

GAZING IN THE MIRROR: REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATING PRESERVICE  
TEACHERS FOR COLLABORATIVE WORK WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITES

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation portrays the life of one teacher educator who is concerned that the teacher education institution where she works is failing to prepare teachers who can work collaboratively and respectfully in/with First Nations and Métis communities in her province. As part of the institution and the dominant group in society that has helped to perpetuate inequities and injustices, she recognizes she is therefore complicit in this failure. This realization has led to a self-study, an autoethnography, within the context of her institution where she attempts to understand why the focus on teaching for social justice, which has been a vision of many of her colleagues for several years, has had little influence on prospective teachers.

She asks, “What are the possibilities for improving the preparation of preservice teachers to work with indigenous communities in respectful, supportive, and collaborative ways?” A series of simple stories illustrates the complexity of the questions. The stories also illustrate how her understanding of the questions and the tangled issues that emerge from the study shifts through iterations of returning to the questions. Rather than trying to disentangle the issues, the study attempts to view the issues through a lens that can provide a holistic rendering of the data.

Using the lens of complexity science, the study illustrates how the teacher educator, the people with whom she works, the institution, and the community schools she visited are complex adaptive systems. Each has the potential to be transformed through enhancing patterns of interaction or to replicate the status quo through inhibiting patterns. Examples of enhancing and inhibiting patterns of interaction are identified as well as suggestions for opening up possibilities for change and transformation. The study

demonstrates that there are no simple solutions to solving some of the problems schools and communities face. The teacher educator comes to understand that if she expects her student teachers to become respectful, collaborative participants in the creation of socially just and equitable communities, she must model those patterns of behaviour herself. She therefore invites others to join her in the dance of co-creating a “shared and harmonious future”.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vii
DEDICATION .....	viii
CHAPTER I – Framing Stories .....	1
<i>Introducing Stories</i> .....	1
<i>Beginning stories.</i> .....	1
<i>Returning Stories</i> .....	3
<i>Haunting Stories</i> .....	11
<i>James.</i> .....	11
<i>What can you expect?</i> .....	13
<i>Being the other.</i> .....	14
<i>The desk clerk.</i> .....	16
<i>Who did I think I was?</i> .....	17
<i>Alternate education.</i> .....	19
<i>Teaching prospective teachers.</i> .....	20
CHAPTER II – Organizing Stories .....	22
<i>Wrestling Monsters</i> .....	22
<i>Re-Searching Questions</i> .....	23
<i>E/InProvoking Methodology</i> .....	28
<i>Sequencing Stories</i> .....	31
<i>Collecting Data</i> .....	32
<i>Reviewing Literature</i> .....	33
<i>Orienting Theories</i> .....	33
<i>Ending pieces</i> .....	35
CHAPTER III – Connecting Stories .....	36
<i>Changing Commitments</i> .....	36
<i>Forming Partnerships</i> .....	40
<i>Aboriginal teachers' teachers.</i> .....	41
<i>Inviting communities.</i> .....	47
<i>Big Sky School</i> .....	47
<i>Can Do High</i> .....	50
<i>Anti-oppressive educators</i> .....	59

CHAPTER IV – Educating Stories -----	67
<i>Filling Gaps</i> -----	67
<i>Clarification of terms.</i> -----	68
<i>History of Aboriginal education.</i> -----	72
<i>Approaches to Aboriginal education.</i> -----	77
<i>Decolonizing Aboriginal education.</i> -----	91
CHAPTER V – Telling Stories -----	97
<i>Voicing Concerns</i> -----	97
<i>Sensing Wisdom</i> -----	100
<i>Surfacing Issues</i> -----	104
<i>Understanding Perspectives</i> -----	108
<i>Pulling threads.</i> -----	109
<i>Drawing Comparisons</i> -----	121
<i>Janet</i> -----	125
<i>Mary</i> -----	129
CHAPTER VI – (Re)Presenting Stories -----	139
<i>Discovering Voices</i> -----	139
<i>Defending Autoethnography</i> -----	142
CHAPTER VII – Troubling Stories -----	155
<i>Replicating Curricula</i> -----	155
<i>Challenging Identities</i> -----	165
<i>Contesting Traditions</i> -----	172
<i>Teaching Passions</i> -----	177
CHAPTER VIII – Contesting Stories -----	180
<i>Negotiating Perspectives</i> -----	180
<i>Silencing Voices</i> -----	187
<i>Disrupting Culture(s)</i> -----	197
CHAPTER IX – Revitalizing Stories -----	204
<i>Changing Assumptions</i> -----	204
<i>Dancing Life</i> -----	211
CHAPTER X – Summarizing Stories -----	216
<i>Seeing Patterns</i> -----	216
CHAPTER XI – Emerging Stories -----	234
<i>Comparing Complexities</i> -----	234
<i>Linking Narratives</i> -----	239
<i>Drawing Analogies</i> -----	242
<i>Living Rules</i> -----	260

CHAPTER XII – Closing Stories -----	266
<i>Mirror Dancing</i> -----	266
<i>Co-creating Dances</i> -----	268
 REFERENCES -----	 271
 APPENDICES	
Appendix A – Faculty Survey -----	291
Appendix B – Sample Interview Questions -----	299
Appendix C – Reflections on New Middle Years Program -----	302
Appendix D – Ethics Approval Forms -----	309

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of our dear friend and colleague,

**Dr. Mary Cronin**  
(1948 – 2006)

Whose life enriched all whom she met and whose presence is keenly felt in the hearts and  
minds of those who knew and loved her.

In the words of her husband, Dr. Douglas Stewart,

**Mary had the gift of open-mindedness  
The ability to think things through with care  
And with attention to our realities  
To detect and courageously  
Challenge humbug  
And to temper her beliefs  
With experience and sound common sense.  
This is rare and wondrous indeed.**



## CHAPTER 1

### Framing Stories

For a century, Indians have been studied under the microscope of white society . . . Perhaps it is time that microscopes and voluminous studies were replaced by a mirror. A single giant mirror which rulers of Canadian society could hold up to themselves. (Burke cited by Hodgson, 2002, pg. 15)

### *Introducing Stories*

#### *Beginning stories.*

I want to tell you a story. It is not unlike many stories you have heard before, or even your own story. Nevertheless, bear with me, for this story may bring new meanings to the teller(s) and the readers.

The story is about a middle-aged, middle-class Caucasian female-turned-teacher-educator who roots for and identifies with the underdog. Despite coming from a community of sameness—White, Anglo and primarily protestant—she had always felt a sense of being not quite as good as others whose families had more money, or who didn't drink to excess or get into trouble with the law. Like many women from working-class backgrounds, teaching gave her access to what she considered respectability—a middle-class way of life, an education and sense of contributing to society. Besides, she had always assumed the role of “teacher” whenever she and her friends and siblings “played school” while growing up, and she just couldn't see herself in the roles of nurse, secretary or hairdresser, which were the main occupational options for women at that time.

This story takes place primarily in a teacher education institution located in a small university in Western Canada. The faculty prides itself on its reputation as one of the best teacher education institutions in the country. Its graduates are regularly recruited

by other provinces. School division administrators from various parts of the province frequently say they like to hire graduates from this particular teacher education institution because the graduates are grounded in the practical—“they know how to manage classrooms.” Yet, many faculty members feel uneasy with this reputation and wonder if it may not be a myth—that the institution, as one faculty member put it, “Might very well be a legend in its own mind.”

Our teacher educator shares this uneasiness, not that she isn’t proud to be associated with the accomplishments of her colleagues who have gone before, but because she knows that while the institution has served the White, middle-class population very well, it has fallen short in preparing teachers for the kinds of schools where students who don’t fit the “norm” can feel safe and thrive<sup>1</sup>. In a desire to continue the work that she began in her Master’s thesis, she headed to graduate school to pursue a doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction in hopes that she might make some contributions to education in the area of social justice<sup>2</sup>. This is the story of her journey since returning to her home institution. This is my story and the story of my colleagues who participated in the creation of it.

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“THE TRUTH ABOUT STORIES is that’s all we are” (King, 2003, p.153).

Thomas King, actor, author and scholar is well known in Canada for his part in the Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour, a popular radio production of the Canadian Broadcasting

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<sup>1</sup> The words, *normal*, *norm*, *normalizing* are used frequently in anti-oppressive literature, for example Kumashiro (2004), to mean the ways of being, thinking and doing that have become accepted by the dominant society as the normal, i.e., White, able-bodied, middle-class, and heterosexual.

<sup>2</sup> My Master’s thesis, *Keeping Students in School: Stories, Issues and Perspectives* (1993) focused on six teachers in an inner city high school who were working to support students considered to be ‘at risk’ of dropping out of school. Most of their students were of Aboriginal ancestry as were my students at that time.

Company. But he is also known for his humorous, yet critical writings about the relationship that North Americans have with its First Peoples. King tells us he believes that stories are “wondrous things”, for they can transform the way we see ourselves and others<sup>3</sup>. Through their simplicity, they are able to show the complexity of our lives (Moore, 2002). Indeed, stories have helped to blister and peel back layers of paint—the stories that we as descendants of European settlers have told ourselves over the last few hundred years—in our attempts to whitewash this country.

This document is a series of stories intended to scrap away some of those layers in the little part of the world where I reside. The stories are about me, some people with whom I work, the institution of which I am part, and a few teachers in two schools. It is my attempt to be an ally in the work of uncovering injustices committed against the Aboriginal peoples of this land (Bishop, 1994). Like King, I would like to start with a story to provide the reader with some background information about my reasons for my interest in this topic.

### ***Returning Stories***

“Welcome back! How was Lotus land?” Meg stands to greet me with a hug as I walk into her office that I will soon be occupying while she is on sabbatical leave.

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<sup>3</sup> To clarify some terms related to First Peoples, *indigenous* is an umbrella term meaning “of the land” and is used when an international context is implied. Canada’s indigenous peoples are referred to as the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and include the First Nations (Indian), Inuit and Métis peoples. “The more than 50 First Nations have much in common, but they are different from one another—and very different from Inuit, whose culture was shaped by the demanding northern environment. Different again are Métis people, who blended traditions from Aboriginal and European forbearers in a unique new culture” (RCAP, 1996, on-line). Much of the earlier literature used the umbrella term *native* to refer to First Peoples, but because the term can mean anyone who was born in a country, it is seldom used except in American literature where First Peoples are referred to as Native Americans, Native Alaskans, or Native Hawaiians.

“It was wonderful!” I exclaim and proceed to fill her in on the details of the last two years of my life: the exciting courses, the fascinating students and professors and the privilege of living in an international graduate student residence where I made friends with people from all over the world.

“Have you decided on a dissertation topic yet? She asks.

“Not exactly. I’m mulling over a few ideas—something to do with ‘transforming society through education rather than just reproducing it’.” I make quotations marks in the air. “I’m still concerned that our educational institutions are not meeting the needs of First Nations and Métis people in this province. You know, the same things I’ve been talking about for the last 15 years. There seems to be a general consensus among teacher educators and critical theorists that we have to do things differently given the inequities in society, but how—I’m still not sure. In the 10 years since I have been here, many of our faculty members have been concerned with teaching for social justice, but I’m not sure we are making much progress.”

“I know what you mean,” agrees Meg. We have some excellent graduates of our programs who are doing a wonderful job in schools but there doesn’t seem to be much change in schools except perhaps in some of the community schools.”

Meg shrugs and shakes her head.

I continue on my soapbox. “You know, during my studies I became quite enamored with the idea of complexity theory or science, as it is sometimes called, which seems to share some of the same views as those of indigenous peoples throughout the world as well as some of the Eastern Wisdom traditions. In fact, biology, economics,

mathematics, physics and even to some extent the social sciences, are rethinking the way we see the world,” I add, perhaps to give my statements further credibility.

“Yes,” Meg replies. I’m seeing the shift to some extent in mathematics too.

Fractal geometry is a good example.”

“Well it seems to me that we have to look at teacher education more holistically and recognize that we are connected to so many other systems that are influenced by and influence what we do as educators,” I say. “I have an image of education as this giant machine that we’ve been tinkering with here and there, but we are really just keeping it well oiled so that it keeps producing more of the same, yet all the while we are being critical of it.” *The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house* pops into my consciousness. I silently wonder whether Audre Lorde’s (1984) metaphor in which she critiques the academy for its marginalization of Black women fits in with my argument here. Maybe not. I go on.

I become even more animated in an attempt to convince my friend. “We need to change our metaphor from one that is less mechanistic to one that is more organic, more dynamic so that education and schools become responsive to the changing times and can influence what is happening elsewhere. We need to see education and ourselves as just one part of a giant web that is connected to everything else.” I wave my arms around and turn in a circle for emphasis. “Our faculty and province are just a microcosm of what is happening globally—like a fractal!”

Meg smiles. I continue.

“I have a hard time trying to figure out how to change large oppressive systems, but if I look at things from the view of complexity, it’s like the pebble in the pond. Maybe my actions will have a ripple effect.” My hands move like waves in front of me.

“Think globally, act locally?” Meg suggests.

“Exactly!” I’m almost jumping up and down now. “Complexity theory or science or whatever it’s called,” I continue, “seems to provide ways to consider the physical, psychological, social, emotional, political, economic, historical, cultural, ecological and spiritual aspects of existence . . .” I pause to gasp for air, “without privileging one way of seeing the world over another. It’s ‘ecological postmodernism’,” I announce trying out the new word I learned from Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2000) that I was only vaguely beginning to comprehend. I wonder if Meg understands what I am trying to say.

“Sounds like a Grand Theory to me—a theory that explains everything,” Meg teases.

I am taken aback. I’ve learned that the post-modernists/poststructuralists with whom I want to identify, eschew Grand Theories, but complexity thinking seems to make so much sense to me. I frantically search for a rebuttal that would deny such an accusation. “Well no, it just makes room for a lot of different theories (Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler, 2000),” I argue.

“Actually, I agree with you, she says. “In fact, one of my doctoral students is also using complexity as a theoretical framework for his dissertation. For my dissertation I used enactivism as the framework, which is similar to complexity but has to do more with cognition and how being, knowing and doing are one in the same. In fact, I just bought a

book by Brent Davis, Dennis Samara, and Rebecca Luce-Kapler you might be interested in.” She pulls her copy of *Engaging Minds* (2000) from the shelf.

“I have this!” I exclaim. “In fact, this is the book that piqued my interest in the idea of complexity.” I glance over to her bookshelf and notice other authors with whom I have become familiar over the last two years (but whom I have not totally understood)—Fritjof Capra, Gregory Bateson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jerome Bruner, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Huberto Maturana and Fransisco Varela, Richard Rorty, Wendell Berry, Marvin Minsky, Lev Vygotsky, Mitchell Waldrop, and Ludwig Wittgenstein among others.

“You are welcome to borrow any of these. But do you have any specific ideas about what you want to do?” I shrug my shoulders - no. “Well, what are you passionate about?”

“I’ll have to get back to you on that,” I laugh. “You know me—I’m a bandwagon person. I’m always jumping off one and on to the next parade. Maybe it will be a case study of the Faculty and what we are trying to do around Aboriginal Education and School<sup>PLUS4</sup>. Those are hot topics around here right now and maybe there will be some funding for that.”

“Oh, by-the-way,” says Meg. “Are you interested in taking ballroom dancing? Classes start this week. It’s lots of fun and great exercise, and you don’t need a partner.”

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<sup>4</sup> School<sup>PLUS</sup> is a model of education proposed by in *the Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School: A Vision for Children and Youth* (Tymchak, 2001). The report recognized that as a result of provincial government incentives and local initiatives, several highly successful community partnerships were established that included inter-governmental agencies, communities and schools in inner cities where there are high Aboriginal populations, and in rural areas between the local school boards and nearby First Nations. In 2001 and 2003 the provincial government, through the Saskatchewan Learning (Education Ministry) expanded the funding to establish a School<sup>PLUS</sup> initiative with the intention to eventually expand this partnership model to all schools.

“I’ll think about,” I say. We say our goodbyes with promises to meet for dinner the following week.

“What am I passionate about?” I wonder, as I make my way home wishing I had taken my car to work, but congratulating myself that I was doing something for the environment and my body. The weather had turned cold and windy. “Walk the talk, walk the talk, walk the talk,” I repeat like a mantra to keep my mind off the cold.

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That night I have trouble sleeping. My stomach is still in knots after an incident earlier in the day during my first class of the semester. I go over the events again in my mind.

*“ . . . The Faculty of Education is committed to the ideals of School<sup>PLUS</sup> and Aboriginal education; therefore, in this course we will be considering ways to teach for social justice, given the inequities in an educational system that marginalizes some students in this province—particularly those of Aboriginal ancestry. As one of the provinces with the fastest growing populations of young Aboriginal students and an aging and declining non-Aboriginal population, it is not only morally, but economically imperative that education become more equitable for Aboriginal students if our province expects to have a prosperous future.” I look out over the class of preinterns, some of whom are sitting with arms folded, legs crossed and leaning back in their seats. Undaunted, I continue.*

*“In order to address some of these inequities, the province has implemented School<sup>PLUS</sup>. That is, it has supplied considerable funding to create community schools throughout the province with the view that some day all schools will be community*



*schools.” I explain that School<sup>PLUS</sup> is based on the belief that ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ which means that all sectors of society and human service providers have a stake in helping to ensure that all students—not just White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual students—are able to reach their potential and participate fully and equally in society. I go on to say we will be looking at ways to incorporate First Nations and Métis content and perspectives into the curriculum, as well as critique some of the ‘isms’ – racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism they might encounter in their field placements.*

*Following the course overview, the students introduce themselves. Although this is a course for preservice teachers who will be working in Secondary Education, like the Elementary Education sections of the faculty—and like most teacher education institutions for that matter, the majority of the students are White, middle-class and female (Banks & Banks, 2001; Stephenson, 2002). A scattering of males occupy the seats. Many of the students tell me that loving kids, enjoying high school and wanting to provide a good experience for other students are their reasons for wanting to become a teacher. Near the end of the introductions, a more mature woman—probably in her mid thirties—stands up and introduces herself as the wife of an RCMP officer who has just been transferred to the city after having lived in northern Saskatchewan near a reserve for five years. She is glad to have moved, because she and her family, she says, had been victims of racism by the First Nations community where she lived.*

*“In what way?” I ask. She explains that her family was never invited to social gatherings, people ignored them, her kids got beaten up at school and her husband was*

*spit at and sworn at when he went to intervene in domestic disputes. "I wonder why," I think but don't say aloud.*

*"Frankly," she continues, "I was never so glad to leave anywhere in my life. Those people are just a bunch of alcoholics, drug addicts and child abusers, as far as I'm concerned. And furthermore, I don't agree with putting our tax dollars into things like School<sup>PLUS</sup> or community schools or whatever. Those kids get free everything and as middle class parents, if we want our kids to have new computers in the school or go on special trips, we have to get out and fund-raise. You don't see those parents doing that!*

*I am dumbfounded. I could have cut the silence with a knife.*

*Finally, a thirty-something male student who has completed a degree in sociology, ventures to explain that racism is really about who has power in society. He doesn't think her family was a victim of racism because her husband is the one who had power in that community. Another student joins in and suggests that maybe the student's family hadn't done anything to make friends in the community. Yet another young woman, takes the side of the RCMP wife and states, "Well I agree with you. Why should they get free tuition when I have to work my butt off all summer to pay for my education?" I step in to say that not all First Nations students who apply for post-secondary education get to go. It depends on the amount of money their Band has for education. But neither of the women is buying it. Their arms are crossed and their faces are red. Soon the class is silent again. Anger, embarrassment and confusion show on most of the faces, so I suggest that we discuss these issues another day. I am shaken and I make a note to let the Program Chair know we have some students who don't fit the mandate of our program.*

I look at the clock—3:15 a.m. Maybe a glass of warm milk might help.

At 7:30 I finally roll out of a tousled bed with the phrase “embodied knowing” running around in my head. It had been one of the phrases that had been common in books and articles I had read during my course work (Brooks & Clark, 2001; Fels, 1998; Matthews, 1998; Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991)<sup>5</sup>. *Hmm, maybe I should pay attention to my body. Caffeine. Body needs caffeine. That’s it! That’s exactly what I should pay attention to—my body and how it reacts to education-related situations. Maybe that will help me uncover what my passion is. When am I moved to tears through compassion, joy, pride, anger or shame? When do I lie awake at night wrestling with troubling thoughts? When do I get knots in my stomach while teaching? When do I become excited about possibilities for projects or research? What books, articles, movies, lectures and public events catch my interest enough to seek them out?*

Because it’s a day with no classes, I grab my pen and journal and sit down with my coffee and try to re-member the incidents of my teaching career that brought me to where I am today. I begin.

### ***Haunting Stories***

*James.*

*He was much quieter than most of the grade five students in my class, but his brown eyes sparkled and his shy grin melted my 20 year old heart that second year I posed as a teacher. James joined our class in the inner-city neighborhood in November when he moved with his mother to the city from his home reserve in Northern*

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<sup>5</sup> Embodied or somatic knowing is holistic knowing that involves perception, the senses, and mind/body/spirit action and reaction (Matthews, 1998).

*Saskatchewan. Although he was somewhat behind many others in terms of his reading and math skills, he caught on to concepts quickly and he worked diligently on his assignments.*

*One day I asked the class to write a story about someone in their family and have a rough draft handed in the following day. The next day when I looked over the children's work, I noted that James had written five pages compared with one or two pages submitted by the others. I was soon immersed in James's world on the trap line with his father, delighted and surprised at the detail in his work, and moved to tears as he wrote about how much he missed his father. After reading the piece, I sat in awe of this 11 year old's masterpiece-in-the-making. Reluctantly I knew I had to put on my teacher hat however, and correct James's grammar, spelling and sentence structure. Because Cree was his first language, incorrect pronouns and prepositions were used, punctuation and modifiers were misplaced, and sentences were oddly constructed. I took out my red pen.*

*The following day I called James up to my desk and told him how much I enjoyed his story and how I thought it was the best one I had ever read. His shy, proud smile soon fell and his eyes clouded over as I pulled out the story with the red marks all over it. Although I tried to convince him that it wouldn't take much to correct the mistakes, he never did hand in the piece again, or any other piece of writing for that matter.*

My eyes well up as I recall James. After 30 some years, his face still haunts me. I wish I had known about the writing process then. I wish I had known that Standard English could also be considered a dialect and it has no place being privileged over other languages. I wonder how many other students' educational aspirations I unwittingly

ruined. Okay, Carol, time to pull yourself out of the quagmire of guilt you have enjoyed wallowing in for the last half hour and move on.

*What Can You Expect?*

*I plunked myself down on a chair in the staff room, thankful that the last bus had pulled out on a Friday afternoon before a long weekend. The students had been somewhat ('hyper') I assumed, from the Halloween candy that they had ingested all week. It had been the rural kid's day for my kindergarten—one of the five public kindergartens that were being implemented as pilot projects in rural areas throughout the province. Our site had moved to an all-day/alternate-day format because the bus drivers, who were farmers, didn't want to come back to the school at noon each day to deliver and pick up students. Consequently, on alternate days the children from town would attend kindergarten all day, and on the following day children from the farms, the nearby reserves and from the Métis farm would attend. Each class had 30 students, and although I had an assistant, I needed a nap every day after school.*

*I usually found the class with the children from town a little more challenging than the rural children's class in terms of keeping the noise and general chaos to a minimum. (I hadn't had much experience as an early childhood educator at that time). On this particular day with my rural children however, not only had our hamster gone missing and was yet to be found, two children had no lunches, another child had wet her pants, one had cut another child's hair, and one had told the class during sharing time that her dad had chased her mother with an axe the night before. Generally, it had also been difficult to keep a lid on the exuberance. I happened to mention to another teacher*

*who was in the staff room that afternoon, that it had been quite a day with the rural children.*

*“What can you expect?” She replied. “Look what you are dealing with.”*

*I said nothing but I fumed inside.*

This particular incident reminds me of the many times I would sit in staff rooms and hear teachers talk about students or their families in derogatory ways. The targets of the comments were usually children who were poor or smelly or who couldn't sit still during long boring classes or endless pages of seat work designed to keep them quiet. In this particular school, the comments were usually about the Aboriginal students in the school. I tried not to engage in these conversations, or I would occasionally defend a child to show another point of view, but rarely did I confront or challenge my colleagues on these comments. Here goes the foot into the guilt pool again.

### *Being the Other*

*It was a dream job. I was able to work with enthusiastic young adults who were motivated to learn. I was able to teach recreation and other courses in which I had particular interests and expertise. I was accepted by the First Nations community in which I worked and I was able to travel periodically with students to learn about indigenous communities in Canada and throughout the world. I felt privileged to teach in the Recreation Technology (or 'Rec Tech') program that was offered jointly by the Tribal Council, The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Arts and Science (SIAST).*

*One September afternoon I read the notice for the upcoming Treaty Four celebrations and feast that were to be held at the local park by the lake. Everyone was to*

*bring something for the feast. On the appointed day I put together a small three-bean salad in a casserole dish and made my way to the park. People were beginning to gather and were milling around talking but I didn't see anywhere to put the food. Finally I asked someone where the picnic tables were and where I was to put my salad. The person gave me a strange look and pointed to the center of a grass field. I noticed there were some boxes and large kettles placed there, so I put my dish down and went and sat on the grass with some colleagues as people started to gather in a large circle.*

*It wasn't long before a young man approached me and said politely, "Women sit on the other side of the circle," and pointed to where I should be. Sheepishly I made my way over to the other side and sat down. I watched in fascination as people began bringing huge kettles and boxes and placing them in the center on the grass and as the Elders' helpers prepared the sweet grass for the smudging and took the food up to the Elders to be blessed. My fascination soon turned to embarrassment as one of the helpers picked up my three bean salad, elbowed his partner as if to ask, "What is this?" The partner shrugged his shoulders and they both laughed, but they took it to the Elder anyway.*

*After some prayers, some singing and drumming, and a smudging ceremony where sweet grass was passed around the circle so that everyone could cleanse themselves with the sacred smoke, the feast began. And what feast it was. Chicken soup, bannock, pemmican, ground choke cherries, oranges, candies and cigarettes were dished out as the Elders' helpers served people several times. After the second round of food I was beginning to feel quite stuffed and so said 'no thank you' when offered a third*

*helping of food and some cigarettes. Again I got another strange look but the server moved on.*

*"You're not supposed to refuse food," a woman whispered to me. "It has been blessed by the Elders." So when the servers came around again, I smiled and said "thank you" and took more food and tried to smoke one of the cigarettes. After the sixth time around, when I held up my bowl even though I was turning a slight shade of green and could hardly look at any more food, the server smiled and said, "My, we are hungry over here aren't we?" It was then I noticed that the other women had brought ice cream pails and other containers in which to put the blessed food for another day. I never did see my bean salad or casserole dish though.*

#### *The Desk Clerk*

*The desk clerk greeted me with a smile and I filled out the guest registration form. Two other recreation technology instructors and I had accompanied our students who would be acting as officials, judges, coaches and facilitators for the Indian Summer Games that were being held on a nearby reserve. As future recreation specialists our students would be gaining practical field experience through their involvement in the games where over 500 First Nation's young athletes would be competing.*

*I completed a registration form and stepped aside as 12 of my students filed in the door with their luggage to register at the motel where we would be staying that week. Immediately the desk clerk's face dropped. "What do you want?" She glared at the first student.*

*I stepped in and said, "Excuse me, these are my students and they are here to run the Indian Summer Games that will be held all next week."*



*She continued to glare and stated, "There isn't going to be any parties in the rooms are there? And if you damage anything, you'll pay for it."*

*Again I broke in, and said politely, "These are very responsible people and there will be no trouble."*

*My students silently filled out the forms and with downcast eyes made their way to their rooms. With tear-filled eyes and rage burning in the pit of my stomach, I silently made my way to my room. I wondered how my students were feeling, but we never talked about that incident.*

#### *Who Did I Think I Was?*

*I sat in the circle in the classroom on the Alexander reserve waiting for the seminar to start. "Oh wow!" I thought. "I'm sitting beside Buffy St. Marie." I had loved her folk singing in the 60s and my children had loved her on Sesame Street. "And isn't that Harold Cardinal?" I had heard about his famous book, 'The Unjust Society' (1969) and then the 'Red Paper' (Indian Association of Alberta, 1970) that he wrote on behalf of the Indian Association of Alberta in response to Chrétien/Trudeau White Paper, which proposed shifting the federal government's responsibility for Indian people over to the provinces. First Nations people were having none of that. And across from him was John Kim Bell, a Mohawk from the Kanawake reserve in Québec and a conductor of the Boston Symphony. He was our keynote for the conference on indigenous education. "He's awfully young," I thought, "and very cute too." I looked around at the rest of the people assembled there and realized I was in prestigious company although I didn't yet know who was who.*

*I turned to Buffy St. Marie and told her how much I had enjoyed her concert in the park in Edmonton the previous day. "It made me cry though," I confessed. "I felt so guilty."*

*"Feeling guilty doesn't help us any," she said. "We just need you to understand and help to make sure that it doesn't happen again." With that she reached over and took my program book and wrote in it, 'Carol, don't you cry no more. Buffy St. Marie.' Tears filled my eyes again.*

*Soon the seminar started and people went around the circle and offered their opinions about what could be done to improve the education for Indian children on and off reserves. At one point I jumped in and offered my two cents worth. People looked at me in silence, then someone thanked me for my suggestions and continued to go around the circle waiting for people to offer their comments. Finally it came to my turn. I had nothing to say.*

Each of these three stories remind me of the time when I was employed as a recreation technology instructor by a tribal council. It was the first time in my life that I had been immersed in a First Nations context and the first time that I had seen blatant racism—not against me—but against people whom I cared about. It was the first time I had really felt like an outsider and yet, accepted at the same time. It was the first time I had been in the company of people who loved to laugh all the time, despite hardships I could only begin to imagine. It was also the first time that I began to understand there were other ways of viewing the world, other ways of treating people, other ways of communicating. I was never the same again.

After my 'Rec Tech' experience, I moved on to teach in an alternate education program in a nearby town. That experience was also pivotal in my career.

### *Alternate Education*

*I study the 12 faces in class photograph. My own looks pale by comparison. Only one other face is White. "Keep these kids in school. I don't care how you do it." I wince at the memory of the principal's words.*

*What has become of them? In some cases I know. Monty used to call every few months for a few years from the provincial correctional center. I haven't heard from him in a long while. Deanne and Polly are raising babies and living with their common-law partners. Trent is in and out of detox centers and Emma and Erma have returned to their northern reserve. I met Conner on a street in the city and he told me he was looking for work. He seemed to be a little high. Had I intentionally 'pushed' him out of school because of his disruptive behavior and unwillingness to work? Some of the other students went into the regular program but dropped out before completing high school.*

*Then there were Lana, Susan and Sarah. Sarah, who was moody, unmotivated, suicidal and verbally abusive, returned after graduation to say thanks for being a caring teacher. Of the 24 students who started in the program only these three graduated from high school—with a certificate in Alternate Education that was recognized in very few post-secondary programs. Nevertheless, these students were my success stories. Or were they? I heard they were all living at home collecting welfare. I put the photograph away. The familiar pain is returning and I don't want to think about that right now.*

This is the story I had used to open my Masters thesis (Fulton, 1993). As I reread it, I think of the 'characters' from this story who were the reason that I decided to go to

graduate school. I recall feeling a sense of inadequacy and hopelessness in my teaching and thinking that graduate work might help me become a more effective teacher. It didn't, but it certainly opened my eyes to the systemic barriers that marginalize those who don't fit society's norms. After completing my Masters degree I remained at the University to teach.

### *Teaching Prospective Teachers*

*The fourth-year post-interns sat listening politely to me as I talked about incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives into the mathematics curriculum. I pointed out the indigenous games played in various parts of the world that had been assembled by a colleague from the program in which I was teaching, and an Aboriginal faculty member working in one of the Aboriginal teacher education programs.*

*A student who had been looking somewhat agitated finally said, "Aren't we perpetuating stereotypes by having students play those games?" She had taken a course that had an antiracist component and was becoming aware of ways the dominant culture 'othered' people and produced stereotypes.*

*I was somewhat surprised by her comments because it had never occurred to me. I recovered sufficiently to suggest that these games helped to illustrate that mathematics was part of all cultures and traditions whether we recognized it as mathematics in the Euro-Western sense. I also suggested that we needed to honor other ways of knowing. She seemed satisfied with my response, but I was left wondering about her comments. How many times had I perpetuated stereotypes in my classes?*

This incident was typical of the many times I felt unclear about how to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives in meaningful ways or what to suggest to

preinterns and interns who struggled with the issue. Often they would come to me asking for advice on how to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives into their unit plans or what topics they should choose if they were asked to teach a unit on Aboriginal peoples. I never knew quite what to say. It seemed to me that often First Nations people were portrayed as being frozen in time and the Métis were almost entirely forgotten when the topics were addressed in schools. Although I would often tell students to show the present as well as the past, in many instances their unit and lessons plans seemed full of stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples both past and present. Yet, I was not—and am still not—sure what to do differently to address the stereotypes and the racism that I often see.

I pull out other memories from my memory box and turn them over to feel which emotions they evoke. There are so many, but I think I am beginning to see some patterns in my responses. I am beginning to see where my passion lies. It lies in my sense of justice and anger at injustices, but it also lies in my feelings of inadequacy to do anything about the injustices I feel. I am reminded of a phrase I read in Ghosh and Tarrow (1993, p. 81), “Change in teacher education will not be implemented without efforts focused on those who teach the teacher” (1993, p.81).

I go to the computer and type in combinations of teacher education and teacher research in Google and search through the various hits. Finally I come across the following statement from the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, “Wider social, organizational, and political contexts influence, and, in turn, are influenced by, the personal experiences of teachers.”

I need to look at myself.

## CHAPTER II

### Organizing Stories

A rhizome is made of plateaus... We call a 'plateau' any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome... Each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau. To attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively constructs it ....(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987 cited by Holtorf, 2004 ¶ 2)

#### *Wrestling Monsters*

I look at the clock. 5:20 a.m. It's starting to be daylight already and I feel exhausted. Another night of wrestling this shape-shifting monster, this dissertation, that has grown enormously over the past two years with numerous tendrils reaching much further than I could have imagined. Where do I chop off these tendrils and make the monster more manageable? How do I wrestle my work into submission and dress it up to be presentable in public so that it will be accepted, perhaps admired; so that it will do no harm to anyone, yet influence change? Will anyone listen to it? Will it have anything to say that will change my or anyone else's life for the better?

After a short shower, I head to my computer with my coffee—organic fair trade coffee. *I haven't cut out coffee yet, but at least I'm trying to do my small part.* I take a deep breath. *I can do this. I need to think of it as part of me, my voice, my partner, rather than an adversary.*

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Anyone who has written a thesis/dissertation/article/book can probably relate to the metaphor I use to open this chapter. Like most qualitative researchers with whom I have spoken, I find it difficult to show the multi-layeredness, the interrelatedness, and the metamorphic, rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) nature of my research, which is also

fraught with ethical issues. The study has waltzed me through several rounds of meaning, always returning me close to where I began, but never exactly to the same place. At times, the paths it has taken have become expansive, showing me complex patterns and relationships between my questions and larger issues. At times, the cycles have been narrower and the focus has become self and my faltering steps as I struggle to learn new patterns and new ways of responding to my partners, this study, and the people with whom I work.

This chapter outlines the story of my attempts to learn new patterns of thinking/being/doing as a result of interacting with those who contribute to the story. It provides an overview of the various sections of the study and my reasons for conducting, presenting, and analyzing the study in the way I have. In other words, this chapter explains the organizational framework for the study.

### ***Re-Searching Questions***

I began this study over 2 years ago in an attempt to answer the question, “What are the possibilities for improving the preparation of preservice teachers to work with indigenous communities in respectful, supportive, and collaborative ways?”

As a teacher and teacher educator I felt a responsibility to help develop in the next generation of teachers a sense of fairness and justice so that they in turn, could help all people enjoy a life of their own choosing within my province. The face of the province is quickly changing where the middle-class White population is decreasing and where there is a young and burgeoning Aboriginal population that for the most part, has not done well

in the mainstream school system or society. Anyone living here can see the dire consequences for the province's social and economic well-being if the issues facing Aboriginal peoples of the province are not addressed.

For example, a young reporter on the radio who was researching the growth of Aboriginal gangs in the province told the listening audience how children are being recruited into gangs because the law, for the most part, cannot touch them. As well, the report of the *Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School* (Tymchak, 2001) highlighted several "tectonic plates" that seem to be shaking the foundations of schooling<sup>6</sup>. Several of these tectonic plates relate to the educational, social, and economic conditions experienced primarily by Aboriginal people in the province.

Similar concerns exist at the national level as identified by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) in 1996, and from indications in the media, it seems that not much has changed in 10 years. Furthermore, conflicts over land claims frequently have the country watching and wondering if the conflicts will turn out as badly as those at Oka, Quebec and Ipperwash, Ontario<sup>7</sup>. Emotions run high further dividing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians when land and resources are involved.

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<sup>6</sup> Some of the "tectonic plates" include: the growing number of children who need specialized care; the growth in school-aged children of Aboriginal ancestry; the information society and globalization; the increasing numbers of children in poverty and the factors associated with it; the growing ratio of students who are 'at-risk' (likely to drop out before high school graduation); pupil mobility; the challenges faced by single parent families which have implications for the additional support that schools and other human services agencies are called upon to provide; the need to accommodate cultural diversity and combat racism; rural depopulation and the crises felt by rural families; the impacts of major curriculum reform; the growing concern about violence, bullying and taunting in schools; youth suicide rates, child abuse and neglect, and the mental health of students.

<sup>7</sup> Two major disputes over land claims in Canada at Oka, Quebec in 1990 and at Ipperwash Provincial Park, Ontario in 1995 erupted in violence and deaths. More recently, a dispute over land in Caledonia, Ontario which began in February 2006, is being compared to Oka and Ipperwash, although as yet, there have been no deaths.



Internationally, indigenous peoples worldwide are suffering the devastating effects of globalization, capitalism, and colonization (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; LaDuke, 2005; United Nations, 2000). The situation in our province is a microcosm of what is happening nationally and internationally.

A government Task Force on the Role of the School made several recommendations for addressing many of the issues related to education after having toured the province talking with various groups (Tymchak, 2001). One of the recommendations was for more cross-cultural and anti-racist education for teachers. Another was the implementation of School<sup>PLUS</sup> which is based on a model of cooperation among the school, community, family and human service agencies to better meet the needs of children and their families.

My motivation for conducting this study was primarily my sense of frustration and uncertainty around preparing future teachers to work in schools and communities where the mistakes of the past aren't repeated, where people are able to determine their own futures and what they want for their children with the support of caring teachers. I noted in the proposal that there are some of the barriers to working toward this goal:

- Preservice teachers have extremely limited awareness of and appreciation for the histories and perspectives of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada;
- Preservice teachers have little knowledge of the causes of inequities in the social, educational, and economic structures that affect Aboriginal peoples;
- Attempts to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives as mandated by the province's curriculum guides into the teacher education programs have met with varying degrees of success;

- Some faculty members, including myself, feel unsure about how to include Aboriginal content, or what it should be;
- Anti-racist education has met with resistance by some students who are openly hostile when introduced to anti-racist education because of the special privileges some students believe First Nations people have. Other students complain that affirmative action policies constitute “reverse discrimination”, or that White people were being blamed for the Natives’ problems. Still others don’t see a problem or consider themselves “colour-blind” and therefore treat all people the same (Finney & Orr, 1994; King, 2001; St. Denis & Schick, 2003);
- Where student teachers are sympathetic to Aboriginal peoples and willing to incorporate Aboriginal content into their lesson or unit plans, they unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes by using a “contributions approach” (Banks, 1999) that focuses on food, celebrations, dances and artifacts, or they represent First Nations peoples only as historical figures<sup>8</sup>.
- Faculty members’ views on how to prepare preservice teachers to work in and with Aboriginal communities vary widely, thus preservice teachers seem to receive mixed messages and are unsure of what they should do.

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<sup>8</sup> A example of this appeared on the front page of the Leader Post (Healy, February 5, 2003), which showed a picture of grade 4 students dressed as if they were “part of a North American Plains Indian tribe around the 1850’s” sitting beside a teepee. The teacher was attempting to have the children celebrate First Nations cultures. The incident, however, caused considerable controversy, which resulted in calls to the School Board Office by members of the Aboriginal community and concerned educators.

When I wrote the proposal for the study, I realized that although most of us in the faculty in which I work have good intentions, there is no concerted effort to include cross-cultural and anti-racist education in all our courses. This focus is usually found only in Foundations courses dedicated specifically to these topics. Not all students take these courses, however. Furthermore, like many other teacher education programs in Canada, approximately half of the students in our institution can complete their degree without having taken a single course in cross-cultural or multicultural education (Masemann & Mock, 1986 cited by Wong, 1998). I realize the Masemann and Mock study was conducted 20 years ago, and I suspect many institutions have changed this requirement since then, but ours hasn't. Although preservice teachers in the Elementary Education program are required to take one cross-cultural/multicultural Foundations course, those in the Secondary Education program are not.

Some of the specific questions I try to explore throughout the study include:

- Within our own university's and community's contexts, what are some of the various perspectives and experiences of people concerning Aboriginal education—the perspectives for example, of teacher educators, members of the Aboriginal community and teachers who are working in with high numbers of Aboriginal students?
- What do the terms “Aboriginal/indigenous education” and “anti-racist education” mean?
- What are the challenges and opportunities with respect to collaborating with Aboriginal communities to ensure positive educational experiences for all students?

- How might this study contribute to my own understanding and practices?
- What implications does the study have for teacher education programs that are attempting to work for social justice?

I realize that the study has several foci: Aboriginal education, our faculty, and myself, each of which could easily have been a separate research topic. I see them as interrelated and connected however. It is therefore difficult to separate the answers to my questions; however, I attempt to untangle some of the issues and address them in the final three chapters of this document.

### ***E/In/Provoking Methodology***

The title of this section refers to my use of autoethnography as a research method intended to *evoke* (call forth), *invoke* (call upon), and *provoke* (incite or stir) feelings, thoughts and actions. My original intention was to conduct a case study of the faculty as the method within a qualitative research methodology until I came across several quotations that pointed to a need for a self-study within an ethnographic setting. The first is a quotation by James Burke, author of *Paper Tomahawks*.

For a century, Indians have been studied under the microscope of white society . . . Perhaps it is time that microscopes and voluminous studies were replaced by a mirror. A single giant mirror which rulers of Canadian society could hold up to themselves. (Burke cited by Hodgson, 2000, pg. 15)

I reasoned it is time, therefore, to hold the mirror up to ourselves. For as Ghosh (1996) states, “if teachers are the key players in the education game, then teacher education programs are of crucial significance” (p.83). And, as I noted in the first chapter, “change in teacher education will not be implemented without efforts focused on those who teach the teacher” (Ghosh & Tarrow, 1993, p.81).

If that is the case, then as a teacher educator, I must also examine my own beliefs and practices concerning the education of Aboriginal students, as well as the structures of and interactions within the institution where I work. I want to understand my confusion, to unlearn my own racism (Cochran-Smith, 2000; McIntosh, 2002) and like Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2000),

to interrogate the racist assumptions that may be deeply embedded in our own courses and curricula, to own our own complicity in maintaining existing systems of privilege and oppression, and to grapple with our own failures to produce the kinds of changes we advocate. (p. 158)

My research method of choice is autoethnography because it provides the opportunity to be self-reflexive, it helps to situate me within particular historical, cultural, and institutional contexts, and it provides a window into the milieu in which I am working (Neumann & Peterson, 1997). It also allows me to show how various facets of my life are connected. A quotation by Neumann and Peterson (p. 7) supports another of my reasons for wanting to make the study autobiographical.

. . . autobiography helps us see and understand the hurtful aspects of institutional existence in academe through the eyes of those who may have suffered in silence through subtle and overt discrimination or neglect. It also helps us see, appreciate, and support the informal structures that help people heal from and resist the hurtful features of organizational existence.

Throughout the study, which I consider to be a long narrative made up of several smaller ones, there are stories (narratives) of feeling on the margins, of resistance, frustration, uncertainty, accomplishment, and hope. As well as telling my own story, I attempt to tell others' stories with their permission; however, this poses some ethical dilemmas (Ellis, 2004; Mitchell, 2004). For one thing, I know I can never tell a person's story accurately or completely because I can never fully understand another person's intentions or perspective, or because to tell my interpretation of it may be hurtful. I try,

however, with permission, to be a voice in instances where it may be politically difficult for some people to raise issues themselves.

Another ethical dilemma relates to the difficulty of ensuring anonymity because of the detail in the narratives. Many people are easily recognizable; therefore, it was necessary to provide them with a copy of their story that I intended to use in the study and ask them to make changes as they saw fit or give them the opportunity to refuse to have the story included. Fortunately, I had to make only a few changes. In two instances, I use a person's real name because I cite his or her work and there is no doubt who this person is. Again, I asked for permission to include a person's story.

Another issue concerns non-consenting others who appear as characters in the stories and whether or not they can be identified, or whether they will be hurt by what is said (Ellis, 2004; Mitchell, 2004). I have tried therefore to ensure that any non-consenting others are not identifiable or that if they are, they will not be hurt by my words.

I use Carolyn Ellis' (2004) work as a model for most of the study (albeit a poor imitation of it). The major portion of the study is in narrative format which sandwiches this chapter between the first chapter and the chapters following this. Ellis' work demonstrates to me that autoethnography can facilitate a holistic rendering of the data, can show the complexities and interrelatedness of the issues, can include the emotional aspects of the research, and can allow me to write in a manner that is personally satisfying. Like Ellis, I try to weave the theoretical pieces of the study and the relevant literature in with the stories rather than provide a separate chapter for the literature.

### *Sequencing Stories*

Following the example of Davis et al., (2000) I use noun/verb phrases as headings in the study to show the dynamic, fluid nature of the research and to evoke multiple meanings for the reader. Admittedly, it is easier to see the double meanings in some of the phrases more readily than in others. I hope, however, the reader will take some time to consider the connotations I try to portray in each of the headings.

The study is presented as chapters of a book and the story appears to unfold in chronological order. Many of the stories did not happen in the order presented; however, I have arranged them in this particular way to lend a sense of coherence to the study.

Chapter I provides background information to the study; Chapter II explains the organizational framework for the study; Chapter III introduces the context in which the study takes place; Chapter IV presents of a review of the literature related to Aboriginal education; Chapter V summarizes the results of a small survey and interviews, and relates the findings to the literature on teaching for social justice; Chapter VI makes a case for using autoethnography as my methodology; Chapter VII provides a glimpse into some of the challenges I face as a teacher educator; Chapter VIII illustrates some of the issues and controversies that arise in teacher education; Chapter IX explores the controversy over race and culture; Chapter X summarizes the findings of the study; Chapter XI positions the study within the context of complexity science and makes links between complexity and indigenous knowledge systems. It also provides five recommendations for teacher educators. Chapter XII closes the study with my asking my students to draw comparisons between the metaphor of the dance and teaching for social justice. The metaphor of the dance is a thread that runs throughout the study because

numerous authors (Bateson, 1994; Davis, et al., 2000; Doll, 1993; Wheatley, 1994) use the metaphor when writing about the interactions within complex adaptive systems.

Some of the stories and characters are fictitious but they provide vehicles for presenting the theoretical components of the study. Other stories are based on my recollection of the events as nearly as I can recall them. Still others are fictitious but are based on actual incidents that happened or are representative of a number of similar incidents. Chapters 10 and 11, for example, are fictitious conversations with a compilation character that allow me to present my findings and explain how they fit with complexity science. The chapters were inspired, however, by some actual conversations I did have with people who are represented by this character in some of the stories.

### ***Collecting Data.***

The data for the study are derived from four focus groups, numerous journal entries, an on-line survey of faculty members (to which only 8 people responded out of a possible 32, but which resulted in several people requesting to be interviewed instead), and 12 individual interviews. In trying to represent people fairly I asked people to read the stories I created in which they were players, and to make any changes they thought were necessary. Most of the data from the focus groups and interviews I conducted had to be reduced to themes. Journal entries of incidents which evoked strong emotions or questions in me served as the basis for many of the stories where I identify issues related to my study.



### ***Reviewing Literature***

The literature cited in the study generally falls into four main areas: Aboriginal education, anti-oppressive education, self-study research (and more specifically autoethnography), and complexity science<sup>9</sup>. As stated previously, I have cited the relevant literature within the study where it is appropriate.

### ***Orienting Theories***

Because my study is intended to show the complexity of issues as well as the historical, cultural, and academic contexts in which I am located, I wanted a theoretical orientation that would illustrate the interrelatedness of these contexts and the multiple perspectives and voices that inform the study. Therefore, the theoretical orientation I have chosen is complexity theory or science (Cilliers, 1998; Davis et al., 2000; Doll, Jr., 1993; 2005; Gilstrap, 2005; O'Day, 2002). I prefer to use the term science rather than theory because complexity is not a theory, and complexity science embraces a number of different theories and is in keeping with the way I am coming to understand the world. A definition of complexity science and related terms can be found on the Complexity and Education web site, which is hosted by the University of Alberta, if the reader requires more information.

Complexity science is the study of complex, adaptive, self-organizing systems (CAS) or *learning systems*, which resist explanation in terms of the reductive methods used in most traditional science (Complexity and Education/ Glossary/Complexity Science web site).

Researchers in a number of fields including biology, chemistry,

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<sup>9</sup> I use the umbrella term, *anti-oppressive education*, synonymously with social justice education. Both interrogate assumptions based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, nationality, and so on and consider the intersection of these concepts in the shaping of identities.

computer science, economics, mathematics, physics, and the social sciences have begun to study the behaviour of phenomena in complex systems in an attempt to find patterns of interaction that can bring about affirmative changes in the system (Capra, 1996; Cilliers, 1998; Davis et al., 2000; Dent, 1999; Doll, Jr., 1993; 2005). The Complexity and Education web site defines complex systems as:

Any self-organizing and adaptive form or network. A complex system arises through the dynamic, non-linear interaction of its component parts yet embodies emergent possibilities exceeding the sum of these parts. Among the complex systems that are of interest to educators are the human individual, classroom collectives, communities and cultural systems.

Because there are numerous players that are adapting to each other and their surroundings, the emerging future is very hard to predict (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999, p. xi; O'Day, 2002). As well, each of the elements or agents within these complex systems has limited patterns of response to other elements and its surroundings in the pursuit of its goals. I see myself, my institution, my community, and so on as complex adaptive systems; therefore, complexity science helps me to understand why change in the way we intend is often difficult to control.

The reader might be interested in a little side story. When I first proposed using complexity as the theoretical orientation for the study, I tried to make the connections between it and an indigenous world view, which I saw as more holistic. I had drawn a number of concentric circles to illustrate the embeddedness of my questions within a particular research method, methodology, theoretical orientation, a philosophy, and finally a world view. I must not have explained myself very well or was very naïve, for a comment from Sherry, one of my committee members was,

I'm not sure about the model she proposes, circles can also be whirlpools, but she is trying to incorporate some of the aspects of indigenous knowledge that she

values. However, I would caution that walking in circles in the bush just means you're lost.

Sherry's insights still make me smile, for indeed, at times I have felt as though I were walking around in circles, or drowning in whirlpools. Nevertheless, I still believe that complexity science is the most useful theoretical orientation for this study because it allows me to study the data more holistically and see how I, the people with whom I work, my students, and my questions influence and are influenced by everything else. It is also consistent with my understanding of narrative as a discursive process that gives meaning to our lives. It is through narrative that "our personal stories emerge from the fluid relationship between self and the world and, thus, can actually mean different things at different times" (Gover, 1996, 4. A SOCIOCULTURAL CONCEPTION, *Activity* section ¶2). Complexity science affirms the notion of fluidity and dynamism in how we understand and relate to the world through our narratives.

### ***Ending Pieces***

Appendices A and B provide samples of data collection instruments I used, and Appendix C provides a brief overview of my involvement during the past year in a new program oriented towards social justice. I have placed this overview in an appendix because my experiences in this new program were not directly part of the data but they have influenced my thinking about some of the issues I identified in the data. Ethics forms are found in Appendix D. Now, I invite readers to join me in the dance as we make our way around the space and weave in and out among the other dancers. Don't be afraid. You might have fun.

## CHAPTER III

### Connecting Stories

In Complex Adaptive Systems there are often many participants, perhaps even many kinds of participants. They interact in intricate ways that continually reshape their collective future. New ways of doing things—even new kinds of participants—may arise, and old ways—or old participants—may vanish. Such systems challenge understanding as well as prediction. (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999, p. xi.)

#### *Changing Commitments*

The next several months fly by as I settle into the familiar routines of teaching and meetings. I am becoming reacquainted with the institution and its members and I join an anti-racist discussion group that meets approximately every 3 weeks. There are a few new faces on faculty as well as many familiar ones. Some things have remained the same but some things have changed since I was last here. For example, a vision for the faculty is outlined in a document entitled *Taking Action* which then becomes *Shaping Who We Are*. These visioning documents outline five priority areas for the faculty.

- a) Nurturing a caring and collegial faculty environment;
- b) Revising programs: quality teaching and learning;
- c) Expanding the vision: Aboriginal Education and School<sup>PLUS</sup>;
- d) Promoting quality scholarship and research; and
- e) Strengthening partnerships.

As beginning evidence of these goals I notice frequent gatherings to celebrate births, marriages, retirements, publications, and other public recognitions are becoming the norm. I decide to talk with two faculty administrators first to find out what other initiatives are taking place.

One administrator who has been instrumental in strengthening the faculty's commitment to Aboriginal education tells me about some of the changes that are taking place. For example, besides the attention to Aboriginal education and School<sup>PLUS</sup>, the faculty is in the process of reorganizing its administrative structure to one that is less hierarchical. It is also considering program revisions. The consideration given to revisions is due in part to budget cuts, but also to the recognition that there are gaps in the programs. An example of those gaps is the fact that Secondary Education students are not required to take a course in cross-cultural education or special education.

The administration is also the process of inviting applications from people of Aboriginal ancestry to teach in the faculty. As well, it has just been confirmed that Connie, one of our faculty members, has been awarded a Tier II Canada Research Chair position. She will preside over a new Centre for Social Justice and Aboriginal Education<sup>10</sup>. A new Middle Years Program is under development, which will have a stronger social justice focus and tighter links to the Aboriginal community, and new faculty members are being hired with the expectation that they will work toward the goal of teaching for social justice now that this has been articulated in the visioning documents.

Another major initiative on behalf of the faculty administrators involves hosting the first provincial School<sup>PLUS</sup> Congress to bring together educators, health, justice, and social workers as well as community members to share information, identify issues, and celebrate partnerships that seem to be improving services to students and families. The organizers of the School<sup>PLUS</sup> Congress are particularly interested in presentations

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<sup>10</sup> The name of the Centre for Social Justice and Aboriginal Education was later changed to the Centre for Social Justice and Anti-oppressive Education.

highlighting partnerships between schools and First Nations Band Councils or Aboriginal organizations within the urban community. I have been asked to co-chair the Congress.

The faculty administrator who has been instrumental in strengthening the commitment to Aboriginal education believes that it should be participatory where Aboriginal peoples identify what they see as their future and their role in terms of power and participation. The two most important directions for improving education for Aboriginal students, according to this person, include developing respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and making structural changes in the institution of schooling. If we can work towards these goals, perhaps we can build a strong province where people get along well together and Aboriginal people are no longer marginalized. This administrator's view is that the focus on curriculum should come last, believing that schools have to be more inviting places and that preservice teachers might learn best through case-based, inquiry-based, or project-based assignments where they work with members of the Aboriginal community on real issues.

Another senior administrator I speak with describes two initiatives that were developed in collaboration with other departments and faculty members working in the Aboriginal teacher education programs. The first is the development of an interdisciplinary Certificate in Child and Family Studies. The certificate includes courses in Education, Social Work, Human Justice, and Indigenous Studies. A trans-disciplinary fund established at the university, as well as support from the Faculties of Education, Social Work, and Arts, provided the catalyst for the project. It was difficult however, to get financial support from government departments, although the idea was deemed

worthwhile. The project was finally approved at different levels of the university after 3 years and tremendously hard work.

The second project is a Certificate of Extended Studies in Aboriginal Education that was developed through the collaboration of representatives from across the various teacher education programs as well as the Centre for Continuing Education. The committee involved the Office of the Treaty Commissioner as well as Elders who, according to this faculty member, “kept people’s feet rooted in terms of what’s good for Aboriginal people. They said we don’t want blame and we don’t want guilt.” This administrator greatly appreciated the work of people behind the scenes who helped with an approach that was win-win for everyone, where everyone could “go through this experience and come out feeling that they have been respected and that they have given some respect in turn.”

I ask whether there was talk of interrogating White privilege and power in any of these meetings. The administrator replies that it wasn’t part of the language of the people around the table, but certainly the intent of decolonization was there. “I suspect it was because most Aboriginal people don’t use that language. It is a language that White people have developed”, the administrator says with a smile.

This administrator has also been highly involved in promoting Aboriginal education within the faculty over the years through various community partnerships, through research projects, and through helping to bring an Elder in Residence into the faculty for a few months to work with faculty members and students.

“Yes, it was wonderful having her here,” I say. “We kept her really busy and I was amazed at how quiet and respectful our students were when she came into our classes even though they are not used to sitting and listening for long periods of time.”

“I think she was a gift to many faculty members, too,” the administrator reminds me. “Several people spent time with her.” As our discussion ends, we are reminded of the work done by many people within the faculty who have helped to create a culture within the institution that espouses a commitment to Aboriginal education and social justice.

### ***Forming Partnerships***

As part of the vision to strengthen partnerships among teacher education programs, the Mamawihtowin Aboriginal Education Council is established that includes the various Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) in the province and a First Nations-governed university to advise our faculty on the development of Aboriginal education. An Aboriginal Education Forum is also held with the intent to generate ideas around ways to provide support to inservice and preservice teachers in the area of Aboriginal Education. On the guest list are prominent members of the academic community of the universities in the province, the representatives of the TEP programs, and the educational partners including the Teacher’s Federation, the School Boards Association, and the Department of Learning. I find it interesting however, that among the various mixed-organization discussion groups who are charged with defining Aboriginal education, there is no one definition of Aboriginal education upon which everyone can agree.



On the research side, several faculty members have become involved in research partnerships and projects with Aboriginal faculty members from the First Nations and Métis teacher education programs and other faculties within the university. Many of these partnerships are the result of an Indigenous Peoples' Research Fund offered to all faculties within the university. Some of the alliances that I hear of include workshops on incorporating indigenous knowledge into science and mathematics, the use of technology to enhance Aboriginal language programs, and a jointly planned and organized Women in Leadership and Learning conference. I decide to talk with some of my colleagues in the Aboriginal education programs.

*Aboriginal teachers' teachers.*

I hold a focus group session with some colleagues in one of the Aboriginal teacher education programs and begin by asking them about their participation in research projects having to do with Aboriginal education. They tell me about the strain it is on them at times to be involved in such research projects.

"We don't have research leaves. If we want to do research, we do it on our own time in addition to everything else we do," explains one person.

"We know there are research dollars available and that some projects require a certain number of Aboriginal names on them," adds another person, "and there was one [research project] and my name was on there, but I did nothing, absolutely nothing. So I wonder if my name is on projects as the token Aboriginal person. The question is always in the back of my mind. The intention is to have meaningful participation by the

Aboriginal community and spread the resource dollars around, but the money usually ends up going to the host university, so we basically end up volunteering.”

I can feel myself cringe a little and blush as I think of the times when I have asked people to participate in joint projects because I knew there was funding available if some people on the research team were Aboriginal. *Did I do it out of a genuine desire to further research related to Aboriginal education, or did I do it to add a publication to my CV? If I'm honest with myself, I have to say both. It's the system that's at fault. It pressures us into dividing our intentions. Somehow I don't feel absolved of my guilt though.*

I then ask the group for their perceptions of how well students in the regular program are being prepared to work with Aboriginal communities.

One person teasingly says, “*Regular* program? What does that make us? *Irregular?*”

“Oh, sorry,” I apologize. “I mean mainstream program.”

“Or *whitestream*, as Grande (2004) calls it,” chuckles someone else.

I blush, suddenly reminded of how language reflects deeply ingrained prejudices (Whetherell & Potter, 1992). I search for another word to help me differentiate between the two programs in a way that doesn't place one program in a position of superiority. I can't think of one. *We need a new language!*

“It's okay,” someone says, sensing my discomfort. You can say ‘regular’. We're used to it.” They all laugh.

In answer to my question, the group members tell me that they see different faculty trying different things, but there is no overall holistic approach. Furthermore,

teachers in the field who are graduates of the larger program are saying they are simply not prepared to work in inner-city communities<sup>11</sup>. “They know nothing of the history of colonization or of the different cultural groups that make up the province,” says one person. “Often students in the regular program come to us for resources,” observes another.

These faculty members say they try to integrate history and cultural content into everything they do so that by the end of 4 years the students have more than surface knowledge. Resource materials reflect a variety of cultures besides Aboriginal cultures, and students are helped to see how they can develop their own materials. Resource people from the community provide some expertise on topics, and the students learn the protocols of inviting Elders to speak. National holidays such as Riel Day and Aboriginal Day are celebrated to show people in contemporary and historical contexts.

Throughout their program these faculty use the principles in the Circle of Courage literature from *Reclaiming Youth at Risk* (Bendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990) in the professional development of the students. These principles are the Spirits of Generosity, Mastery, Independence, and Belonging. Students must demonstrate through their portfolios how they have grown in each of these areas. These principles run through the four-year program and the instructors use a collective approach to actively make the model come alive. As well, the instructors try to be good role models themselves and demonstrate to the students that they don’t have to give up their culture to be successful in society. “There are places to celebrate your culture and people to celebrate with you,” is what they tell the students.

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<sup>11</sup> This is consistent with the findings of a study commissioned by the First Nations/Métis Urban Partnership (Currie & Tymchak, 2003).

In their program the instructors teach both anti-racist education and cross-cultural education. They note that some of their students have been victimized by racism while others who have been oppressors, identify strongly with mainstream society. It is very difficult for some students to admit they stereotype and discriminate against others. The program uses a developmental, spiraling process to help students come to terms with their identity, and faculty keep revisiting the idea of oppression throughout the program.

Faculty members begin with having the students look at change on the personal level, then how one might go about teaching for change. Students then learn how to move on to other levels such as how to change the system, the community, and the curriculum. Not everyone is at the same level when they come in or when they leave, but the instructors expect everyone to grow and develop.

I ask the group what they think about having our students interacting for different things. They tell me they do participate from time to time in modules and so on and it is usually a positive experience. They do have to be watchful because their function is to deliver a teacher education program. It is difficult however, to work around scheduling issues and to find time in the busy programs to get together.

Another reason for the hesitancy is they don't mind sharing information, but their program should not be the sole source of information for other programs. One person explained it to me in this way: "The way knowledge is learned is hard work and it takes a long time. There are cultural protocols we've had to go through to learn some types of knowledge such as how to approach an Elder in the right way. That's something we learned from experience, so to just freely give that information after you've worked hard

for it for a very long time, doesn't seem right, you know? The same process has to be learned for your students or it's not a full learning process."

Suddenly it is as if a brick hits me on the side of the head and I feel extremely foolish. I start to tear up and begin apologizing. "And we just take it away like we've always done," I say with an apologetic laugh.

Another person says, "Lots of times we are okay with sharing, but it's just not nice to be asked to do the same things three or four times by different people. Shauneen Pete makes a similar observation when she talks about her experiences as a consultant in a chapter she wrote for the Ward and Bouvier book, *Resting Lightly on Mother Earth* (2001)."

I ask about doing instructor exchanges, and the group agrees as long as it's a mutual exchange and they are not being asked just to do something cultural. "I can do that," says one person, "but I can do other things, too. To be asked to come in and give a lecture however, requires a lot of extra planning and preparation, which is fine as long as it's reciprocal." We all agree that timetabling such exchanges poses difficulties.

Suggestions the group has for the larger teacher education program include:

- have classroom/field experiences that strongly connect theory and practice because sometimes students see a disconnect between what is taught in their courses and what is done in classrooms;
- develop a sense of community and belonging among the students in the program so that they can learn from each other (their students in the upper years act as mentors for the junior students and they form friendships that last a lifetime);

- include cross-cultural and anti-racist content in the programs to help students learn about the histories of Aboriginal peoples of the land and the history of colonization;
- have the students learn about the Treaties because everyone is part of Treaty.

As a final comment, the group suggests that it would be nice to improve communication between our two programs. “There are students in your program that have never heard of ours, and it seems some staff members haven’t either because our mail keeps going to the other Aboriginal teacher education program. Also when decisions are made in the faculty regarding the sequencing of courses or programmatic requirements, our program is affected. It would be nice to be included in the decision-making process or be told that some change has been made. The communication is usually quite good and we sit on the various committees, but that hasn’t always happened,” notes one person.

I thank my friends for their time, their suggestions, and their hospitality and wish them a good summer holiday. As I make my way home I think back to the numerous times these faculty members have been called upon to share their expertise yet have received little, if anything in return. *I’m glad they had to courage to tell me these things. I know it wasn’t easy. Hopefully we will be more sensitive to our partners from now on.*

*Speaking of partners, there seem to be some interesting partnerships developing around the province between schools and Aboriginal communities. I think I should find out what they are doing in the area of Aboriginal education.*

*Inviting communities.*

I decide to talk with teachers from two schools that appear to be models of school/community co-operation and collaboration. Both schools have high numbers of First Nations and Métis students, so I reasoned that the teachers might have some helpful suggestions for teacher educators who are preparing prospective teachers to work collaboratively with indigenous communities.

Big Sky School is a K-12 school that serves a number of rural communities and four nearby First Nations. Can Do High is an urban school that primarily serves students taking vocational programs. Teachers at both schools accept my invitation to be interviewed and are very welcoming and inviting. Despite differences in their programs and demographics, teachers in both schools have similar things to say, which I see as common themes. They also have some unique differences.

*Big Sky School*

As I enter the door to the school where I had taught in an Alternate Education program over 15 years ago, I am struck by a sense of familiarity, yet strangeness. The school somehow looks a little brighter and more inviting than I remember. A number of rooms have changed. The school office is larger and more welcoming. I introduce myself to the principal and we chat for a bit about my research as he shows me to the room where I will be interviewing the teachers.

Due to the efforts of a number of people including administrators, School Board members, and representatives and Elders from the First Nations bands, the school applied for and received funding to become a community school in 2001. A vision statement was developed, a Community School Coordinator was hired, and a Community School

Council was created with representatives from each of the stakeholders including students. Several programs have emerged from the visioning of the communities involved.

When I taught in this school, there were considerable tensions among the various groups represented in the school population, but conversations with former colleagues have led me to believe things are changing. Located in a small rural community, the school draws from several communities as it did when I was a teacher there. The difference however, is that the school population has grown significantly in recent years with the majority of students coming from the four nearby First Nations, while the number of students from the towns and farms has decreased. Because of the declining population in rural communities, the towns realize co-operation is needed to ensure that the school survives. This means that all the students must feel as if they belong and are successful there or the students from the Bands simply will not attend. Everyone has a vested interest in the school.

Five teachers have agreed to talk with me. After introductions and my explaining the purpose of the study, I ask about some of the programs and changes that have taken place since the school was designated as a community school.

The group identifies the following changes: First, the staff is very aware of the unique nature of the seven different communities they serve and the fact that any decisions require considerable negotiation. They have also noticed that communication between the Bands and the school has increased greatly in the past several years, primarily because each Band employs an education coordinator. As well, people from the reserves are frequent visitors to the school now because they see it as a more welcoming



place. A number of interagency partnerships have been built with the RCMP, with Health, Justice, the Bands, Counselling Services, the Tribal Council, and the Elders.

The school has a number of programs to help ensure students stay in school including a retention program for those who have been unsuccessful because of irregular attendance; an alternate education program; a work placement program away from the school building; a Farm Program for students with behavioural issues who have been expelled from system after system, but who may be able to come back to the regular program; and a Pathfinder program for adults who want to return to school and complete Grade 12. As well, a nursery, a pre-school, and daycare have been established to care for the children of young mothers as they complete their education. A family literacy program has also been developed that connects people such as parents, Elders, people in the community, and those who are caregivers.

One of the vice-principals notes that a major part of her job now is to actively pursue funding so the school can provide these support services. The school also tries to have events that bring people together to build relationships. "Transportation is a huge problem because of the distances between communities and between our schools and homes, and most folks don't necessarily have the means to attend whatever the school is arranging." Furthermore, funding becomes an issue every year to support the established programs. As this person says, "I'm not saying that you shouldn't be accountable; I'm just saying that we shouldn't have to redesign a program every year in order to get the money."

The teachers discuss some of the other challenges they face as well as suggestions for prospective teachers and teacher educators, which I make note of for comparison to

the comments from teachers at Can Do High. At the end of my time with them I thank them for their comments and leave a book for their school.

### *Can Do High*

Two weeks later I visit Can Do High to find out what the teachers there have to say. I chose this school because I attended an interesting presentation by some of the staff members at a conference on Aboriginal Education. At the presentation I learned that the school had been cited in McLean's Magazine as one of the top 10 best schools in Canada. The school offers an instructional program that integrates academic instruction, personal development, and vocational preparation and provides many student services. Some of these include a "Kids First" daycare and numerous programs to support students who are returning to school or who have severe attendance and other issues. The emphasis in the school is on vocational training so students spend considerable time in work experience placements as well as in courses. According to the presenters, students who attend the school have a 70% success rate in finding employment.

During my conversation with the teachers I learn that they think Can Do High is one of the city's best kept secrets. The teachers love working there and love working with the students. "I know I'll eventually be transferred but they're going to have to carry me out kicking and screaming," says one teacher. His colleagues agree enthusiastically. Everyone has a unique story about how they came to be teaching at Can Do High, not always willingly, but now they don't want to leave.

I ask about the McLean's Magazine award and how that came about. Consuela, who identifies herself as Métis and feels she has "died and gone to heaven" since coming to the school, explains: "They were looking for the top schools across Canada so we

submitted an application. I submitted it on behalf of the students and the staff here at Can Do because I felt that we were one of the best kept secrets, but we didn't recognize that we were. We were successful in what we were doing and we needed to celebrate the successes rather than focus on the negatives. So winning the award has made a huge difference in this school. I've seen a big paradigm shift in the kids. They no longer consider it Cocaine High or Coconut High. The people in the community and the surrounding area are very proud to send their kids here. Business people are very interested in Can Do High School and employ the students from here now. I feel that's a huge accomplishment and a huge paradigm shift in the community. I think that the children will reap the benefits of this in the long run." Consuela sits back proudly in her chair. The other teachers' faces are beaming with pride as well.

The teachers also tell me that because of the award, students have become political activists and write letters to MPs and MLAs, with the help of their teachers. When the students wrote to the leaders of the federal political parties about the Gomery commission, they were surprised and pleased when (most of) the leaders replied. Several politicians have since dropped by the school.

"I had a couple of kids I know who were affiliated with gangs and after they realized the Minister of Finance had called us several times, you could see the change of expressions in their faces. They didn't say anything but you could just see it in the body language that they started to believe they could move mountains," says Consuela.

"Wow!" I say. "Excuse me a minute," I say as I reach for a tissue in my purse. "I love hearing stories like that," I say as I dab my eyes and nose. The group smiles at me and a few people relate similar stories.

I ask the group for some suggestions for prospective teachers and for our teacher education program. They too have several suggestions which sound similar to those offered by the teachers at Big Sky School. At the end of the interview I ask the teachers to please take some of the fruit, muffins, and juice I brought and I thank them with a book for their school as well.

Back in my office after transcribing the tapes, I try to see if there are indeed, some common themes, issues, or suggestions offered by the two staff groups. Several jump out at me immediately:

*Pride* in the school and in the students. Like the teachers at Can Do High, the teachers at Big Sky School have considerable pride in and affection for their students. As Sam says, "Whenever we go someplace, I will rank our kids against any school in the province. They are the most respectful kids I have ever seen. Yes, we have our blowups, but our kids know how to represent our school. I have always been terribly proud of them. I have seen some horrible racist treatment of our teams, especially in the sports, and our students have always risen above it. They have always taken the high road and I always have the greatest pride in them for that."

*Respect* is another key theme in both schools. Teachers recognize the importance of working respectfully with community members and students. Working together helps to reduce racism and the mystique of the other.

As Sam from Big Sky says, "If you really want people to be equal and respectful of each other, you have to find a way to get First Nations and non-First Nations people together. I think some of these misconceptions, these silly beliefs that they have are just

because they don't know any better. There has got to be more of just getting together so that people get some of their stupid beliefs blown out of the water."

Similarly, a teacher at Can Do states, "You have to take the mystery out of it. It can't be *them* and *us*. We've got to take that away. Preservice teachers should be expected in all 4 years to be involved in community activities somehow where it's an integrated blend of theory and community involvement. It doesn't necessarily have to be with First Nations and Métis kids. It could be with the Chinese community, it could be the African community, it could be the South American community from El Salvador; that sort of thing. I think you have to demystify this because there is this sort of romanticism that goes with it."

This teacher's counterpart at Big Sky states as well, "Just get the teachers into more diverse classroom situations. They can see very different life styles depending on the schools. Give them a variety from the very privileged, upper middle class White school to a very mixed school or one that is predominantly Aboriginal. Give them that whole span so that they can compare, and they may find that there are a lot of similarities among the schools too."

*Compassion* and flexibility are seen as key characteristics people need if they are to be successful teachers. Stewie from Can Do, for example says, "Well first of all, teachers have to be compassionate people. It's not something that you can necessarily teach someone to be. You have to get the right people in to do the right job. They have to be accepting of different cultures and they have to be flexible. That's just my opinion."

At Big Sky, Bebe points to a poster on the wall that states, *The world has enough smart people. We need more good people* and Sam says, "It doesn't matter how bright a

star they are. It doesn't matter what their marks were, when we interview people for teaching positions here, we look for those people skills. Those are the people who will be successful in our communities."

Similarly teachers from both schools talked about the importance of being *flexible*. As one person stated, "A sensitive teacher who is flexible can learn a lot by just being patient and flexible." The teachers felt that training in special education and the adaptive dimension helped prospective teachers learn to be flexible.

*Anti-racist and cross-cultural training* is a huge priority in both schools. "I think that all children should be taught First Nation and Métis cultures and history. To tell you the truth, I think that the outer core, the suburbia area needs to have more exposure to this than our core kids because we are not going to change attitudes and make paradigm shifts until that happens," says Consuela.

Consuela feels such training would reduce some of the racism that is seen as a roadblock. "There are a lot of roadblocks out there and people seem to think that there is an equity issue; that Aboriginal people are getting hired because there is a push on out there to hire the First Nations or Métis people. That's not true. We have to have the qualifications too. That needs to be clarified. As First nations and Métis people who are working in a system, we didn't get the jobs just because we are Indian. We got the job because we are qualified."

*Dialogue* among all the educational partners is seen as necessary to build *Trust*. It is important to have a "legitimate dialogue where you listen to people's needs and actually do something about them so that there is visible change. That way they see that

their input means something, which helps to develop trust and a higher degree of comfort. Giving lip service destroys trust,” says a teacher from Big Sky.

Another Big Sky teacher also says, “When people see each other as people, they stop seeing differences in culture; they just see friends. *Trust* is built through the more opportunities people have to come together and enjoy a meal together, enjoy entertainment together, talk, whatever the case may be. If you wanted to get to know your neighbours and make friends with them, you would invite them into your house and have a cup of coffee. We just do lots of that.”

Can Do teachers talk about the importance of dialogue among staff members when initiating new ideas, because the staff sees many ways they could still improve the school. “If you do it in the right place, in the right forum instead of just gossiping in the staff room, and that’s an unhealthy way of asking questions. In my opinion, if you find the people that are initiating this particular kind of program and you don’t understand it and you ask the questions outright, you’ll get a succinct and honest answer rather than just starting propaganda in the staff room.”

Incorporating *Aboriginal content and perspectives* as well as those from other cultures in a meaningful way is seen as extremely important in both schools although one of the teachers from Big Sky School says this is difficult to do when there are so many different perspectives, even within the same community. “So rather than somebody teaching about a community’s culture, it’s more of a ‘go out and discover’ kind of approach that you have to do in order to understand the cultural background of a community.” Bringing in resource people and parents from the community is the key to understanding. Both schools also emphasized the importance of teaching prospective

teachers as well as school children about the Treaties as a part of the history of the country.

To make the content of the courses more relevant to students, the Big Sky teachers tell me they have rewritten the modified English Language Arts and made a point of gathering numerous resources for other courses that reflect the lives of First Nations and Métis students through novels, short stories and poetry. “The girls seem to like these better than the boys who are more interested in adventure stories,” says one teacher. To teach anti-oppressive education, they may start with books on the Holocaust and then move the discussion to how Aboriginal peoples in this country were treated.

At Can Do High, one of the teachers emphasized the importance of having the content current, not just historical. “There’s no excuse not to bring it to present day. You have Indigenous Circle, you have the APTN network; there are all kinds of First Nations newspapers and Métis newspapers that come out of Alberta. There’s the Sweetgrass newspaper, the Eagle Feather newspaper, I think it’s called; there are also the magazines that they have, and role model posters. There are all kinds of things. The Internet is absolutely full of stuff and the thing is, it is connecting it to students’ relations.”

The teacher relates a story of having the students working on a web site that was Aboriginal-based. One of the little girls found the story of an Elder on the web page. She asked the teacher to copy the write up of the Elder, then showed her mom. The Elder turned out to be her grandfather. This teacher also showed that web page on a data projector at a presentation they were making in a school district. “I picked this one character who was called Grizzly Bear or something like that, and his hair was sticking up in every direction, and one of the participants quietly tapped me and said, ‘That’s my



grandfather. I was in that house when I was 10 years old or 7 years old.' I replied, 'pardon me?' She said, 'That's my grandpa's kitchen. I was there when I was little.' So then she told the story to all of the teachers in the area. This was a huge thing for her because she was the only First Nations person in that school district working with all of these teachers. We were able to make a connection for her. And it's making those community connections—connecting the dots."

Other themes both schools have in common is having high expectations of students, having a sense of humour, building caring relationships with students, being flexible, and providing lots of support. Big Sky seems to try to involve as many people in a student's life as possible to provide support. It is not clear whether Can Do teachers bring in various other people. However, both schools have excellent programs to provide the support they think students need.

Regarding the *teacher education programs* in the province, the teachers in both schools have some criticisms. Neither staff thinks the universities in the province are doing a good job of anti-racist or cross cultural education or special education. They also both think there should be more co-operation among the Aboriginal teacher education programs and the larger programs. One of the teachers who graduated from our sister university told the following story.

"We had a Foundations class that was cross-cultural education, but a lot of that was theory—the history of racism and not a lot about, 'Okay what do we do now and how do we move on from that?' I think a lot of it falls to the TEP programs. You know, they are Aboriginal students so they are the ones to be expected to go back to the reserve schools and schools like this but I don't think that's good either. That needs to change. A

lot of non-Aboriginals could benefit from having an Aboriginal teacher. I had a girlfriend that I was quite close to and she was in a TEP program and we attended a focus group like this with the Dean. The Dean asked what the college could do to help improve communication among the various teacher education programs, and this girl said, 'Stop viewing Aboriginal people as this little segment in your classes. We are more than just Batoche or the Treaties. The past happened but focus on the future and really integrating the cultures.' And speaking about that, I think not enough was done to make connections between the TEP programs and the other education programs. There were still barriers at that level of education."

As I look over the teachers' suggestions for preservice teachers, I see there are several similar recommendations, which include:

- Be compassionate, flexible, and have a sense of humour;
- Use a variety of teaching strategies to accommodate different learning styles;
- Use contemporary, local materials and examples so that students see themselves and perhaps their relatives in the materials;
- Understand the effects and causes of poverty;
- Have an understanding of First Nations and Métis history and cultures by talking with Elders and resource people in the community and valuing their knowledge;
- Understand the effects of colonialism and racism on the Aboriginal peoples of Canada;
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes and take risks. If the "deferred success" (a term one person prefers instead of "failure") happens, don't quit there;

- Listen with an open heart and mind to what others have to say even though it may hurt to hear some things;
- Find a mentor on staff with whom you can talk.

As I look over the teachers' comments I feel a familiar—something. Yearning? Nostalgia? Admiration? I can't quite name it but memories of teaching in an alternate education program come flooding back. Some are happy, some are not. *Those teachers seem so caring, astute, knowledgeable, kind. Was I like that? Would I be a better teacher knowing what I know now or would I try to mould the students in my own image again?* I slip into a reverie where I imagine myself working in a school like Can Do or Big Sky and feeling as if I've died and gone to heaven. Suddenly my day dream is shattered by the ringing of the phone.

"Hi Carol," It's Sandra. "Do you happen to know if our discussion group is meeting today?"

"Yes," I say. "It's at 3pm in ED 532. I think Lisa put a copy of the article we will be discussing today in everyone's mailbox. Did you get it?"

"Yes," says Sandra. "Thanks. I'll see you there."

### *Anti-oppressive educators.*

I belong to an anti-racist education discussion group that meets regularly. Group members bring articles to share, which we then discuss in following meetings. The discussions are lively and interesting, but I often have a hard time contributing to the discussions, either because I feel a little intimidated by the knowledge of the people in the

group, or by the time I have a chance to make my point, the discussion has moved on and the point is no longer relevant.

At times I feel enlightened and at times I feel confused. Most of the articles we read critique the social construction of identities that mark difference, yet the group members criticize those who say that they are colour-blind and don't see difference. I am never quite sure whether it is good to see difference or not. Some of the articles we discuss include: "Toward a Theory of Anti-Oppressive Education" (Kumashiro, 2000); "Unsettling Differences: Origins, Methods, Frameworks" (Mackey, 1999); "On the theoretical Status of the Concept of Race" (Omi & Winant, 1993); "Democratic Racism" (Henry, Tator, Mathis & Rees, 2000) and "The Educational Politics of Identity and Category" (Willinsky, 1998) among others. Some of the articles frustrate and challenge me as I try to wade through long paragraphs to find the point an author is making, while other articles flick on the light in my head.

I particularly like the introduction to the Berlak and Moyenda (2001) book, *Taking It Personally: Racism in the Classroom from Kindergarten to College* because of the narrative and emotional nature of the chapter. One statement hits home. Moyenda (p. 11) asks, "*Do you want to change? Do you really want to begin to doubt most of what you take for granted to be just, right, and true?*" I'm not sure I do, but I find that the discussions in this group are causing me to doubt everything I believe.

In one of our meetings I ask whether it is important to see multiple perspectives because I thought that was at the heart of postmodern or poststructural discourses. One person replies, "Well, there are just some points of view that are wrong." Another person states, "We don't ask students their opinion on racism, just as we don't ask them their

opinion on mathematics.” Another person says, “Perhaps we need to have a discussion on what we mean by postmodernism and poststructuralism.” I silently think that wouldn’t be a bad idea because I don’t seem to have the same understanding as my colleagues.

After several months of meeting, I ask the group members if they would be willing to participate in a focus group discussion around questions I am exploring for my dissertation. The group agrees and we set a date near the end of the semester.

I ask the group the following questions: *How do you incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives into your courses? How do you address anti-racist/anti-oppressive education in your courses? What do you believe are the greatest challenges to teaching for social justice in this faculty?* The responses to these questions take two sessions, but we all come away feeling quite elated by the process. Rather than people speaking randomly the way we do in our regular sessions, we go around the circle and people respond to each question one at a time. Some people comment that they like that format because they could hear what each person had to say about a topic.

After transcribing the tapes, I write a summary of my colleagues’ responses.

*How do you incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives in your courses?*  
*How do you address anti-racist/anti-oppressive education in your courses?*

I combine the responses to these two questions because the group members’ answers to both are very similar. Except for one person who talks about the importance of helping our students become familiar with other epistemologies and ways of knowing, the other group members use an anti-racist/anti-oppressive framework in their courses.

Most people try to help the students understand how certain discourses, identities, courses, and educational practices become normalized. One person says she “takes

students back to how they are positioned in the process of power relationships and the hegemonic practices in society that implicate them in the production of racism, sexism, heterosexism and so on.” Many people use a variety of resource materials to show other perspectives such as poetry, photographs, or Elizabeth Moje’s (2000) alternative to Writer’s Workshop where she works with “gangsta adolescents”. The group members also talk about language and power and the dominance of the English language as the language of power. Some people have students look at the work of Paulo Friere and how literacy education can be a site of struggle for social justice. Most people try to normalize Aboriginal content and perspectives by including them along with other things they do in the classroom. One person uses critical media studies to raise awareness of issues; another uses the arts to decentre the teacher as the source of power; and another person has students engaged in community-based service learning projects then later in their seminars, helps students to contextualize their learning and break down prior understandings they have of oppressed groups.

One person brings another perspective to the table. Besides having an anti-oppressive education orientation, this person said that it is important that oppression not be seen as only a political problem, but rather as a curricular or epistemological problem so that students can become aware of other knowledge in the world—of other ways of explaining the physical and spiritual world around us. This person believes that once students take that first step toward their own education in the importance of being more flexible epistemologically, it is important to help them learn how to work in communities and how to approach an Elder or work with the Muslim community. It is also important for students to understand the concept of spiritual— and that it does not mean religious.

“I’m not saying they should learn about the Medicine Wheel, because there are all sorts of problems inherent in that. Rather it is helping our students develop more flexible understandings of curricular and epistemological issues; it’s about giving them some practical help and resources so that they, too, can teach children to have an even broader epistemology of the world.”

*What do you believe are the greatest challenges to teaching for social justice in the Faculty of Education?*

In response to this question, one person believes having colleagues who don’t have the same orientation to social justice is a challenge. “There are some who don’t want to challenge the status quo and believe ‘the world is just fine the way it is, thank you very much.’ There are others who really want a better and more just world but they believe you do it one person at a time. They don’t see systems of privilege and they believe if you could just get people to be nice to each other, justice will come.”

Another challenge someone identifies is the “lure of the practical” where we believe that everything should be secondary to lesson plans and that the focus of teacher education must be the practical. This person thinks we are in a constant battle to make everything practical or students feel that it’s not worth anything.

A third challenge has to do with our white faces that makes it difficult for us to see another’s position. “We are always struggling with our own positioning even when we intend to be otherwise. We are part of the national discourses of our country—of the systemic denial of racism. The notion of the good country filters down to be the myth of the good citizen and we have the inability to recognize how the system implicates us in the production of racism whether we are participating in it or not.”

The effect of culturalism is another challenge for us. “We believe that if we know enough about First Nations people the problem of racism will disappear. Culturalism lets White folks off the hook if we feel we are participating as helpers. They say ‘We will help you once again to regain your culture.’ What this really produces are colonized /colonizer relations. It involves discomfort in trying to overcome this way of thinking, so our concern for our own comfort keeps us from taking on those more difficult issues.”

This person goes on to say that historically, the colonizers are more than happy to have the colonized participating in activities that mark difference. “We ought to look at how much we are encouraging that to go on and look at the resentment that is held against minority people who are successful.”

Another person echoes this point of view and points to our “liberal orientation and belief that we already are non-racist, we already are non-sexist, and the proof of that is our colour-blindness, our tolerance, and our willingness to go out and celebrate all those other people’s differences. What more do you want? Right?”

Someone else suggests that university doesn’t encourage people to learn how to live, or how to be people. Instead it just encourages us to focus on content. This person also believes that there is a constant tension between minimizing the perpetuation of injustices and imposing a social justice agenda on people, which is another form of injustice.

Another participant says, “My political position is causing me trouble in terms of the effectiveness of my teaching. Students interpret what I am giving them as propaganda and they are concerned that they are not learning what they are expected to learn. I guess this also points to the lure of the practical.”



Another challenge is faced once students become aware of oppression, “Where do you go with that? They feel as if they are on islands in a turbulent sea, but where is the lifeboat?” As another person states, “I think one of the most important things we can do for our students who themselves will be educators, is to develop the political will to change some of these greater things. And I remain stumped. I don’t know how to do that because they don’t seem to be getting it.”

This person’s comment reminds me of Moore’s (2002) chapter in the William Doll, Jr. and Noel Gough book *Curriculum Visions*, which “is designed to awaken readers to a curriculum tradition that emphasizes control and goal attainment” (p. 219). Moore says educators often complain that students “don’t get it” but she says Doll, Jr. & Gough make the point that curriculum theorists must move beyond “either-or” thinking and their desire for control (although a desire for control seems to be part of our human nature, but we need not necessarily yield to domination and hierarchy). Rather, readers are invited to “get it” that we need to change the structures and processes of curriculum from an emphasis on control and goal attainment to a vision that includes “complexity and simplicity”, “community and individuality”, “conversation and silence” and “culmination and new beginnings”. In other words, it is a holistic view of curriculum that arises through our interactions with each other and our students, rather an educator’s view of what is right that is imposed on students.

A guest who joins us in the second session but who is silent until the end, thanks the group for the opportunity to sit in on the discussion. This person is encouraged by the dialogue because it is similar to his point of view and what he is trying to do in his role as an administrator in a school system. This person sees School<sup>PLUS</sup> as a point of re-contact

between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in a way that is more just, humane, and equitable. He also sees the dilemma of the White administrator trying to do well by the thousands of our Aboriginal students in a way that isn't going to further promote racism and colonialism. "What you have to do I think, is to create opportunities for the power structure to shift to Aboriginals. That's the challenge that I'm right in the middle of now. So I thought I would just leave that with you."

After I transcribe the tapes I leave them for several months before I start looking for themes. My initial assumption is that everyone in the group is of the same mind on all issues. When I go back to the transcripts, however, I see there are some divergent points of view. Three voices in particular stand out from the rest, in my mind, primarily because other people say nothing in support of their views and they seem to be speaking from a different theoretical position than the majority of the participants.

The person who identifies the need for students to understand different epistemologies seems to stand alone, as does the person who talks about using the arts to decentre the authority of the teacher. The third person is the faculty administrator who wants to create opportunities to shift the power structure to Aboriginals. Each of these views seems to be talking about sharing power (although one seems somewhat patriarchal), whereas most of the other participants seem to be critiquing power relationships. I find myself drawn to three people whose views differ, possibly because I don't know how to move beyond a critique of power. Where does personal agency come in? Some months later I find an explanation for the difference between postmodernists' and complexity theorists' views of the world. "Postmodernists want to deconstruct science; complexity theorists want to reconstruct it" (Price, 1997, p. 14).

## CHAPTER IV

### Educating Stories

We need to understand the dynamics of past and present dominance, face how we have been shaped by myths of superiority, and begin to sort out our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors relative to Whiteness and other dimensions of human diversity". (Howard, 1999, p. 4)

#### *Filling Gaps*

"Good morning, everyone," I say loudly enough to bring the Secondary Education students' attention to the front of the room. It is early in the new semester so I still feel a little nervous. After dispensing with the day's announcements and addressing questions about upcoming assignments, I ask the class how many people have taken a course in Indigenous Studies or Cross-Cultural Education. Five or six hands go up out of a possible 25.

"I know this isn't on your syllabus, but I have decided that a crash course might be in order so that you have some background of the history of Aboriginal education in Canada<sup>12</sup>. Many of you will be student teaching in inner city schools where there are high numbers of First Nations and Métis students, so it might help to contextualize some of the experiences you may have. For those of you in other schools, it may help you to question some of the things we do as educators." I proceed to pass out the handout that accompanies the lecture. Students open their books and prepare to take notes. *They seem almost happy about this. They're probably relieved that they don't have to discuss*

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<sup>12</sup> I present this "crash course" with a fictitious class to provide a theoretical context for the thesis and to summarize some of the literature related to Aboriginal education. Many of the conversations with and issues raised by these fictitious students are illustrative of actual conversations I have had with students over the last few years. The presentation of Aboriginal education as a crash course is intended to further emphasize the need for more in-depth treatment of the issues related to Aboriginal education.

*anything or think too deeply at 8:30 in the morning.* I start the PowerPoint presentation and click on the slide that provides an overview of the lecture:

- Clarification of Terms
- History of Aboriginal Education in Canada
- Approaches to Aboriginal Education
- The Role of Educators
- Discussion/ Questions

*Clarification of terms.*

“To begin with there are a few terms with which you will need to be familiar such as: *Native, Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Indian, Treaty Indians, Status Indians* and *Non-status Indians*. The first term, *Native*, is an umbrella term referring to the Original Peoples of North America. You will find it in the older literature, but it is not used very often any more because it can refer to anyone who was born in a land. Much of the American literature still refers to Native Indians or Native Americans, Native Hawaiians or Native Alaskans.

A preferred umbrella term is ‘indigenous’ meaning ‘from the land’ (Cardinal, 2001) because the land is extremely important to many indigenous peoples. It should also be noted that there is no agreed-upon definition of indigenous peoples because of political and economic issues; however, Sanders (1999) discussed this working definition:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-

dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (p. 379)<sup>13</sup>.

Indigenous, then, is the term used when speaking of original peoples all over the world. Can anyone tell me the inclusive term that is used to refer to Canada's indigenous peoples?" I ask.

"Indian?" offers one person.

"First Nations?" says another.

"Aboriginal," states a more mature woman whom I recognize as one of the students in Ellie's Foundations course. "The term includes First Nations or Indians, the Métis, and the Inuit as defined by the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982," she says confidently.

"Yes," I say. "Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996) state that:

The Aboriginal peoples of Canada include First Nations (Indian), Inuit and Métis peoples. The more than 50 First Nations have much in common, but they are different from one another—and very different from Inuit, whose culture was shaped by the demanding northern environment. Different again are Métis people, who blended traditions from Aboriginal and European forebears in a unique new culture. (on-line)

The term, 'Indian', as you probably learned as a child, is the name Columbus gave to the people he met in the Americas when he thought he had found India." I hear a few people chuckle to a comment at the back of the room. "It has come to be known in Canada as anyone defined under the Indian Act and its various amendments," I say. "The

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<sup>13</sup> Sanders (1999) cites this important working definition of indigenous peoples developed by Special Rapporteur Jose R. Martinez Cobo. It was adopted by the U.N. Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1983 in *The Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*.

Indian Act was originally designed to protect the land base of the original peoples but it gradually came to be used as tool to ‘assimilate and civilize’ Aboriginal peoples and control every aspect of their lives,” I say using imaginary quotation marks.

“So the government could decide who was Indian or who wasn’t,” adds Jon who has a B.A. political science. “For instance, if an Indian woman married a non-Indian, she was no longer considered an Indian. But if a non-Indian man married an Indian woman, he became an Indian—until Bill C31 that is,” Jon says. “It got even weirder for the children of these unions,” he adds.

“Or if a man decided to go to war to fight for Canada he became enfranchised and had to give up his status as an Indian. If people wanted to vote, they had to give up their status,” chimes in the woman from Ellie’s class. “And did you know that the definition of a ‘person’ up until around 1951 was anyone who wasn’t an Indian? Aboriginal people could become persons if they voluntary enfranchised,” says Cheryl (whose name I have now looked up on my class list). I hear gasps of horror from around the room.

“Right,” I say. “Farrell-Racette, Goulet, Pelletier and Schmon (1996) note that with regards to First Nations peoples, a variety of pieces of legislation such as the British North America Act, the Indian Act with its various revisions and Bill C31 have ‘resulted in a complex categorized system that is often hard to understand’ (p. 10). For example, there are Status/Registered; Non-Status, Treaty and Non-Treaty Indians. Marriages among the people of different groups resulted in people within the same family having different status. As well, terms change and evolve as ‘people seek to regain what was lost through the process of colonization,’” (p.11) I say.

“And if people wanted to leave the reserve they had to have a pass card that an Indian Agent could give out at his discretion,” someone else adds.

I nod my head as I watch the students’ dismay and listen to their comments, and I am somewhat surprised that this seems to be news to most of them. “If you want to learn more about the Indian Act and its various revisions, do a Google search and you’ll find numerous government and non-government web sites on it,” I tell them.

I remind the students that in our province the Aboriginal peoples are: Nehiyawak (Cree), Dakota, Lakota, Nakota (Assiniboine), Dené, Anishinabe (Saulteaux/Plains Ojibway) and Métis . “The different nations have their own languages and traditions just as the European nations do, so when referring to specific groups, it is better to use the name that describes their national origin. And just remember,” I say, “All people have the right to name themselves, regardless of how others define or label them. Please remember that

[a] peoples’ ability to name themselves and self-identify their membership is a basic foundation of continued survival as a distinct people. . . . The names the many nations have for themselves most often translate into ‘the People’. It is preferred and appropriate when speaking about a specific Indian nation to refer to the group according to their origin. People in the local community are often the best judge of what terms apply and when.” (Farrell-Racette et al., 1996, p. 11)

“This is really confusing,” says a young woman. I don’t know if I can remember all this.”

I smile sympathetically. “I know. Sherilyn Calliou talks about this in an article she calls ‘Us/them, Me/you: Who? (Re)thinking the Binary of First Nations and non-First Nations’(1998). Her solution is to call everyone PFNA—Persons of First Nations Ancestry if we have to put labels on indigenous peoples to highlight the oppression they experienced. She prefers however, as do I, that there be no labels.” I watch as students jot

down notes on the outline I have provided. When it seems that most people are ready to move on, I switch to the next slide.

*History of Aboriginal education.*

“Prior to the 1960’s the education of Aboriginal peoples in North America was based on an assimilationist model that was designed to eradicate Aboriginal cultures. Duncan Campbell Scott, poet, essayist and Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, is credited with saying, ‘Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department’” (Henderson, 1996). Several students stop writing and look up in disbelief.

“To accomplish this, boarding schools were established and children were removed from the influences of their families and communities. By now, most Canadians are aware of the physical, emotional, and sexual abuses inflicted on many students attending these schools, and many people attribute the social problems experienced by Aboriginal communities to these abuses and the effects of assimilation. Despite the horrific legacy that residential schools left on generations of people and the attempt at what many consider to be cultural genocide (Bear-Nicholas, 2001; Haig-Brown, 1988; Miller, 1996; RCAP, 1996), Aboriginal peoples survived. Although the assimilationist policies of the Canadian government had detrimental effects on the different religious beliefs, traditions and languages among the various cultural groups, Aboriginal peoples shared similar experiences and issues because of colonialism. As students in the residential schools began to identify with peers from different nations or tribes, they



developed a strong ethnic identity, which facilitated the development of a pan-Indian identity (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997),” I tell the class.

“What is a pan-Indian identity?” asks a young woman.

“It’s when the people started to identify with each other as a group,” I say. “Non-Aboriginal people started to see Aboriginal peoples as one group as well. You’ll often hear people talk about the ‘Native culture’ when in fact there are many different cultural groups. I noticed when I attended an Indigenous Peoples’ Conference in Vancouver one year with indigenous peoples from all over the world, I had a sense they shared a common bond and were able to identify with each other because of colonialism. I, on the other hand, was an outsider even though they were very welcoming and never did anything to make me feel that way. It was just a sense I had.” A few heads nod to indicate they understand. “Let’s move on,” I say.

“The government began to realize that residential schools were not the answer to assimilation so began closing them in the 1960’s and looked for other ways to integrate Aboriginal peoples into the dominant society. One of these ways was to take children from their families and let non-Aboriginal people adopt them. This was known as the ‘60s scoop’ because children were literally scooped from their homes on the premise that their parents were incapable of looking after them properly because most Aboriginal people lived in poverty, which was largely due to the limitations imposed on them by the Indian Act.” More gasps of horror.

“Then the Hawthorne study (1966/67), *Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada*, raised Canadians’ awareness of the plight of Aboriginal peoples. Bear-Nicholas however, believes the report was an attempt to further justify assimilation. In response to

the report's conclusion that the high dropout rate of 97 percent for Native children was directly attributable to cultural differences of Native People, she asserts that 'Indigenous culture was to be targeted anew for intense modification, if not eradication. Now fully validated, the federal government continued its integration project with renewed vigor'" (2001, p. 15). A student raises her hand.

"Yes, Amy?"

"My older brother was adopted into our family when he was about 5, but he always had a lot of problems despite coming from a good home. He got into drugs and alcohol and started hanging out with other Native—I mean Aboriginal—kids. Lots of times my parents didn't know where he was and he was always a worry for them. Finally one day he just left and we haven't seen him since. My grandmother kept saying it was genetic—bad blood—but my parents knew he felt different from the rest of us, like he didn't belong, no matter how much they tried to show him they loved him. I've heard of a lot of people who have similar stories, so I don't think the adoption idea was a good one."

"Neither do I. I, too, know some people whose stories are similar, but I also know of others who were very happy in their adoptive families, although they say they did feel they were different. Thanks for that Amy," I say and continue with the lecture.

"After the Hawthorn report, self-determination issues relating to education became prominent in the late 60s and early 70s during the time the National Indian Brotherhood, which was the forerunner of the Assembly of First Nations, lobbied for *Indian Control of Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). At a time of political activism, this period through the 1980s saw a move from an assimilationist agenda to one that involved federal, provincial and Aboriginal—mainly Indian—

organizations discussing ways to revitalize Indian-controlled education. The emphasis was on parental responsibility and local control—‘although there were certainly varying ideas about the meaning of local control’ according to Abele, Dittburner, and Graham (2000).”

While the federal government was giving over control of education to Bands, some provincial governments were struggling with how to address the diversity among the Aboriginal groups for whom they had responsibility. Alberta, for example, recognized that Métis people were particularly vulnerable because they were not protected by legal rights and had no land. Their interests, therefore, ‘*should be of particular concern to the Government of Alberta*’ (Alberta Task Force on Intercultural Education, 1972, 159, cited by Abele et al., 2000, p. 7) [emphasis in original]. Dorian and Yang (2000) note that generally much less attention has been paid to the Métis educational context and that ‘generalizations are often transferred from First Nations education to Métis education without any critical analysis of parallels and divergences,’ (2000, p. 176).

By the way, that’s an excellent point that Dorian and Yang make,” I say to draw the students’ attention to it. “Sealey and Lussier, (1975) call the Métis *Canada’s Forgotten People* because most people assume their history is the same as that of the First Nations and that their issues are the same. It’s true that the Méits have oppression in common with First Nations, but they have a unique history. We don’t have time to delve into Métis history today, but I suggest that you do some reading in the area. I have listed some resource materials on your handout. Take a look at Sealy (1977), Sealy and Kirkness (1973) and Peterson and Brown (2001). The two major goals of Métis people in their struggle for political and economic rights, of which education plays an integral part,

are maintaining a distinct Métis identity and culture and achieving self-identification and self-government”(Dorian & Yang, 2000). I click on the next slide.

“Abele, Dittburner and Graham (2000, p. 4) identify three distinct phases that have marked the changes in policy related to the education of Aboriginal peoples since the Hawthorne Report up until 1992, when the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was launched. Each phase has led to greater autonomy and recognition of the rights of Aboriginal peoples. These phases include:

- the period from 1966-1982, which saw debates move from assimilation to Aboriginal control of education;
- from 1982-1988 where Aboriginal issues were included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and there were frequent calls for equal opportunities for Aboriginal peoples; and
- from 1988-1992 which witnessed increased attention to the ‘nitty-gritty of when and how education reforms should be undertaken, along with a redefinition of the roles of Aboriginal and Canadian governments’ (p. 21).

Then in 1996 the RCAP report ‘described how every aspect of Aboriginal life had been trampled on’ (Battiste, 2000, p. iix). Although the report acknowledged many positive changes and initiatives, it cited many problems that persisted such as ‘too many youth who do not complete high school, they do not have the skills for employment, they do not have the language and cultural knowledge of their people’”(RCAP, Vol. 3, p. 434).

“It doesn’t sound as if much has changed,” quietly observes a young male who is sitting near the front. Two people at his table nod in agreement.

“The report also noted that many who continued in the education system experienced racism, not only on a personal level, but through the denial of Aboriginal values, cultures and perspectives in the curriculum and the life of the institution. The report made 440 recommendations for improving the lives of Aboriginal people, many of which have to do with empowering Aboriginal communities to continue the healing and rebuilding their communities (Battiste, 2000).”

I can see the students need a break, so I suggest we reconvene in ten minutes and continue with the next section when we return.

I spend the break talking with students who have come to the front asking for suggestions for resources or to tell me of some personal experiences. “Why weren’t we told this in school?” one student asks. I tell her that’s a good question and one I’d like her to think about. When the class returns I talk about some of the different ways people have approached Aboriginal education since the Hawthorne report.

#### *Approaches to Aboriginal education.*

“Besides changes to government policies, approaches to Aboriginal Education during this time also underwent several phases (Bear-Nicholas; 2001; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; St. Denis, 2002) with remnants of each of the approaches still prevalent today. I am sure you will see which approach still dominates when you go into the schools,” I add.

Thousands of articles have been written about finding better ways to educate Aboriginal students, but I think of the different approaches as three main categories: the education *of* Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginals; education *for* Aboriginal people, again primarily by non-Aboriginals who designed special programs for students to better

meet their needs; and education *by* Aboriginal people which marks the beginning of the TEP programs. Finally, there is the hint of a new area of research by indigenous and non-indigenous scholars that focuses on education *with* Aboriginal people that sees people working together to co-create what our government calls a ‘shared and harmonious future’,” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004; Smith, 1999; Ward & Bouvier, 2001) I say.

Sandra raises her hand. “Could you please talk a bit about the TEP programs? I’m not quite sure what they are.”

“Sure.” I say. “TEP stands for Teacher Education Program—specifically an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program. Around the 1980s, TEPs were established in several locations across Canada. The role of the TEPs was/is to educate Aboriginal teachers who could serve as role models, cultural brokers and cultural bridges between their students, their communities and the non-Aboriginal communities (Lawrence, 1985; McAlpine, 2001; Nyce, 1990; St. Denis, 2002). Studies have reported that the Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs have had highly positive effects on the preservice teachers enrolled in them, and that having Aboriginal teachers in schools has positively influenced their students”(Archibald, 1986; Friesen & Orr, 1995; Nyce, 1990).

Some of the TEPS are controlled and governed by a university and others are governed by indigenous institutions who are educational partners. In the case of our institution, the Aboriginal teacher education programs are our partners, and they are administered by either the Métis or First Nations governing bodies. However, the graduates of Aboriginal teacher education programs receive a degree from an accredited university with which their program is associated. You have probably heard of

ATEP, BUNTEP, ITEP, NITEP, NORTEP, SUNTEP, YNTEP, and so on. There are several others across Canada,” I tell the students.

I decide to bait the students a bit. “Non-Aboriginals sometimes assume that these programs are somehow inferior to the so-called ‘regular’ programs, but it has been my experience that in many respects, TEP graduates far surpass their counterparts from the dominant teacher education programs,” I say. Sure enough, I get a bite.

“What makes you say that?” asks a voice from the back.

“Well for one thing, TEP students have to work twice as hard as other students to be considered as good. This was evident one time when we had preinterns from all the programs participate in a unit planning fair. Besides some workshops that people attended, everyone brought examples of unit plans they had created. The TEP students’ unit plans were far more developed, creative and professional-looking than those of most of the students in the dominant program.

Furthermore, Aboriginal students have to know a lot more about First Nations and Métis history and how to integrate Aboriginal content and perspectives into the curriculum documents, *as well as* the content that other students have to know. Graduates are often called upon to be the ‘Aboriginal expert’ in schools. And because they are a small group, their instructors know them well and students can’t get away with much. In our program, it’s much easier for you to become invisible—although not entirely.” I point my middle and index fingers towards my eyes and then towards Jon in a gesture to say, “I see you.” The class laughs.

James speaks up. “My girlfriend is in the TEP program here in the city and we often wonder why our two programs can’t get together. I think it would be good. She says

she and her classmates sometimes feel a little isolated and would like to meet people in our program.”

“I’ve often felt the same way, James,” I say, “and I have asked the instructors about it before. We have done a few things together in the past, but they have a number of very good reasons for not wanting to get together more regularly, which I don’t want to address right now, but scheduling problems is one of the biggest hurdles. Anyway, let’s move on.

The most pervasive type of literature relating to Aboriginal education has been the *deficit model* approach, where educators attempt to remediate the deficiencies they perceive in Aboriginal students by developing special programs or putting them into special education programs. For example, in one of the schools where I taught, all the students who were considered at risk were put into an alternate education/work experience program and I was their teacher,” I tell the class. A few of the other teachers in that school called my class the ‘sweat hogs’ and that would just infuriate me, because they were good kids. But I digress.”

“Is that why we have community schools and special programs for First Nations and Métis students? Amy asks.

I hesitate as I mentally try to assess whether the community school concept is based on a deficit model approach. “Well ideally, community schools, such as proposed in the School<sup>PLUS</sup> concept, are supposed to be based on a collaborative model of education, but in practice, I’m not sure that always happens,” I hedge. “The assumption is that students need supports from other service agencies such as Health, Justice, Social Work and so on. Therefore, these services are often located within or connected with





schools, and because of life circumstances, some students are thought to benefit from more flexible programs that are often offered in community schools. Sometimes there are also programs for parents to help them find support or continue their education. So yes, I guess you could say some community schools are based on a deficit model approach,” I reluctantly admit.

“But is that so bad?” Amy asks. “I mean, what’s the alternative?”

“I don’t think there is an alternative just yet—other than letting kids end up on the streets,” says Jon. “We’re stuck with this mess caused by the attempts at cultural genocide, so until Aboriginals start feeling healthy and strong enough to determine their own futures, we have to provide those supports.”

Something about what Jon says bothers me so I add, “It entirely depends of the people involved in the school and whether the structures and people associated with these schools are flexible and able to accommodate change that allows shared power and decision-making with the students and community. (Bouvier, 2001; Watt-Cloutier, 2000). However, if we take the approach that ‘we-know-what’s-best’ for Aboriginal peoples (Miller, 1996), just as our ancestors did, then yes, we are assuming the students are deficient,” I argue.

“And who gets to decide what deficient means? I mean, I would be extremely deficient if I had to survive on the streets like some kids have to do,” adds Cheryl.

“Bingo!” I say. “Demmert (2001) reviewed over 8000 ERIC documents dealing with American Indian education, many of which, though not all, take a deficit model approach. He categorized the research around the following topics: early childhood environment and experiences; Native language and cultural programs; teachers,

instruction, and curriculum; community and parental influences on academic performance; student characteristics; economic and social factors; and factors leading to success in college or college completion. I suspect the pattern would be the same in Canada.” I click the mouse.

“Another prevalent area of the literature is *cultural differences* and *cultural discontinuity* research that attributes the failure of Aboriginal students in schools to the difference between the students’ culture and that of the school. This research looks at differences such as speech and communication styles, child rearing practices, learning styles, and the value that each culture places on competition versus co-operation. The problem with this type of research to explain academic success or failure is that it perpetuates stereotypes and ignores the power relationships between Anglo-controlled schools and Aboriginal societies (Bear-Nicholas; 2001; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; St. Denis, 2002). It also ignores research that suggests that students for whom education is a large part of their lives and who are immersed in their culture, do better in schools” (Deyhle, 1995).

“I would agree with that,” Jon says, seemingly unfazed that I had argued against his point. “I work in an after school sports program with kids in the inner city and there is a group of boys who dance competitively in powwows. They sometimes talk about going out to the ‘res’ to visit their mushums and kookums or their cousins and aunties and uncles. They’re great kids and they seem to be doing well in school too. I doubt they’ll be lured into gangs or some of the other things that are going on in the neighbourhood.”

“That’s good to hear. Thanks Jon,” I say and click the mouse for the next slide.

“Along this cultural differences line is *resistance* research that focuses on institutional inequities, the dominant group’s role in creating the inequities, and the resistance of students to the assimilation efforts of the school. Donna Deyhle (1995) for example, found that teachers typically have low expectations of Aboriginal students and often counsel them to take vocational programs rather than academic programs. Students typically rise to our level of expectations,” I remind the class from my vast wealth of teacher folklore wisdom.

“Closely related is literature on *socio-structural conflict* that highlights the structured inequalities in society that leave Aboriginal youth disillusioned and exhibiting lack of optimism, effort, and perseverance (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997),” I say. I watch the students’ faces as they seem to be trying to make some links with examples from their own experiences. No one offers a comment however, so I press on.

“One area of research that has figured prominently in the last decade is *cultural revitalization* research, which is intended to counteract the effects of colonization. Written primarily by indigenous authors, it discusses the importance of revitalizing Aboriginal/indigenous cultures and languages for strengthening Aboriginal peoples’ sense of identity and empowerment (Archibald, 1995; Little Bear, 2000; Kawagley, 2001; Kipp 2001; Lipka, 2002). Although this approach has done much to further the positive self-esteem and identities of Aboriginal students, there are those who are critics of this approach however. (Mackey, 1999; Razack, 1999; Schick, 2000; St. Denis, 2002). St. Denis for example, believes it perpetuates racial *othering* that often happens when we reinforce cultural differences.”

Amy's hand shoots up again. "What do you mean by *othering*?" she says looking somewhat annoyed.

"It's when we compare ourselves to other people and we distance ourselves which makes us seem normal and them different. Often this carries over to the creation of stereotypes and is used as a mechanism to oppress people. Racial and ethnic groups all over the world have been victims of othering by dominant groups in society. Women have been othered by men. I'm sure each of you can think of people who have been marginalized in your classes because they are perceived to be different."

Amy nods to indicate she understands and begins to write again.

"St. Denis further criticizes this approach because it perpetuates essentialism. This is the notion that people have an inherent essence that makes them who they are as a group and it ignores individual difference. As well, the culture concept ignores the influence of society in the construction of identity. Furthermore, St. Denis argues that cultural revitalization alienates many urban Aboriginal people who have no sense of connection to a particular Aboriginal culture or language. It also puts a lot of pressure on the older generations who were told to stop speaking their language or practicing their traditions. Now they are being asked to bring these back. Nevertheless, cultural revitalization literature figures prominently in teacher education programs, affirmative action programs and government documents intended to further the rebuilding of Aboriginal identities. You will notice in all of the curriculum documents, teachers are instructed to include Aboriginal content and perspectives in their lessons and units," I say.

Several hands go up. “How do we do that? What exactly do you mean by Aboriginal content and perspectives?” asks one young woman. She obviously has voiced the question of the group because the hands go down.

“Great question,” I say. “I don’t know for sure. That’s what I am trying to find out in my doctoral thesis. People assume we are talking about the same thing, but I’m not sure everyone can agree on what it should be. People in the Department of Learning are wrestling with the same questions. When the curriculum guides were developed in the late 80s and early 90s, Aboriginal content and perspectives were considered to be more of an add-on and teachers found it hard to incorporate it into their lessons in meaningful ways—particularly when they felt they had little background knowledge or experiences in this area (Longman, 2005). Now, Department people are considering how to move the curriculum guides from using a contributions approach, which means we simply celebrate the contributions various minority groups have made to the larger society (Banks, 1999), to a more transformative approach—curriculum that will help to transform society so it is more just and equitable.”

I notice that many students are frowning. *I don’t think they like my answer. Maybe I need to elaborate a bit.*

“Some people think the best way to do that is to critique the dominant group’s role in producing inequities while others think that it is important to make curriculum more culturally relevant to Aboriginal students while also acknowledging and integrating indigenous knowledge into the curriculum so that it is on an equal basis with the ‘mainstream’ curriculum.” I make quotation marks in the air. “Some people are somewhere in between. If you are wondering why I put the word ‘mainstream’ in

quotation marks, it is because the word gives the impression that the dominant curriculum is 'normal' and written from an value-free, objective perspective; however it was created by teachers from the dominant group in society who hold particular values and beliefs. Sandy Grande, (2004) a Native American activist, calls it 'whitestream' rather than mainstream." A few people chuckle at this.

"Jean Paul Restoule (2000a) in his article, "Walking on the Earth: The Akwesasne Science and Math Pilot Project", describes the cultural relevance that science and math have in relation to the way of life of the Kanien'kehaka—"People of the Flint"—also known in English as 'Mohawk'. The project was an attempt to help students become more proficient in science and math by demonstrating how these curriculum areas can be learned through studying their own contexts. It was also a way to help students see the links between sociology and ecology and how people might help reduce inequity *and* unsustainability. Restoule asks, for example,

What if our teachings, traditions and worldview were the base from which we learned? What if our ways of knowing were presented on an equal footing with European knowings in the curriculum? Perhaps it would be possible to make a reduction in the social inequity present in education. In the balance, we might even teach our children how to reduce ecological unsustainability. (2000, ¶5)

"So I believe that as teachers we have to be aware that both social and ecological injustices are based on the same type of thinking," I say.

"What type of thinking is that?" asks a more mature man whose name I don't know yet. It could be my imagination but his question seems to have an edge of defiance.

Jon turns around and says to him, "It's the type of thinking that justifies doing whatever you want to other people or the earth if it serves your own self interest and if you have enough money and power."

“So survival of the fittest,” says the mature student. “Isn’t that how nature works anyway?” This raises a few hackles and some people begin talking at once. I break in and ask for order.

“According to more recent thinking in the complexity sciences, some scientists believe that’s not exactly how things work,” I explain. “Some people have begun to challenge Darwin’s theory (Bowers, 1995; Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 1994). I’d like to follow that idea, but we’ll have to save that discussion for another day. Thanks for raising that issue though. It’s important to our understanding about why there are such immense ecological and social problems. Now where were we? Oh yes.”

“Besides making the curriculum more relevant to Aboriginal students, Restoule (2000) and many other scholars believe that the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of many indigenous societies can help us address some of the ecological concerns facing the earth (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992; Shiva, 2005). The United Nations, in recognizing the importance of indigenous ecological knowledge, addressed it in several major conventions on the protection of the global environment (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). This knowledge is threatened as never before, however, because indigenous languages are disappearing, children are spending less time with their kin learning about their environment, and indigenous communities are relying more on university-trained technicians to manage their resources,” I explain. I see people nodding their heads.

“The UN as well as international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Labor Office (ILO), the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) are



explicitly acknowledging the contribution that local indigenous knowledge can make to sustainable development (Science and Development Network, 2002),” I add.

“So why are the World Bank and the IMF screwing around so many of the indigenous peoples in Third World countries then?” The young man near the front who had quietly asked a question earlier, suddenly blurts out this question, only much louder this time.

“To steal their resources,” says Jon. “It’s economic imperialism.”

I want to steer the conversation back to the lecture, but I succumb to the temptation to follow this line of thought that has piqued my interest since starting my explorations into the writings of indigenous scholars.

“Unfortunately, I think Jon is right. One downside to the recognition of the importance of TEK, is the exploitation of indigenous peoples’ knowledge, art, and artifacts for commercial profit (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Dubin, 1999; Science and Development Network 2002; United Nations, 2000). For example, traditional and sacred sites are being exploited or destroyed by the tourist industry, indigenous art and sacred materials are used without the permission of the artist or community, and cultural artifacts and ancestral human remains are removed and put in museums all over the world without permission. More recently, pharmaceutical companies are patenting and claiming ownership to traditional plants for medicinal purposes even though the plants were used by indigenous peoples for centuries. Often these companies do not recognize the intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples’ traditional ownership of such knowledge and do not compensate them fairly so that they too can derive some of the economic benefits of this knowledge (United Nations, 2000). And what I see as

extremely immoral is the ‘hijacking of the global food supply’ (Shiva, 2000) by monolithic corporations such as Monsanto, Cargil, and RiceTec, who through international trade agreements have been able to claim patents on seeds and grains. Centuries of collective innovation by farmers and peasants are being hijacked as corporations claim intellectual-property rights on these and other seeds and plants” (p. 9). The students sit in stunned silence as they try to comprehend what I am saying. “Do you want to hear a story about that?” I ask. Heads nod.

“When I was at UBC starting my doctoral work, there was a young woman from Malawi who told us her people were starving, not solely as the result of the drought, but because of what corporations and the International Monetary Fund have done. At one time, the people could anticipate cycles of drought, so they would save some grain each year and store it up for times of famine. As the country became deeper in debt however, it borrowed money from the IMF. In order to repay the debt, the government had to sell the peoples’ stores of grain to the IMF. After that, they had to buy their seeds from the large corporations. The only trouble is, the seeds are genetically modified and don’t reproduce. People can no longer save seeds from year to year as they have in the past and are at the mercy of these large corporations.”

“That’s terrible!” says one student. Others agree.

“As a result of these injustices, indigenous peoples have expressed their concern over these issues and are attempting to protect what they know from appropriation and exploitation (United Nations, 2000).” I search through my file folder for a quotation I had found on the Internet and I read it aloud. “But as St. Clair & Busch (2002) state:

At this moment, the world faces a variety of ecological crises. Deep ecology—a spiritual view of the world as an organic, integrated system—looks to the values

of indigenous peoples. Native peoples must overcome mistrust, share their values with the larger ecological community, and thereby preserve those values in a new network of cooperation.”

“I wouldn’t blame them if they don’t,” says the young man who started this conversation. “They should let the rest of the world self-destruct,” he says to which a number of people laugh nervously.

“There seems to be a fine line here though, between recognizing some indigenous peoples’ relationship to the earth and the spirituality associated with that, and the romanticized notion of ‘Indian-as-naturalist,’ which includes ‘Indian-as-spiritual-being’ and ‘Indian-as-shaman’ (Dubin, 1999, p. 159), as this quotation seems to suggest. I sometimes find myself stereotyping people in this way too.” I put the quotation away.

“These are important issues to think about, but for now, let’s get back to where we were,” I say. “I think we were talking about cultural revitalization.” I click the mouse.

“Some literature points out how teachers can be misguided in their efforts to promote cultural revitalization. In an effort to support the cultural beliefs and traditions of Aboriginal peoples, some non-Aboriginal teachers have naively tried to incorporate some of the traditional practices that they think are part of ‘Native culture’ such as talking circles, sweat lodges, references to the Medicine Wheel and so on. Without understanding the significance of the practices or how certain ones are specific to particular groups, teachers have unknowingly offended and stereotyped Aboriginal peoples (Aldred, 2000; Marker, 1998)—and I count myself in that. In short, we have trivialized aspects of indigenous cultures. That is another reason why critics of the cultural revitalization approach don’t want educators to focus on this. They want instead, for teachers to recognize how their/our own identities as Whites have contributed to the

oppression of others.” I notice that the mature male has put his pen down and is now leaning back in his chair with his arms and legs crossed. *He’s not going to like this next section, I’ll bet.*

*Decolonizing Aboriginal education.*

“A growing body of literature identified as decolonization theoretization has received considerable attention in the last few years. Calliou (2001) states that ‘Decolonization theoretization is the researched deconstruction of the ideological, legal, legislative, operational, textual and other institutionalized structures sustaining unequal and discursive relations of power between non-First Nations and First Nations citizenries’” (p.2). I see some furrowed brows now as people start to take notes so I speak a little more slowly and wait longer before moving to the next slide. “In other words, it looks at all the ways unequal power relationships between non-First Nations and First Nations peoples are maintained in our various institutions,” I add.

“Decolonization also involves the researching, reclaiming and restoration of uniquely indigenous protocols, philosophies ceremonies and ways of life ‘utilizing a knowledgeable application of traditional, lay and academic models of social change’ with the understanding that the models may become outdated as new discoveries transform contexts (Calliou, 2001, p 2.). The decolonization theme is present to varying degrees in many of the articles mentioned under previous themes,” I say. I still see some questioning looks on people’s faces so I say, “Questions? Do you understand this?” I wait and wait before someone is brave enough to put up a hand. “Amy?”

Amy hesitates for a moment and then says, “So is that the same as postcolonial theory? And what’s the difference between decolonization and postcolonialism?”

I feel the panic start to rise in my stomach. *I hope I can get this right and explain it in a way the students will understand. I barely understand some of it.*

“As far as I can tell they are the same,” I venture. “Decolonization is the process that started primarily after World War II by which indigenous peoples who were colonized by other countries, are attempting to free themselves from the oppression of their colonizers. They are doing it through their literature, the arts and in the academics. Postcolonial theory/literature is the work that was produced after countries gained their independence or the large empires dissolved. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffens (1989) state that postcolonialism encompasses ‘all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression’(p.2). In other words, it has been a constant struggle by people to be free of the values, beliefs, customs, religions, and ways of being that Europeans imposed on others in the conviction that the European ways were right and normal.”

“Was colonization or imperialism only practiced by European countries? asks Amy.

“Oh no. Colonization, which means establishing a colony of a particular country in another land, and imperialism, which means that one country tries to control the land, the politics, and the economy of another country, happens all over the world. It’s just that most of the postcolonial work that finds its way into our academics is primarily from countries that were once European colonies,” I say.

“Why is that?” asks a voice from the back.

“I’m assuming it has something to do with language barriers and the ways books are set up in different languages. Or maybe it’s just that the academy privileges work that is produced in Euro-Western countries,” I say. “Anyway, it is postcolonial theory that introduced the notion of the ‘other’. Ashcroft et al., (1989), state that

the ‘other’ is anyone who is separate from one’s self. The existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one’s own place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view. (p. 169)

“Would anyone like to paraphrase that?” I ask hopefully.

Jon raises his hand. “It means that the colonizers made the indigenous people seem like monkeys or cannibals, or less than human. They weren’t considered to be real people or civilized people like the colonizers so this gave the colonizers an excuse to take over.”

“That pretty much says it,” I smile. “But postcolonial theorists are contesting those deeply held beliefs by the dominant groups and defining who they are themselves as well as reclaiming their own beliefs, values, political and economic systems, religions, social organizations, and so on.” I check my watch and see it is almost the end of the class period so I start talking faster and with more emphasis.

“There are a number of different models of postcolonial theoritizing,” I say, and not all postcolonial theorists are in agreement with each other. But I believe that postcolonial theory is the one approach to Aboriginal education that has the potential to start to reduce some of the inequities in education experienced by indigenous peoples and bring about educational, social, political, economic, and ecological change—“ I stop to

take a breath, “—provided teachers can become familiar with and open to what indigenous scholars are saying. Now a lot of this literature is very difficult to read, or it may make you angry because it may start to challenge your most cherished beliefs and assumptions about what is normal and right, so you may resist hearing some things (Carson & Johnston, 2000; Finney & Orr, 1995; St. Denis & Schick, 2003). But when you are ready, it could start to resonate with you. In the meantime, there are indigenous scholars right here in our communities and on the reserves who speak in a language you can understand, and whose insights may be as profound as those in any texts you will read. People revere their Elders for a reason, so I hope you will take the opportunity to seek out the Elders in your communities and let your students hear their wisdom. And don’t forget there are wise Elders among us here too,” I say nodding my head and pointing to myself. Most of the students laugh. Mature man is still sitting with arms and legs crossed. His ball cap is covering his eyes now. *I wonder if he’s gone to sleep.*

“Finally an area of research that I believe needs greater attention in teacher education is what Deyhle and Swisher term *Community-based* and *Self-determination* research. This approach advocates research *by* indigenous peoples that emphasizes local knowledge, local control, effective practices, and equal co-existence of languages and cultures, as well as political action with regards to land entitlements and self government as effective means of rebuilding communities (Assembly of First Nations, 1992; Battiste; 2000; Bear-Nicholas, 2001; Deyhle and Swisher, 1997; Kawagley, 2000; Smith, 1999). Education is part of this self-determination and self-defining process. And Eber Hampton (1995) reminds us that:

The recognition of the uniqueness of Indian education and the contribution it has to make to society does not imply a kind of segregation. . . . Indian parents and

educators want Indian children to learn everything that education has to offer as well as their own cultures (Bradley, 1980). Indian education as distinctive indicates a legitimate desire of Indian people to be self-defining, to have their ways of life respected, and to teach their children in a manner that enhances consciousness of being Indian and a fully participating citizen of Canada or the United States. (p. 10)

The authors of this type of research acknowledge the role of colonialism but believe that Aboriginal people do have the power to determine their own futures. As Battiste (2000) states, “The responsibility ultimately rests with Aboriginal people themselves in a continuing journey of collaboration and negotiation, healing and rebuilding, creating and experimenting, and visioning and celebrating” (p. ix). However, Kipp (2000) makes this plea.” I click on the slide.

Many things that were brought to Indian people were not brought to destroy them. They were brought in the name of love. What people thought their love would do for us, in fact, killed us. So I would say that one of the things in my model is we build strong walls and we try to keep certain things out. . . . We ask, “Could you leave us alone for just a little while? Just give us a break. Just back off and leave us alone until we can get our health back, until we can get our strength back, until we can get our own vision back. (p. 65)

The students sit quietly as they reread Darrell Kipp’s plea. “I see our time is almost up, so please bring any questions you have for next time. Next day we will be discussing ways teachers might try to address the needs of First Nations and Métis students in schools. But before you leave, I would like you to complete an exit slip in response to two questions.” I hand some pieces of paper to a student to pass out and I write the following two questions on the board:

- *Why do you think high school dropout rate among Aboriginal students is so high compared to the majority population?*



- *What can the Faculty of Education do to help you prepare to work with students whose backgrounds and experiences may be very different from your own?*

After the students fill out the exit slips and hand them in, a few students hang around to talk about the need for more cross-cultural education in their program. On my way back to my office I wonder whether this crash course has made any difference in the students' understanding. *Perhaps I'm expecting too much from students at this point. It has taken me decades of experience, and a lot of education to help me understand what I do thus far, and still I feel my understanding is so limited. It will be interesting to see what the students will say in response to the exit questions though.*

## CHAPTER V

### Telling Stories

The story depends on everyone of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being. (Trinh, 1989, p. 119)

#### *Voicing Concerns*

People begin to assemble for the faculty meeting and I sit and chat with several colleagues. I am still a bit upset by some of the comments on the students' exit slips from the previous day.

"I think we need to do more about addressing racism among our students and we need to be more diligent about incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives into our curriculum courses," I propose. "I decided to give the Secondary Education students a bit of background on Aboriginal education because we really have no place for familiarizing students with it in the program. At the end of the class I asked them to complete an exit slip in response to two questions: Why they think the high school drop out rate is higher among Aboriginal students and what they think our teacher education program could do to prepare them to work with students whose backgrounds and experiences are different from their own. You wouldn't believe some of the comments<sup>14</sup>!" I exclaim.

"I would!" says one person.

"Really?" asks another. "Like what?"

"Well in response to the first question regarding dropout rates, a little over half the class identified things such as poverty, racism, low self-esteem, irrelevant curriculum

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<sup>14</sup> The comments identified here represent the results of a survey I conducted with Secondary Education students in February, 2003 to obtain a general sense of their attitudes toward educating for diversity. Only 41 of 96 students returned the questionnaire.

that doesn't reflect the students' experiences, feelings of isolation, and teachers who don't care. But the rest of the class identified things such as a poor home life, lack of parenting skills, no good role models, drugs and alcohol addictions, lack of motivation, not seeing education as important and,—get this—'they don't need to get jobs because we are paying for all of their expenses through our high taxes'. Five students said something similar to that."

People around me nod as if to indicate they are familiar with these types of comments.

"Then in response to the second question about teacher education," I continue, several students suggested having some personal experiences with Aboriginal communities would be helpful because they had had no opportunities to do so; some suggested a course or courses in Indigenous Studies or Educational Foundations dealing with cross-cultural education because it's not required in the Secondary Program. Those who had taken one as an elective said they really found it helpful. Some suggested having guest speakers come in. Most students generally felt they didn't have enough background knowledge about the histories and cultures of Aboriginal peoples. In fact, several students said that they seldom hear anything about Aboriginal education in any of their courses, but they thought they should be learning about all cultures as well. Many also thought student teachers should be taught to be more open-minded, to not be discriminatory or racist and to learn to value all people as human beings.

But there were a few other comments such as, 'Why are we so worried about cultural diversity when we should be worried about teaching the curriculum and preparing students for the future?' Or, 'I wonder if you have heard of the term it's only a

problem if you make it a problem?’ So I think we have some work to do,” I announce emphatically to my colleagues.

My colleagues’ comments and reactions are varied and as the meeting begins, I feel even more agitated.

When I return to my office I jot down some of the comments I can recall from my various conversations I have had with people about racism and incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives in the curriculum.

*When you talk about racism against Aboriginal people, it doesn’t even register with me. In my home province racism is directed more toward Asian communities.*

*I really feel uncomfortable talking about Aboriginal content and perspectives in my classes because I don’t know enough about this whole area.*

*I don’t think we should be trying to incorporate Aboriginal content in our courses. There are so many different Aboriginal groups. Besides, that smacks of essentialism. I think we need to have anti-racist education in all our courses to help our students see how dominance and privilege are constructed.*

*Do we have the right to tell people they can’t be racist? Wouldn’t we be imposing our views on them?*

*I think the more we dwell on difference, the more we put up a barrier between ourselves and the Aboriginal community.*

*Shouldn’t we be focusing on multicultural education instead? Our students may not be teaching just in Saskatchewan. I think we should help them appreciate and celebrate all cultures.*

*If we're going to improve education for Aboriginal students, I think we need to work more closely with parents when their children are very young. That's where it all starts.*

*I just think we need to pay more attention to how we treat each other and people in general.*

I sit back in my chair and sigh. "How is the faculty ever going to reach the goals outlined in our visioning document if we all have a different view on how we should be addressing Aboriginal education and racism?" I mutter to myself. I pull out the faculty survey questions I had developed in the hopes of garnering suggestions from faculty members for improving the way we teach Aboriginal education and anti-racist education. The questions now seem inappropriate. *What can I ask that might give me some indication of the views my colleagues hold concerning Aboriginal education Maybe it's just all in my head that we're so far apart on these topics, but besides gathering some suggestions, I want this survey to either confirm my suspicions that we're all over the map or show me that we're heading in the same direction. Maybe the results will give me a better sense of where to go from there.* I chew my nails a bit, pace my office a few times, consider whether to file papers or go for coffee, then finally settle in front of the computer to revise my survey questions.

### ***Sensing Wisdom***

"Hi Ellie. What are you doing here? I thought you were on sabbatical and heading to Africa." I greet my long-term friend and mentor with a hug as she comes down the hall. Ellie is highly regarded in Cameroon where she has been given a special

honour because of her tireless efforts in bringing educational and medical supplies to some of the communities

“I leave next week,” says Ellie. “I’m just waiting for some of the paper work to go through. How are things with you?”

“Oh busy,” I say, “like everyone else around here. I tell her about my survey and wanting some people who are on leave to read it and give me some suggestions. Ellie tells me she would be happy to look at it, so we stop by my office to pick it up and head for coffee.

During coffee I tell her about my concerns over racism among students and not knowing how to handle it. “I just find myself getting angry and wanting to lash back at students but I know that just drives the racism underground. Either that or I try to avoid the discussion altogether because it makes people feel so uncomfortable. I know you’ve taught cross-cultural education classes and you must have run into this same thing. What do you do?”

“Well, I don’t try to avoid the issues,” she says in her slow relaxed style, “but I try to create a safe space where people can express their views or questions. I give them lots of readings and we talk about the issues that come out of those.”

I can imagine Ellie’s class and the way she asks gentle, probing questions without making people feel defensive. She has a real talent for that and students love her because she makes them think. She also makes her colleagues think but she is not as gentle with us sometimes.

I comment on the aesthetic quality of the posters that line the hallways of the Education building, which are the products of her class. The posters show various types

of oppression in society, which relate to gender, class, race, sexual orientation, and so on. We talk a bit more about helping students to develop a critical perspective in non-confrontational ways. One of the things she finds effective is having the students bring examples of stereotypes they find in books, team emblems and mascots, children's toys, videos, and so on, and put them in a big box they have named the 'poison cupboard'. The box is nearly full as students are becoming astute at picking out stereotypes. I make note of some of her ideas that might inform my dissertation and my own teaching.

After parting hugs, I watch as my friend walks down the hall. *Now there goes someone who walks the talk. Not only does she take care of everyone in our own community, she travels halfway around the world to look after people in Africa too.*

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Over the next year, I have opportunities to listen to two Elders as well, one who is a presenter for a *Treaties in the Classroom* workshop and another who works at a First Nations Healing Centre where I take some groups of students. After presenting tobacco to the Elders, the students and I listen respectfully as they talk about their hopes for First Nations students. One Elder tells us that teachers should encourage students who are having difficulty to seek out Elders and people in their communities in order to heal and find their sense of purpose in life.

The other Elder tells us that it is important for teachers to understand the history of assimilation and what happened to Indian and Métis people. He also tells us how important it is that we build relationships with students to show that we care and that we have high expectations of them. He says that incorporating First Nations content is not so important. "Math is math", and students have to know how to live in today's society.

The Elder then invites questions from the class. One young man puts up his hand and says, “I don’t mean to sound disrespectful, but what is it that First Nations people want?”

The Elder replies, “Self-determination. I’m not talking about self-government. I’m talking about being able to make our own decisions about how our lives should be.” He explains to the students how the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs plays a major role in the lives of people and that much of the money allocated to First Nations people goes to running the bureaucracy rather than benefiting the Bands as most people assume. He also spends some time talking about how the Pass system worked when he was young and how the Indian agent could control everything that people did, from not being allowed to leave the reserve to visit family without permission, to not being allowed to sell lumber, grain or anything else without permission. He tells the students the government systematically took away any sense of independence that people had. “The other thing we want,” he adds, “are allies who will work with us as equals rather than others telling us how to run our lives. Can you do that as teachers?” he asks.

The students nod, and several quietly respond, “Yes.” By the end of these sessions I can tell the students are visibly moved. Some have tears in their eyes; others seem to be fuming with anger at the injustices. Many want to stay behind and talk more.

*Good. I hope they carry that with them. I can see the students had no idea about any of this. We definitely need to provide more opportunities to learn about the racist history of this country through hearing people’s stories rather than reading historical accounts of what happened from the Whiteman’s perspective.*



### *Surfacing Issues*

I return home one evening after an emotional screening of Jane Elliott's (2005) new documentary film, *Indecently Exposed*, where she worked with a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the community. The film is based on an exercise similar to her Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes documentary she made in the 60s to show that racism is learned. One audience member in the discussion afterward said that unlike the Brown Eyes in Elliot's earlier film, the First Nations people did not assume the role of the oppressor. A Cree woman who participated in the film suggested, "That's because we didn't want anyone to feel the pain we went through." Another person in the audience noted that although the White people felt badly for a while because of the exercise and could start to empathize with Aboriginal people, they could still go back to their regular lives and carry on as before.

*There weren't too many dry eyes in the audience. At least I wasn't the only one crying.* I search for a cucumber in the refrigerator to put on my eyelids so they won't be too puffy for my early morning class the next day. I think about the conversation I had with the colleague who had given me the invitation to the screening.

*"I really enjoyed your presentation to the faculty but I'm still confused about this whole race/culture thing. What I thought I heard you saying was, we shouldn't be focusing on making students aware of the beliefs and traditions of Aboriginal cultures, but we should be having the students look at their own racism and privileges as Whites instead."* My colleague nods. *"But . . .,"* I hesitate, not quite sure how to frame my question, *"how do we support Aboriginal communities who are interested in revitalizing their cultures and languages?"*

*"Well, we have our own work to do which is looking at our role in perpetuating systems of oppression. Culture is simply a red herring. If we focus on that, it detracts from the real work we have to do," she tells me.*

*"But," I pause again quite sure that she doesn't understand what I'm trying to say. "Of course we have to look at our role in perpetuating systems of oppression, but is that all? What I am saying is," I search frantically for the right words to explain myself.*

*"I think what's interesting is your reaction," offers my colleague.*

*What does she mean, my "reaction"? I do a quick bodily check. Yes, a knot is forming in my stomach and my voice is getting higher and louder. Okay, calm down. Take a deep breath.*

*"You're right," I concede. "I guess I do need to think about how and why I'm reacting to this. I'd love to talk with you more about this whole area because it's one where I don't feel confident. Could we have coffee and talk about this more sometime?"*

*"Of course," says my colleague. "I'd be honored to talk with you about this."*

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During the next several months as I hold conversations with various people to find out what they are doing to help the faculty vision become realized, I can see there are some unresolved issues around Aboriginal education. Because of my own uncertainty around teaching for social justice by incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives, I decide to survey faculty members to find out if and how they are involved in initiatives related to this topic, and what, if any, suggestions they have. Part of my survey is also intended to find out if there are very diverse opinions related to Aboriginal education and anti-racist education. I ask some faculty members who are on leaves of various kinds, to

look through the questions. After making some revisions based on their suggestions, I post the survey on the faculty web site with the help of an instructional designer. Because it is near the end of semester, only 8 people out of approximately 30 respond on-line; however, five people email me and ask to be interviewed instead.

The responses to the survey do not surprise me much, partly because I know the questions are somewhat vague—and deliberately so—for I wanted to see how people understood the terms, “Aboriginal education” and “anti-racist education”. As I anticipated, there are diverse opinions concerning these concepts. I realize the survey is not statistically valid; however, what I find most intriguing are some of the comments, which are beginning to show a polarization of views on faculty. Some of the comments also seem to have an emotional quality, and I begin to wonder whether there is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction among faculty members. For example, people say in response to a few of the statements:

**I have a clear understanding of what is meant by racism.**

#3

As an Aboriginal teacher working in a non-Aboriginal setting under a non-Aboriginal model, I feel racism on a daily basis.

#5:

I have some understanding of at least some definitions, this range does not include all definitions and may well not meet with the agreement of all. I do not accept that I should feel guilty that I am white, but I am not unaware of the advantages I have had in the society. However I am open to ideas being discussed and concerns being identified to me. I do not always see the issues as clearly as some others here do.

**I believe we should promote anti-racist education in our courses.**

#3:

Courses are a superficial way of transferring knowledge. Immersion with the people and in a cultural setting is the true way to teach anti-racism. It needs to be taught by a person who understands culture and racism. It is so disappointing to see non-Aboriginal people teaching about racism. It should be a lived experience. First-hand knowledge is truly necessary.

#5:

This idea seems a bit like motherhood - you have to be in favour. On the other hand the promotion may be in ways other than content and overt support. It may mean

using examples or guest speakers to present some issues to students.

#8:

It should be anti-oppressive education.

**What would you like to add that is important to consider in any discussions concerning Aboriginal Education or School<sup>PLUS</sup>?**

#1:

So much of this work, like so many of these questions, risks falling into an essentialist trap that reinscribes current power relations and hegemonic practices. Not unlike my participation in completing this survey. Not unlike this answer.

Still, I believe it is important to try -- then again, Yoda said there is no try, "only do, or not do". What will this research do? What will any of us do? I did this.

#3:

Who will be in charge of ensuring this document [SchoolPLUS] is properly implemented? This needs to be taken into consideration or this be another document that will merely be optional for teachers. Some will do it and some will choose not to.

#5:

The province has a very large and growing population of Aboriginal students in a range of schools. SchoolPLUS seems to be a good working model for the future of education. At the same time I think the direction for any initiatives needs to primarily come from the Aboriginal community. I am not sure that our solutions have enough merit to argue they will work. The Aboriginal people of the province need to create their own solutions to the issues that are present in education.

In the big picture they need some source of economy. Without a means of providing income for their people I really don't think solutions are likely. Nothing is going to save our rural communities for this reason (no source of income for larger populations) - without a source of economy I am not sure what can be done.

#6:

Involvement of Aboriginal people in all cases  
Personal and social values and skills emphasis

Some of the comments in the survey unsettle me slightly and give me pause. I want to find out more about the opposition to School<sup>PLUS</sup>, but the comments also raise some alarms about my study. *Is the study going to fall into an 'essentialist trap and re-inscribe hegemonic practices?' How will I even know if that happens? What about the person who is Aboriginal and feels racism on a daily basis in this institution? We must be blind not to see that. Or the person who believes that cross-cultural education and anti-racist education should be taught by an Aboriginal person?*

*I realize this isn't going to be a simple matter of gathering suggestions for incorporating cross-cultural and anti-racist education in our courses or suggestions for preparing students to work in cross-cultural settings. I wonder what I am getting into with this study and whether it will create animosity among the faculty members if I show the disparate points of view.* I follow up the survey with interviews to try to understand some of the various points of view.

### ***Understanding Perspectives***

The people whom I interview are very willing to discuss their views on Aboriginal Education, anti-racist/anti-oppressive education and what they are doing in their courses in these areas. Their views and practices vary greatly, yet there seems to be a common theme of teaching for social justice, in my opinion. Perhaps those with a more critical perspective would disagree because not everyone seems to be as aware as others of the insidious, systemic power relationships that influence us all. Nevertheless, everyone I with whom I speak recognizes the inequities in society and believes that one of the goals for teacher education should be to help preservice teachers recognize those inequities and help to level the playing field for marginalized groups.

I am keenly aware, however, that the people with whom I speak have a particular interest in Aboriginal education and/or anti-oppressive education, but I have only heard from approximately one third of the faculty. I have a general sense that the rest of the faculty members focus on other aspects of teacher education that they see as more important. It is the people with whom I speak who seem to be most actively involved

either in the community, in research projects or on faculty/university committees oriented to Aboriginal education and/or social justice.

After several months of recording interviews and transcribing tapes, I begin to feel overwhelmed with the amount of data I have collected. In my opinion, everyone has interesting, insightful comments that sometimes support my beliefs and sometimes challenge them, and it is difficult to pare down the 300 or more pages of transcripts. Each of the interviews generates interesting and lively discussions but I soon realize that it is not possible to include all of the stories in the thesis. Because there is considerable overlap in what many people say, I can see some similar threads that make up the warp and weft of the faculty tapestry. I decide to keep two of the stories intact however, because they represent some motifs in the (en)unfolding landscape.

#### *Pulling threads.*

The common threads that I see in each of the interviews include: a) Developing respectful relationships, b) Working with Aboriginal communities, c) Having high expectations for students, d) De-emphasizing curriculum and emphasizing practical ideas, e) Participating in project-based courses, f) Taking anti-racist and cross-cultural courses, g) Critiquing power and privilege. Not everyone has the same perspective in relation to these threads.

*Developing respectful relationships* surfaces most frequently in the interviews. Some people focus on the need to show respect to a community. One person for example, believes that is necessary to form strong relationships and partnerships with parents and

caregivers. Her subject area focuses on family and community involvement and because “you cannot teach in a vacuum”.

To earn the respect and trust of an Aboriginal community, others had this to say: “Learn the language of a community and use it. That’s the greatest honour you can bring to a community.” Similarly another person says, “I share this story with them of having gone to an elementary school in a northern community where the principal who was non-native spoke in Dené – very lousy Dené I would say, because the kids were chuckling about it and he had somebody sitting with him to correct him. So he would apologize and then say what he needed to say. But that was a powerful choice he made. And on the walls and bulletin boards were pictures of people’s lives. It honoured the community.”

One participant asks, “What would happen if we really saw Aboriginal parents as people who have a right to be in school? What if we had a different attitude toward parent involvement? Let’s take students to the positive and then be practical. I think we have an obligation.”

Developing caring relationships with students is seen as important by an Aboriginal participant. “For First Nations kids in particular, if you don’t establish a relationship, you will have no success. They will not trust you, they will not listen to you, they will not engage, because their fear of rejection is so huge that they will simply disengage. Trust and relationship is really the foundation for good learning with all children, I believe. And for some kids it’s a little harder because the adults in their lives have never done that with them.”

For another person, developing respectful relationships with colleagues is important. “I listen to people and I may not agree with everything they say but I don’t

challenge them on the spot. I think, 'this is what this person believes'. Sometimes people say that in the ceremonies the spirits talk to them and I think, 'if that's what they believe, fine.' I can leave that out there for deliberation. I may not believe it but I don't have to challenge them and make them feel like they know nothing. And that's how I feel sometimes when people talk to me about anti-racist education. I know something. It may not be what they know or believe, but I have some knowledge to bring to the table here."

The importance of relationships, for another person, is summed up by this statement: "Have compassion – *kisewatisowin* that's what the Elders tell us in all their talks. We all have our weaknesses and failings."

*Working with Aboriginal communities* is another important thread running through the interviews. Most people believe that is important for students/teachers to have opportunities to work with Aboriginal people in their communities to break down barriers and stereotypes. As one person says simply, "Work with your community and participate in their practices." To help prospective teachers learn about teaching in Aboriginal communities another person suggests, "There are many ways to do this including bringing in people who have taught in First Nations communities, bringing in Elders, spending some time in a First Nations community. The process should be developmental and the students should have some concrete learning in community organizations before going into schools."

If we want to see some improvement in Aboriginal students' school completion rates, one person has this advice: "Make schools more inviting places that are more strongly connected to the communities. That's going to have to happen with teachers working more collaboratively in communities, not just working alone in classrooms."



Another person believes that more faculty members should be out in the community involved in projects with their students and modelling what we espouse.

*Having high expectations for students* is also seen as important as is ensuring Aboriginal students receive as good an education as other students. One Aboriginal participant reminds us that, “All children want to feel successful academically. It makes no sense for Aboriginal students to be failing in schools—they are every bit as bright as non-Aboriginal students. We need to find ways to build on their successes. It is also important that they have a sense of belonging, which will lessen the likelihood of being enticed into a gang in order feel accepted somewhere.” Another person states, “There are people who say you don’t teach anything about Aboriginal children’s culture, because you’ll get it wrong, but teach my child to read. Do a really good job of that. I don’t mean to be simplistic, but if we can do that well, if we could see an Aboriginal child as a child full of potential, as a child who deserves respect and attention, that would be, I think, an Aboriginal perspective in teaching.”

Regarding incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives in the curricula, one person doesn’t feel it is that important. “Aboriginal kids don’t think about math differently, they don’t count differently from non-Aboriginal kids. They don’t perceive the world differently mathematically. I’m sure there are cultural differences and those are important, but I don’t think non-Aboriginal teachers can do anything about that. I think that they’re there to teach math, and for goodness sakes, make sure that these kids are not disadvantaged by having inferior math. Make sure that they in fact, do come out of the schools with every opportunity that the non-Aboriginal kid has in terms of progressing to

high school, in terms of progressing to post-secondary, and so on. I think that that's got to be the vision."

*De-emphasizing curriculum* is another theme mentioned frequently. "I would like to see the curriculum areas disbanded and the program become more inter-disciplinary," states one person. Another says, "It's not just about curriculum content. In fact, I'd almost put curriculum content last because I think it's about structural changes. It's about creating relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. It's about where are Aboriginal people going to have influence in the move to a different kind of education that's going to have to put Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal together in terms of the future of this particular province. And it might entail changes in curriculum, certainly changes in program. And even more importantly, changes in relationships and cultures in schools. It seems to me that there is something bigger that has to take place before we start tinkering with curriculum."

Another person also thinks there are more important aspects to teaching. "It's also important to give respect to students and help them feel as if they have been heard. It's not so much whether you've taught some aspect of the curriculum."

An educator outside the faculty had this advice to beginning teachers: "My suggestion for first year teachers is to get to know the students in the first two weeks of school and not worry about the curriculum because it will help create conditions in the environment for learning. Kids will trust you and feel like you care. And sometimes we put the caring behind in favour of the curriculum and the timetable, but in the long run, it's the kids who matter, not the curriculum."

A faculty member who has a longer history in the institution has this to say about the curriculum: "One of the beliefs we have to counter in teacher education is the idea that the curriculum is everything. In 1990 we went the other way. In 91 when we revised the Elementary Program, we decided to make the program more 'generalist' and that was the cover for making the curriculum everything, which is what we love to do because we are all subject area specialists. And we get so excited about math and language arts and visual art, and we just have to tell our students everything there is to know about curriculum. And that's the job of teacher education. We did that in the early 90s but we are still living with that program and that emphasis. We are drowning our students in curricular content and making it difficult for them to learn anything because they are so smothered by work." This person feels that the emphasis on curriculum has interfered with prospective teachers' ability to focus on other more important things such as social justice and building relationships.

*Participating in project-based courses* is one way some people thought that students' learning would be more authentic. It would also help to break down stereotypes and promote activism among the students. One person, for example says she engages her students in "a variety of community-based research projects where they identify issues and talk with community people about these issues. Action is always a critical element of the assignments. Students then have to do something with the information." For example, some students wrote letters to some clothing chains and created a web site to raise issues of sizism. They wondered why clothes were made only for petite models. "They came to the conclusion that the manufacturers believed that only certain images 'sell'."

Another person has this wish, “My hope is if we could create, let’s say almost a case-based, or project-based or inquiry-based approach to learning through meaningful dialogue with all our resource people.” One person says that her subject area has students involved in community projects and notes that it is easier to involve community people in the less affluent areas of the city than in areas “where the kids have everything.”

*Taking Anti-racist and cross-cultural courses* is seen as a must for students by most people as illustrated by this comment, “It is important for students to understand the history of colonialism and racism in this country and the importance of the Treaties.”

Another person feels even more strongly. “It’s something that we need to breathe in everyday just like oxygen and all the other molecules. It’s pedagogical philosophy that underpins your thought, the way you move through your day, the way you think, the way you breathe. It can’t be seen as just content or process.”

Another person is more practical. “It’s wonderful to raise students’ awareness, but we have to understand that they’re going into the classroom for the first time, and what are they going to do? I feel like we have to prepare them to go out there and actually teach something. So that’s the bridge and I also want to be a bit more positive. Sometimes I think students see anti-oppressive education as something negative.”

The glaring gaps in this area are brought out by another person. “We need to ensure that they [our students] have the content. I’m still convinced that some of our students don’t have the content, especially at the Secondary level.” Another faculty member believes it would help if Secondary students had an Indigenous Studies course. “I think they do need an Indigenous Studies class. They do need some content and background so that they understand the Treaties, they understand the history of different

Aboriginal groups, that they understand some of the sociological issues, you know in terms of present day Aboriginal existence and that sort of thing.”

For one person, cross-cultural and anti-racist education has to be more than one course. It has to be as important as learning to teach anything else. This person states, “Preservice teachers need to learn how to teach about the history and contributions of Aboriginal peoples to society and that it is as important as learning to how to teach mathematics or English. Anti-racist education should be foundational to the program as well, starting in the first year. There are many ways to do this including bringing in people who have taught in First Nations communities, bringing in Elders, spending some time in a First Nations community. The process should be developmental and the students should have some concrete learning in community organizations before going into schools.”

*Critiquing culture versus race* is a prominent theme and the most controversial. It is entangled with teaching for social justice and anti-racist education which falls under the umbrella of anti-oppressive education. One of the guiding principles for many anti-racist educators, however, is the necessity for students to interrogate their privileges as Whites. Having students learn about other cultures, anti-racist educators believe, further entrenches stereotypes and racism (Schick, 2000; St. Denis, 2002).

Anti-racist educators on faculty firmly believe that it is fine if Aboriginal people want to learn more about and participate in their cultures, but White, middle-class Canadians have their own work to do. “There are different things that White students need to learn, because they come with such a sense of entitlement that they feel that what the world needs, is who they are. Hegemonic discourses in society continually confirm

who they are.” Kevin Kumashiro’s (2000; 2004) work is used by several people to help students see how we are implicated in the marginalization of others whom we see as different. By having preconceived notions of what is normal in terms of race, class, gender or sexual orientation, we other those who do not fit with these notions. “Anti-oppressive education (which includes anti-racist education) “asks us to consider whose views are considered normal, how the idea of normalcy develops, and in whose interests it is to ensure these norms remain intact. Who has the power with respect to the creation of various norms?” states one faculty member.

Not all participants agree with this perspective, however. “You can shame me into feeling badly about that, but what you do is silence me then. I don’t think guilt does very much good. Guilt is a way that society holds people in line and tries to tell them what the right things are. But my sense about it is that most people then hide what they think.” This person believes that people have to be invited to change, we can’t make people change. Another person has a similar point of view. “If you talk too much about power and authority and control, you make people feel like the poor victim or the bad oppressor all the time, and that just perpetuates things. We have to get beyond that.”

One participant has this to say: “There is some arrogance in that discussion. I am missing out where things are working, and I’m making the other person into some kind of victim or tragedy and I don’t want to. I want to honour that they come to the relationship with lots of richness. And I guess politically, some people get more air time than other people. And that’s not right. We need to change that. But it is my job to understand and value that person, not to see them as less because they’re different than I am. I see their difference as an asset and I also see that we share much in common.”

To counter this argument, one person who uses an anti-oppressive education perspective states, “I don’t have any sympathy for people who say that we shouldn’t be talking about Aboriginal oppression because really, many groups are oppressed. That just diffuses it. In this province we have a problem.”

I ask some anti-oppressive educators what to do about the feelings of discomfort that come when students’ ideas about normalcy are disrupted. “How do we move the students beyond the discomfort to doing something about it?”

One person expresses this opinion: “I think that there is an urge and a rush to action and decisionism, which contradicts the notion that they really haven’t come to terms with who they are yet.” This person says that students won’t know what to do with the technical process until they have learned about who they are. “The thing that I really object to is that our own sense will bring us around. It brought us colonization, and it is partly because we can’t see our own self-interests. And that’s why I’m saying, if this were a math topic or an English topic, we wouldn’t say, “How do you *feel* about that?” What do you *feel* about English? That’s why I’m saying that there is a body of knowledge that needs to be taught that largely has to do with history, and knowing what social and economic analyses are.”

Another anti-oppressive educator takes this approach. “I structure the class as a healing process, and I don’t think it can be treated simply as content. I have done a lot of in-services for people and they want content, but content has never been sufficient to create change.” She often has students respond to an article by asking them how they *feel* about it rather than what they *think* about it. This often surfaces some emotions but later on in the semester she tells them, “We have to remember how appalled we were at the

extent of discrimination and oppression and privilege, at our disgust and our grief and guilt. If you carry that around and are at least aware of it, you can never go back and oppress again. That's where true learning comes."

Aboriginal people have the strongest words for an anti-racist/anti-oppressive education approach. "Sometimes I feel like saying, 'You don't have to tell me how much racism hurts. We live through this on a daily basis.' Sometimes I think when people talk about anti-racism, they feel like it's not about them, but I notice racism in the daily interactions of my work." Another person talks about the rhetoric of inclusion and social justice espoused at the university and then provides examples of feeling marginalized on several occasions. "I don't think people are deliberately racist, but it seems as if we're invisible."

Two people interpret the anti-racist stance, which objects to teaching about culture, as attacks on their beliefs and traditions, rather than seeing it as a message intended for non-Aboriginals. "I don't appreciate being positioned as the other, as the victim. These things that people say essentialize me and objectify me, I refuse to give them up. This is who I am; this is where I live; this is my community. Even though I spend a lot of time working here, ultimately my place is back home on my reserve and I remember my place. I see it sometimes as another way of oppression. One of my questions is, who created this discourse?"

Another person says something similar. "When I first started my graduate program we were asked to give a presentation in one of our courses, so I brought in a Medicine Wheel to explain some of my community's traditions and beliefs. My professor told me, 'That's essentialism. Forget culture, move on.' As if we're too stupid to figure



out what works for us! But I didn't say anything because I was in the first year of my graduate program. I might say something now that I have a Ph.D. though!"

This controversy is recognized by another faculty member. "I guess my concern is that we really think about how we do this, because I have seen in the past where we just get a reaction from students and it doesn't really accomplish anything other than helping people who are committed ideologically that way feel good because they are living out their ideology, but in the meantime students don't change and they do things the way they've always done them. So I think we have to be very thoughtful and tactful in the way we actually go about dealing with this. Because these are really deep, emotional issues for a lot of students. They do react and if we don't understand the process of them changing and engaging in this, in the end we do more damage by addressing it than just leaving it alone. I'm not at all suggesting we leave it alone, but I think it's a big cultural thing, and as the culture of the faculty changes and people are committed to this, as more people do it individually in their classes, as more people take part in the discourse, eventually we will see new projects, new ways of working together, new initiatives.

Despite the controversy, another faculty member believes academics have an important role to play in promoting social justice. It is important work for the faculty however, as one person observes. "It's not just our hearts that have to be engaged in social justice, it's also our heads. As academics we have special gifts that allow us to lead the way on that. One of our jobs is critique of society, critique of the educational institutions we serve. We are equipped to do that; we have time to read, to think, to write, and to teach and those are the ways in which we apply what others have written and our own thinking to teacher education. We make the connections. That is our job."

### *Drawing Comparisons*

The interviews with the various participants confirms my belief that our institution is not unlike other teacher education institutions that have used a variety of approaches to prepare teachers for working with students whose cultural, social, or economic circumstances are markedly different from their own. Some have turned to multicultural education and anti-racist education for answers. "They have studied prospective teachers' beliefs about themselves and persons unlike themselves and have attempted to modify courses, field experiences, and entire programs of teacher preparation to interrupt, challenge, and change the ways teachers think about themselves and 'Others'" (Zeichner, 1996, p. 118). A Masemann and Mock (1986) study of Canadian universities, however, revealed that "very little multicultural teacher education really exists in Canada" (p. 9 cited by Young, 1995, p. 58). These researchers found that most of the courses having to do with multicultural education were electives and it was possible for teachers in Canada to graduate without having taken a single course in multicultural education. Based on a brief look at on-line education calendars at Canadian universities, not much seems to have changed since then.

In the 1980s multicultural education was seen as the answer to helping prospective teachers appreciate and value other cultures; however since the then there has been an ongoing debate about the nexus between multicultural education and anti-racist education (Rezai-Rashti, 1995). Advocates for anti-racist education severely criticize what they see as a "heroes and holidays" approach that further privileges/normalizes some and marginalizes others (Young, 1995).

Although these stances are often viewed as dichotomous, they might also be viewed along a continuum. Multicultural education and anti-racist education address difference to varying degrees. Grant and Sleeter (2001) for example, have categorized the various approaches to teaching about ethnocultural diversity. They note that schools of education typically take one or a combination of these approaches:

- a) *Teaching the exceptionally and culturally different approach* to help students adapt to the norms of the dominant culture by making curriculum relevant to the students' backgrounds and learning styles, and adapting instruction to meet their needs - "building bridges" to help them catch up to the standards of the dominant group;
- b) *Human relations approach* to promote unity, tolerance and acceptance among various groups by celebrating differences;
- c) *Single group studies approach* to raise the equality of opportunity, recognize the group's contributions to society, and show how it has been oppressed by the dominant group. Teacher education programs that have graduates that might be employed by particular communities often use this approach;
- d) *Multicultural education approach* to synthesize many ideas from the previous three and work toward equal opportunity and social justice for all groups;
- e) *Education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist approach* to extend the previous approaches by teaching prospective teachers to help their students critically analyze inequality in their own circumstances through anti-oppressive education and to develop skills for social action.

Similarly, Kumashiro (2000) describes four different approaches to anti-oppressive education (and anti-racist education) that consider the nature of oppression and the

curricula, policies and pedagogies needed to bring about change. He identifies limitations in each and argues for an amalgam of these approaches. These approaches are:

- a) *Education for the other* where educators focus on improving the experiences of students who are othered by providing safe, affirming, therapeutic, supportive and empowering spaces and by recognizing the differences in all students;
- b) *Education about the other* where educators attempt to bring visibility to and enrich their students' understanding of different ways of being;
- c) *Education that is critical of privileging and othering* that entails helping students recognize "both the privilege of certain identities, including their own, and the processes of normalizing and Othering, in which they are complicit" (p. 37);
- d) *Education that changes students and society* that uses poststructuralism to unpack how oppression originates in particular harmful discourses that "frame how people think, feel, act and interact" (p. 40). The intent is to help students deconstruct the Self/Other binary and their notions of normalcy to work against oppression.

The extent to which the different approaches to educating for diversity are incorporated into the teacher education curriculum also varies. Some teacher education programs have an extra course in multicultural education added to the existing curriculum or may include a topic on multicultural education within some of their courses. There is growing evidence that this approach causes little, if any, significant changes in prospective teachers' attitudes or practices when working with diverse populations (May, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner, 1996). "When special courses are designed to address racism, classism, and other issues associated with diversity, faculty members teaching other courses may assume they are not responsible for addressing

these”(Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. xiii). Furthermore, these courses are usually optional, so students can graduate without any preparation in issues of diversity (Villegas & Lucas).

Several writers insist that teacher preparation programs that use only a cultural difference (deficit) or human relations approach (heroes and holidays) are not doing enough to reduce inequities and may, in fact, be perpetuating them (Banks, 1999; Cochran-Smith, 2000; Grant & Sleeter, 2001; May, 1999; McIntosh, 2002; Nieto, 1999; Zeichner, 1996). They stress that teacher education programs must include a critical component that considers how identities and inequities are produced and maintained (Apple, 1989; Giroux & McLaren, 1987; May, 1999). Further, they insist that part of every teacher's education—regardless of culture—must include a critical race analysis of how categories of difference are constructed (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Mackey, 1999; Ng, 2003; Schick, 2000; St.Denis, 2002; Weil, 1998; Willinsky, 1998). Ng states, “The perpetuation of ignorance surrounding the dynamics of racism are unacceptable, especially for preservice teachers who will inherit the power to affect children's lives” (2003, p. 11).

As an alternative to the add-on approach, those who advocate for critical multicultural education argue for an infusion or integration approach. In this approach entire programs including arts and science as well as education courses and field experiences are dedicated to critical multicultural education. It is still not clear how best to accomplish this or what this would entail (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zeichner, 1996), as transforming teacher education for social justice poses a variety of challenges.

As I consider the research related to teaching for social justice, I decide to provide the stories of two people on faculty who enact their vision of what this means. Their stories are by no means representative of other people's stories, because each person whom I interviewed had a slightly different approach to teacher education. These stories however, are illustrative of the commitment to teaching most people on faculty have."

*Janet*

"Hi Janet." I say as I knock on her door. "Thanks for agreeing to meet with me. As I told you on the phone, I am on the Secondary Program OCRE planning committee and there is talk about having a focus on Aboriginal content and perspectives for OCRE again this year<sup>15</sup>." Janet was on the committee the previous year and I don't want to face the same criticism that committee encountered.

"No problem," Janet says as she invites me sit down. I begin by asking her why the committee decided to focus on Aboriginal education for OCRE last year. She tells me it was because there is no required cross-cultural course in the Secondary Education program. The committee thought this might be one way to provide some information for the students. They also wanted a theme that would tie each of the subject areas together, and because they were going to be in the valley where there are a number of First Nations, it would be an opportunity to access some good resource people.

"But, as you may have heard, we met with controversy right away," Janet admits.

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<sup>15</sup> OCRE stands for Off Campus Residential Experience, a component of the various programs that was implemented over 30 years ago. It was intended to help students take teaching and learning beyond the classroom into the outdoors and surrounding community, develop their sense of interdependence with other living things and realize that curriculum is everywhere.

I nod. “What happened?” I had heard some rumours but I wanted to hear Janet's side of the story.

“Well as soon as we used the words First Nations or indigenous, it was looked upon as tokenism. People felt that we were not going to be able to do justice to the topic and that a little information might be more damaging than just getting started. Here we were trying to do something good and yet we were met with controversy.”

“That must’ve been a little unsettling,” I say sympathetically.

She tells me that the Secondary Program people decided to go ahead anyway, because they thought students needed some understanding of Aboriginal histories and perspectives. To gather some information about protocols and possible sessions that might be appropriate, the committee contacted people in the Department of Learning who were “just ecstatic about finally being able to connect with the university”. They met with resource people and Elders from the Aboriginal teacher education programs, and with teachers who had taken students to a cultural camp.

Janet tells me that the experience out at OCRE was wonderful for students because “When we were there, a lot of people found that by being immersed in that setting, we just learned to appreciate their culture better instead of always having to analyze how we look at things.” I ask what she means by that and she tells me how difficult it is to be always talking about White privilege and racism.

“When I worked with the Department people,” Janet says, “any time we started using the words Aboriginal and racism—bang—right away the conversation shutdown and no one moved forward. Whereas, if we talked about appreciation and empowerment and what we could do to get Aboriginal students feeling good about themselves, then we

could move forward. But if you keep talking about racism all the time and all the things that went on years ago, the conversation seems to go nowhere.”

Janet thinks we could do a better job of teaching Aboriginal content and perspectives, but she doesn’t feel competent in the area even though she has taken the several modules offered to university employees. She also doesn’t know whether one course would be of benefit to students. She believes an immersion experience where students become involved in a community and get to know First Nations or Métis people on a personal level is the only way they will gain some understanding of issues and perspectives.

She also believes that students need to learn about the protocols of inviting Elders to speak to a group and how to listen respectfully to people who have important information to share. She noted that students don’t want to wait for answers, but as one Elder told the group, it may take weeks or months before someone realizes their answer after speaking with someone.

Janet says she was surprised at the amount of the honoraria that the faculty was expected to pay the Elders, “But as one of the Elders’ helpers explained, it’s important that we show we value their knowledge just as much as we would someone with a Ph.D.”

“True,” I say. “I think we’ve been conditioned to value one type of knowledge over another and it’s time to rethink some of our assumptions. I change the topic a bit and ask whether she noticed any incidents of racism among the students during OCRE.

Janet tells me of one incident where a student told a racist joke and was severely reprimanded and warned that he could get kicked out of the program. “He came to the instructors with an hour and half apology, but I think students tell racist jokes all the time



and they don't even recognize they are doing it." She thinks that continuing to engage in activities at OCRE where students are involved with Aboriginal people will help to eliminate some of the stereotypes and racism.

"We had half a dozen well-educated, respected, knowledgeable, kind individuals who talked with our students and it helped to break down some of the stereotypes they hold. This wasn't a class where they were learning *about* Aboriginal people. They were immersed in conversations with them at the lunch table and after supper over tea and coffee. They took part in their ceremonies and began to understand the significance of those ceremonies and how important they are to them. It gave the students new appreciations about their culture," Janet says.

I wince a little at the use of "them" and the singular "culture" but I ask whether the committee had a sense that the students thought the experience was worthwhile. Janet says that informal evaluations conducted by the different course instructors, seem to indicate the students thought it was valuable. I silently wonder how much will translate into differences in how the student teachers will perceive the Aboriginal students in the high schools.

She says she has learned a few things in the last couple of years: storytelling is done in the winter time; symbols painted on teepees are the gift of a vision and therefore sacred; if you bring in an Elder to the class, it should be for more than just storytelling because Elders have so much more wisdom to share. She also talks about the need to raise the students' awareness of issues related to poverty because often they link that to Aboriginal people rather than seeing that it can include anyone.

"I couldn't agree more," I say. I thank Janet for the information and contact numbers and she wishes me good luck with planning.

"Thanks," I say on the way out, wondering what kind of hornet's nest I might be walking into by being on this committee.

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*Mary*

"Mary, how are you? You look wonderful!" Mary and I embrace as people gather for the Kevin Kumashiro lecture. Despite numerous rounds of chemotherapy, Mary remains a candidate for being one of the best dressed women in the city. I eye the beautiful turquoise silk scarf that is draped elegantly around her shoulders, and her funky new "do". "You have a new hairdo."

"It's a wig," Mary confesses.

"Wow! It's really cute! I'll have to let my sister know that it's possible to get fantastic wigs. She has just been diagnosed with breast cancer and is really depressed about having to lose her hair."

Mary and I chat a bit more about what has been happening in each other's lives since we last talked. I tell her I would love to interview her for my doctoral dissertation. Mary is another of the people who moved the faculty toward a social justice agenda by raising our awareness of issues related to poverty and literacy in Aboriginal communities. She has worked tirelessly in the community with Aboriginal children, parents and educators in the area of literacy education and has received numerous awards in recognition of her efforts. More recently her work has helped to raise awareness of the issues faced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans-gendered youth. She has recently co-

chaired a conference and co-edited a book on these topics. (See McNinch & Cronin, 2004). Mary tells me she would be honored to be interviewed and we agree on a date and time just as the lecture begins.

Connie and Monica take turns going to the podium to introduce, welcome and then thank Dr. Kevin Kumashiro on the occasion of the inauguration of our new Centre for Social Justice and Anti-oppressive Education.

“I feel somewhat like a groupie hanging around a rock star,” says one of the women, which brings a laugh from the full house gathered in the auditorium. I note that people from all faculties in the university are there. I am somewhat surprised. I had read some of Kumashiro’s work in the area of anti-oppressive education but I had no idea that his visit was so noteworthy to people outside the Faculty of Education.

After the lecture as people are milling around during the reception, I notice that Mary is standing off to the side watching as people talk with Dr. Kumashiro. *At one time Mary would have been one of the organizers of this event. I wonder if she is feeling like an outsider right now. I think I see how people become marginalized. It’s not just about differences in race, class, gender, sexual orientation or ability. As Kevin Kumashiro says, it’s about how we regard normalcy. Perhaps Mary is no longer considered normal and we distance ourselves. Why? Fear? Ignorance? Insensitivity? Discomfort?* I think of my own fear of being in her shoes, of my sister’s illness, of my own discomfort at not knowing what to say to make things better. *Perhaps we’re just too caught up with our own lives to notice others who aren’t on our immediate radar screens.* I silently admonish myself for my insensitivity in not making an effort to visit with her more

regularly. I go over to Mary to say goodbye and we make arrangements to conduct the interview the following week.

A week later, Mary visits my home and we chat for a bit as I make tea. She tells me how at peace and happy she is despite living with cancer. “My doctor says I have ‘friendly’ tumours because I am still alive after five years. I like to think of myself as a cancer ‘surpriser’ rather than a cancer ‘survivor’,” Mary laughs. I laugh too and say that’s a wonderful way of looking at it. *Could I be so courageous and good humoured?* Finally I turn on the tape recorder and we settle in for our conversation.

I begin by asking Mary how she came to have an interest in Aboriginal Education.

She tells me it began when she was doing her doctoral work in Edmonton and when she went down to 97<sup>th</sup> street, which was considered “skid row”, she noticed most of the people there were Aboriginal. “And this was very, very different from images that I had about the noble North American Indians that we talk so romantically about in Europe. So I began to ask some questions about that and I began to do some reading.” At that time her husband was also doing a doctorate in anthropology in Northern Alberta so she went with him and did some research into Aboriginal storytelling.

She then returned to her home in Ireland and became very involved in education for underprivileged people in the inner city in Dublin. She came back to Canada 18 years ago and took a position in the faculty where she was able continue community work.

Mary talks about wanting to make equity an issue in the Elementary Program when she was Chair. “I was able to make use of some money that was around, such as the

Cordis Fund<sup>16</sup>. We also had a Dean who was quite sympathetic to those issues and he gave me quite a bit of money to do the things that I wanted to do.”

“Yes!’ I jump in. “I remember when we used the Cordis Fund for our Equity retreat. We did some goal setting around our vision for social justice education. The sound of the faculty members singing about peace to the tune of “Lord of the Dance” in the lobby of the hotel at the end of the retreat still brings shivers to me. The acoustics with that high ceiling were wonderful!” I exclaim almost tearing up thinking of the emotional impact that had on me.

Mary shakes her head in agreement. She continues. “What I set out to do at first was to educate some of the faculty because I really was horrified that some faculty had been there since the 70s; they were in a province with a very high Aboriginal population, they were Canadian born, and yet, they knew nothing about Aboriginal people! So that was my first thing—to bring Aboriginal people into the faculty and to hold seminars and talks and discussions around issues. Then in my own work, I began to work increasingly more with the community and community organizations.”

“Did you do it out of a sense of social justice?” I ask.

“Yes, very much so. And I see a huge distinction between social justice and charity. There is that tension always there. In charity work it’s to help the other—the underprivileged—rather than seeing it as ‘we’, the human family. We’re all in this together.”

I nod in agreement and wince a little. *That reminds me of what Eduardo Galeano (2000) says,*

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<sup>16</sup> The Cordis Fund is a sum of money that was donated to the faculty from the estate of the late Dr. Leora Cordis, an early childhood educator and strong advocate of social justice. Dr. Cordis’ instructions to the faculty were to use the money for professional development in the area of social justice.

*Unlike solidarity, which is horizontal and takes place between equals, charity is top down, humiliating those who receive it and never challenging the implicit power relations. In the best of cases, there will be justice someday, high in Heaven. Here on earth, charity doesn't worry injustice, it just tries to hide it. (pp. 312-313)*

*How many times have my students and I collected money, food, clothing, and toys for the food bank and various charities and then felt self-satisfied that we were helping the poor rather than recognizing the causes of systemic inequities and working toward ways to help change those conditions. But then, when do we have to time to address the bigger issues? Mary's voice pulls me back from the edge of the abyss.*

"It doesn't bother me much if someone accuses me of it coming from my Christian background. I can't help my background and I don't think it matters where it comes from, as long as its there."

"Monica compares it to jumping into a river to save a drowning person, but then another drowning person comes along, and another. Finally, you have to get your friend to save the drowning people and you have to go upstream to find out what's going on. She says you are a person who does both."

Mary smiles.

I ask her what sorts of things, if any, she did in her courses to raise awareness of social justice issues.

"Okay." She pauses a bit and takes a sip of tea. "I often had a hard time bringing the community work that I do into my university courses because the courses that I taught were very specialized courses in reading. But I had a joke with my students saying that you could do social justice work through teaching students to read."

"Paulo Friere," I interject.

“Yes, and I would often start off by asking students to predict for me which students are going to have difficulty in reading—those in a community school in the inner city or those in schools in more affluent areas.” She then goes on to say that students always recognized that the children in the poor neighbourhoods will have the most difficulty. This led to discussions about literacy issues related to poverty, the things teachers can change and those that they have to accept, such as children changing schools frequently.

“I challenged them to think of some things they can do to help children in a seemingly impossible situation. So I did not do anything really dramatic because I firmly believe that we must get the balance right between helping our students develop the skills to teach, and understanding social issues.”

We talk about racism and Mary believes that sometimes it's due to ignorance.

“Yes, so I think sometimes people just don't have the knowledge,” she says.

“They don't know anything about the Treaties or what ‘Treaty’ means. They wonder why immigrants who come here do well after a few years, yet many Aboriginal people remain in poverty. Well that's very different! Aboriginal people have Treaties with us and we have not kept the bargain with them. So then we are placing people in an unequal position because we don't uphold our side of the bargain! And I find that lots of Canadians don't know that.”

*That reminds me of John Ogbu's (1992) theory about voluntary and involuntary minorities; that involuntary minorities—people who were brought as slaves or who were colonized—don't do as well as those who choose to come to North America.*

“No kidding! I say. “My third-year students just had a *Treaties in the Classroom* workshop and there were so many things they didn’t know at all. They had so many misconceptions about Aboriginal people and the special so-called privileges they believe First Nations people have. The workshop presenters did a great job of letting know them know White people have the privilege of living in this land in peace and with access to the abundance of resources.”

Our conversation leads to Mary’s work and she admits she is drawn more to the pragmatics of a situation and what needs to be done rather than to theoretical aspects of the work—and fairness. She always tries to check up on herself to consider whether she is looking at the situation as an outsider (emic) or trying to see it as an insider (etic). “You have to try and see the situation from the other person’s point of view,” Mary reminds me.

Finally I broach a subject that has been bothering me for some time. “There are some people on faculty right now who are causing some of us, like me, to question what we have been doing around Aboriginal Education. From my reading I see there is a whole spectrum of beliefs and opinions among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about whether we should be teaching about cultures or whether we should be teaching about racism. On the one end there are those who advocate returning to traditional values and the revitalization of cultures and languages. On the end are people who are looking at anti-oppressive education and who call cultural revitalization ‘essentialism’. This whole debate really has me confused. Where do you stand on this?”

Mary ponders the question for a minute. “I think I stand halfway. Maybe I’ve become too Canadian,” she laughs. “I stand half away for a few reasons. Number one, I



think I stand halfway because most of the Aboriginal people that I work with are happy standing halfway. They are comfortable with the fact that they are learning and revaluing some of their traditions and knowledge. They are seeing that as valid and maybe they are reinterpreting some of it. And maybe I am paternalistic, but I think that it is better to get into some of this discussion step-by-step because I feel that people are not comfortable sometimes when you talk too much about things that are deep or deal with conflict.”

Mary pauses for a bit then continues. “But I’m not really clear about how I worked with students with respect to power and essentialism,” she confesses. “I know how I worked with grad students because I could talk more clearly to them and I could give them both positions. But with undergraduate students, I’m not sure that I did a very good job.”

Mary talks about the importance of building self-esteem through skill development. “But I think the most important thing we can do is to help students learn how to build relationships. In order for our students to work well with communities, they need to know how to build trusting relationships, and they need to be able to help the students they teach learn that.”

I nod in agreement.

Mary tells me that when she was on the provincial committee for Aboriginal Head Start pilot preschools, she gave some workshops to teachers in the Northern part of the province. An Aboriginal woman on one of those committees said, “I really think that we are into a new phase of racism. In the past we had teachers who did not like our students, who were mean to our students. Now we are dealing with teachers who are too nice to our students and let them get away with murder and who don’t teach them anything.”

I stop writing and look up. *Am I guilty of that? When I had the alternate education program, did I have low expectations for my students because I thought they weren't capable or I wanted them to like school?*

"So that was my dilemma in teaching reading classes," Mary says. "The classes that I have are very short so how much do you diverge to teach Treaties and things like that?"

"I guess you have to trust that other classes are going to teach that, so it means working with other faculty members," I suggest.

"Yes, and I'm glad we have the structure to do that," says Mary. My dilemma is always getting that balance right, whether you talk about power or whether you do things that will empower people," she admits.

I ask her if she has any advice for faculty members who are trying to cover all the things they feel they have to teach without making it superficial or add-on, as well as taking part in community service.

"Yes," says Mary. "I would say start small and get together with other people in situations where they don't feel threatened and where they can put the little that they are doing on the table, because there are some stars. But I think it's more of an attitudinal change and when that comes, other things will fall into place."

"An attitudinal change? Like. . . ?"

"Really thinking carefully about what we trying to do here. Are we trying to make changes just because changes are required, or because it's the politically correct thing to do? What is going to really make a difference to the students that I'm teaching, and will that translate into change for the students in their classrooms and parents in their

communities? Maybe start simply by getting to know people to open things up a bit. I think we try too hard to make too many big changes in the beginning.”

I nod in agreement thinking how overwhelming it all feels at times. “Thank you for this, Mary. I would love to continue our discussion another time.” I turn off the tape recorder.

As we say our farewells, I ask Mary if she can still touch her toes to her nose. We laugh about how she would amaze everyone, particularly students, with her ability to stand on one foot and bring her toes to her nose, a feat she would perform during the entertainment sessions during our Off Campus Residential Experiences (OCRE). We reminisce briefly about the good times and talk about getting together again soon.

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As I look over the data, I have difficulty trying to represent people’s views and my own responses to their perspectives. I have identified some themes, but struggle with how I might represent the data in a way that doesn’t exclude me from the picture. Unlike ethnographers of the past who attempted to take an objective stance in interpreting and reporting their findings, reflexive ethnographers attempt to anchor their experimental (and traditional) writing in an ongoing moral dialogue with the members of a local community (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. 1).

It is the notion of “an ongoing moral dialogue with the members of a local community” that I want to develop but I am stymied as to how I might do that. Then one weekend I am given a huge gift by the faculty administrators in the form of a writing retreat.

## CHAPTER VI

### (Re)Presenting Stories

Autoethnographers 'ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become coparticipants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745).

#### *Discovering Voices*

I nestle into the stylish chair with my cup of tea in a quiet area of the grand, old hotel where a number of my colleagues and I have come for a writing retreat. In an effort to help new faculty members prepare for our academic careers that will involve extensive research and publishing, the faculty administrators have arranged for the untenured people to attend a weekend writing workshop in another city, all expenses paid.

"I think I am having a 'crisis of representation'<sup>17</sup>," I tell our workshop facilitator, who is a highly regarded educator, editor of a prestigious academic journal, and my former high school English teacher.

"Tell me more," Rob says as he takes another chair near me to help me through my writing angst.

"Well, I want to do what some call a 'reflexive ethnography' (Davies, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). That is, my research is an ethnography situated in our faculty that describes our efforts to prepare teachers to teach in ways that are more socially just. But I am also trying to show my own history of how I became interested in the topic, my

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<sup>17</sup> The term "crisis of representation" is used frequently in post-modern literature in relation to the arts and media, to semiotics, and to philosophy although it is understood differently in those disciplines. I use the term in reference to Denzin and Lincoln's (1994, 2000) *fourth moment* of qualitative research that started in the mid-80s where researchers began to represent the social world in ways that were unfamiliar to quantitative researchers. Additionally, qualitative researchers began questioning terms such as objectivity, reliability and validity and their appropriateness in qualitative studies. My own 'crisis of representation' arose from the assumption that my research had to more closely resemble the early forms of qualitative research that were more in keeping with quantitative studies.

But I am also trying to show my own history of how I became interested in the topic, my frustrations, my emerging understandings, and how I am changing as a result of the research process.”

Rob nods and I continue. “I have interviewed several people; I have conducted focus groups with faculty members and teachers in schools; and I have gathered some faculty documents. I have even conducted a small survey and made occasional journal entries, but now I am finding it very difficult to show the complexity and the interconnectedness of the research and my place in it. There are so many layers to what I am finding and I don’t know how to represent it all. Somehow, discussing themes in a way that distances me from the data just doesn’t seem to fit.”

“Have you read any of Carolyn Ellis’ work?” Rob asks.

I feel my face turning pink. “I’m not as familiar with it as I’d like to be,” I admit.

“You might find this helpful then.” He hands me a copy of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000) edited by Denzin and Lincoln. “Read the chapter by Ellis and Bochner on autoethnography.” I look at the book and recognize the article I had skimmed and cited briefly in my comprehensive exams, but at the time, the article didn’t resonate with me.

Rob questions me a bit more about my research and I select two other books that look interesting from the pile before me. Satisfied that I have been heard and have a direction to explore, I say goodnight and head to my room.

Soon I am stretched across the bed immersed in Carolyn Ellis’ world and that of her partner, Art Bochner. As I read, it’s as if a veil suddenly lifts from my eyes. I marvel at how seamlessly Ellis and Bochner weave the arguments for and the practicalities of

representing autobiographical research into an engaging, evocative story filled with the vivid details of their daily lives. They make a case for using the “researcher’s own experience a topic of investigation in its own right” (p. 733). They argue that autoethnography displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (p. 739). Readers are asked to feel the truth of the stories through the emotions that are evoked, and to become coparticipants, “engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually” (p. 745).

After reading their chapter, I literally dance around the well-appointed room. I can hardly contain my stories that have been struggling to be free from the shackles created by my notion of what constitutes scholarly writing. I head to my computer and watch as the words fly from my fingers onto the screen well into the early hours of the morning.

“Rob, this is exactly what I needed!” I exclaim when I see him the following morning. “I feel as if I have found my voice.” I proceed to tell Rob I have finally found a way to represent my research data that is in keeping with the holistic philosophical orientation that I had wanted to embrace. “I’m not sure I’ll be able to write in that fashion well enough to satisfy my committee, but it certainly has given me a sense of direction again.”

Rob is pleased to hear of my breakthrough and suggests that I also read Ellis’ (2004) *The Ethnographic I* for a more detailed description of autoethnography. I thank him and head to my room for another day of writing.

On the way home, a colleague and I share our experiences of the workshop and of being doctoral students and faculty members at the same time. She tells me of her own research which is an autobiography about coming to understand white settler identity and

how it has become constructed as the norm in the prairies. She allows me to read to her what I have written thus far, and she laughs and comments enthusiastically in all the right places. Her remarks are encouraging and I can hardly wait to resume my writing.

The following day I e-mail a copy of what I have written to my supervisor with my reasons for choosing autoethnography as a methodology. Within a day or two, he responds positively and suggests that I become very familiar with autoethnography so that I might defend it strongly. I read over his other suggestions and make notes for follow-up. I then head to the library for more books and articles on autoethnography and find to my delight that Ellis' *Ethnographic I* is on the shelf.

### ***Defending Autoethnography***

"Hi Sweetie, how is that the dissertation coming?" Charlotte asks as we meet in the hall on the way to our offices.

"I've had a breakthrough!" I exclaim. I tell Charlotte about the writing retreat and being pointed in the direction of autoethnography through Ellis and Bochner. I unlock the door of my office and motion for her to come in.

"Great. Tell me what you're up to." I know she loves to play devil's advocate and will have lots of questions for me. "So, tell me why you have chosen to do an autoethnography," Charlotte says as we sit down.

"Well, you know that I had originally intended to do a case study of the faculty and what it was doing in the area of Aboriginal education and School<sup>PLUS</sup>?" Charlotte nods. "I chose this topic because of the faculty's mandate in these areas and my confusion around different faculty members' views about trying to teach for social justice

as it relates to the Aboriginal peoples of the province. But it isn't really about the faculty; it's about me and how I am trying to improve my teaching.

"What is it about your teaching that you don't like?" asks Charlotte.

"Well, I guess I feel really frustrated most days because I really don't know what I should be doing as a teacher educator in terms of teaching for social justice. I have a sense that that's my ultimate *raison d'être* or it *should* be, but I've been feeling somewhat lost, so there are several tensions or questions that I have been trying to explore in hopes of finding a sense of direction."

"Such as?" Charlotte asks.

I sigh and lean back in my chair. "First," I hold up my fingers to start counting on them, "I don't feel I know what I should be doing in terms of incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives in my classes; I'm confused by the different viewpoints on this issue among faculty members, so I'm trying to figure out what *I* think and believe; I'm trying to find ways to deal with student resistance when it comes to teaching for social justice – especially when we're dealing with racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia; and I'm trying to figure out how to help preservice teachers use socially just content and methods in the classroom while maintaining a sense of order, respect, and co-operation without all hell breaking loose."

"Maybe you're expecting too much of yourself," Charlotte offers. "I don't think anyone has the answers to those questions. We just do the best we can each day."

"I suppose," I concede, "but I still sense I could do better and I'm learning something from everyone I talk with. I want to show how I am changing as the result of



working in this faculty and trying to work through these issues. So I've been looking at the area of self-study research in its various forms – one of which is autoethnography.”

“Tell me more about self-study research,” says Charlotte. “I have a grad student who is interested in that area and I’m not very familiar with it.”

“Well,” I begin, “self-study research or teacher research has grown significantly since 1990 and is becoming accepted as a legitimate form of research – by educators anyway (Bullogh & Pinnegar, 2001; Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey & Russell, 2004; Zeichner, 1999). It’s primarily qualitative research that is reflexive in nature, but it can take various forms including action research, autobiography and autoethnography, and so on. It’s one of the largest Special Interest Groups (SIG) in the American Educational Research Association. Apparently it started with the organizers’ belief that if researchers in colleges of education were to study the development of teachers, they should look at their own role in that development (Bullogh & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 14). Feldman (2003) suggests that self-study research has an ‘existentialist orientation that requires an understanding of’—I pull out one of my comprehensive exams and skim for the quotation I want—‘the way we are teacher educators and to change our ways of being teacher educators’ (p. 2). He also says that other types of scientific research may offer more of what positivistic researchers consider valid, but they miss subtleties in ways of being with each other that can be explored through autobiography, narratives, and other forms of literary research.”

“Well, I certainly agree that we need to pay more attention to the ways we are with each other and our students,” Charlotte interjects. I suddenly realize this is one of

the main things Charlotte keeps bringing up with faculty members, but I sense she feels that this message is not taken seriously by many of our colleagues. I nod in agreement.

“If you want to give your student a place to start reading,” I suggest, “there is an excellent two-volume edited book called the *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* by Loughran, Hamilton, Kubler LaBoskey, and Russell, published in 2004. You will have to put in a request at the library though. It’s really hard to get a hold of. Every time I check it out, someone recalls it right away.”

“Great. Thanks. Do you have a piece of paper so I can write that down?” I hand Charlotte some paper and a pen and repeat the information for her.

“Anyway, after reading about autoethnography, I realized it was one way to show the complexities, the multiple realities, the multiple voices, and competing discourses that influence me and other teacher educators. It is also a way to show how I am changing as a result of this research process. Not only that, I am able to identify issues that are of concern to me as a teacher educator, consider my future actions in light of my findings, and make the dissertation accessible and personally satisfying to write.”

“How is that different from doing a reflexive ethnography that I thought I heard you mention last month?” Charlotte asks. Her question reminds me how many times I have changed my mind about my methodology.

“Hmm.” I hesitate. “Well, I don’t think there is much difference, really. Wait, let me take a look at some of the notes that I’ve just made.” I search through my book bag for my note pad. “Here it is. Denzin (2003) tends to use the terms interchangeably because he says that for a decade or more ‘interpretive ethnographers have been staging reflexive ethnographic performances using their field notes and autoethnographic

observations to shape performance narratives ...'(p.ix). Both terms situate the observer in the ethnography as a participant whose actions and interpretations of the events form part of the research. In an edited book by Denzin and Lincoln (2002), they say that in a reflexive ethnography the researcher is a morally and politically self-aware participant in the event, setting or location under investigation. It seems to me that in autobiographical research the researcher is the subject of the investigation. Maybe it has something to do with where one puts the emphasis – on the self or the situation or event – even though they are linked. Even autoethnographers vary in their emphasis – it could be on the *auto* or self, the *ethnos* or culture, or the *graphy* or research process (Reed-Danahay, 1997 as cited by Holt, 2003). Whatever the emphasis or whatever you call it, it's a way of looking reflexively at self-other interactions. Oh, here is a good quote from Carolyn Ellis'

*Ethnographic I.*" I read the quotation aloud.

"The interpretive, narrative, autoethnographic project has the following distinguishing features: the author usually writes in the first person, making herself or himself the object of research. The narrative text focuses on generalization within a single case extended over time. The text is presented as a story replete with a narrator, characterization, and plot line, akin to forms of writing associated with the novel or biography. The story often discloses hidden details of private life and highlights emotional experience. The ebb and flow of relationship experience is depicted in an episodic form that dramatizes the motion of connected lives across the curve of time. A reflexive connection exists between the lives of participants and researchers that must be explored. And the relationships between writers and readers of the texts is one of involvement and participation" (p. 30).

I put the notebook away and say to Charlotte, "So from what I can gather, autoethnography is more performative. That is, it's written in a style more like a novel or autobiography that embeds the researcher in her various contexts, and through the story, the researcher is able to show multiple realities and emotions. I realized when I read that description of autoethnography, that this is exactly what I want to do."

Charlotte looks somewhat quizzical, so I try to clarify what I'm trying to say. "I think if I were doing a reflexive ethnography, I would be looking for themes and trying to give a critical interpretation or analysis of the events and my own response to them," I suggest. Charlotte nods.

Encouraged I go on. "But I really don't want to critique or criticize anyone, other than myself, perhaps. I really just want to show the world as I see it. Maybe others are having similar struggles, but ultimately, the readers will have to interpret the text based on their own values, beliefs, and experiences. I was a bit concerned at first though, that autoethnography was based simply on the 'interpretive turn' rather than offering a critical analysis of the text or events that is a characteristic of reflexive ethnographies (Cole & Knowles, 2000). For instance, here is a quote by Polkinghorne. " I reach for my notebook again.

"When we are in the role of hearers or readers of the narrative experiences - the creations of others, we understand the stories through the linguistic processes we are constructing in our own narratives. We call this kind of understanding - of hearing the meaning of a story - hermeneutic understanding" (1988, p. 160).

Not everyone agrees we should just rely on a hermeneutic understanding in research though. For example, Janet Miller (1998) says that teachers are seldom asked to give a critical perspective on their stories – they are simply asked to simply tell their story rather than theorizing about the social, historical, or cultural contexts and influences including language and discourse, [or] on constructions of the selves who have those experiences (p.150). She goes on to argue that without problematizing the construction of multiple and overlapping identities that may be in conflict, teachers' stories often simply serve to 'reinforce static, predetermined, and resolved versions of our selves and

work...[and] such autobiographical renderings close down rather than open up possibilities' (p. 151)."

Charlotte nods, but I see her eyes are starting to glaze over. I raise my voice a little and become more animated to draw her back.

"But according to Denzin and many others who are interested in performance as a way to expose injustices, it can be critical as well. For example, Denzin says,

Performance ethnography simultaneously creates and enacts moral texts that move from the personal to the political, from the local to the historical and the cultural. As Conquergood (1985) observes, these dialogic works create spaces for give-and-take, doing more than turning the other into the object of a voyeuristic, fetishistic, custodial, or paternalistic gaze" (2003, p. x).

"Okay," Charlotte says slowly. "If someone on your committee were to ask you about some of the criticisms levelled at autobiographical research, what would you say?"

*She's testing me to see if I have done any reading.* "Well," I hesitate. "I guess I would have to assume that I wouldn't have to make an argument for conducting qualitative research anymore. It's been well established for over 20 years and most educational researchers recognize the value of qualitative research methods as legitimate ways of representing the social world. But I know various forms of autobiographical research have been considered on the margins of respectability because they don't necessarily fit well with the criteria used to judge other forms of qualitative research (Ellis, 2004; Holt, 2003). Let's see." I rifle through my notes again.

"First, I think one of the primary criticisms against autoethnography is that some see it as too individualistic and somewhat self indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999; Sparkes, 2002 as cited by Holt, 2003). What Carolyn Ellis (1997, p. 4) would say to that, which echoes what Denzin has said, is that showing the concrete details of a life can

convey a general way of life; that good autoethnography speaks beyond itself; that the personal *is* political; and that perhaps ‘orthodox social scientists are self-absorbed in the worst kind of voyeuristic way—of gazing at others while protecting their selves from scrutiny and writing only for themselves and their small tribes.’”

Charlotte laughs. “I like that,” she says. “What else?”

“Well, there are those who are always arguing about the rigor of the research, – you know, about validity and reliability, saying that regardless of the research method, we should attend to the rigor and quality of the research throughout the research process (Hammersley, 1992; Leininger, 1994; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). For example, Morse et al.(2002) argue we need to ensure rigor throughout the research process rather than evaluating the quality of the research at the end as Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested in the 80s. To do that, they suggest we use verification strategies that ensure both reliability and validity of data [through] activities such as ensuring methodological coherence; sampling sufficiency; developing a dynamic relationship between sampling, data collection and analysis; thinking theoretically, and theory development. I don’t take issue with many of these, except perhaps with the need for sampling sufficiency, but they also argue that we should be able to use criteria and terminology that is used in mainstream science – as if mainstream science were the standard to which we should still aspire!”

“So they seem to be privileging mainstream science?” asks Charlotte.

“Exactly!” I exclaim. “But Thomas Kuhn (1962)—back in the 60s, for heavens sake—helped to expose some of the problems with mainstream science. I know that many mainstream scientists have criticized him, but at least he gave social scientists a



reason to believe their ways of doing science were as legitimate as doing ‘normal’ science.” I make imaginary quotation marks in the air. “Postmodern thinkers have further contributed to the move away from privileging one form of knowledge over others. Since the 80s, many qualitative researchers have argued we need to use different criteria with which to judge self-study research and autobiographical research” (Ellis, 1997, 2004; Lather, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mitchell, 2004; Richardson, 2000).

“Okay,” says Charlotte. “So what criteria *should* be used then?”

“Well, there doesn’t seem to be a common set of criteria and it’s always changing. There are those who say criteria such as credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of data should be the cornerstones for evaluating research (Holt, 2003). Ellis (2004) cites Lincoln and Guba (2000) who ask whether all participants’ views are represented, whether participants’ awareness has been raised and whether people are moved to action. She also cites Patti Lather (1993) who attempts to rupture validity as a ‘regime of truth’. Lather proposes ‘counter practices of authority’ such as ‘ironic validity, which concerns the problems of representation; paralogical validity, which honors differences and uncertainties; rhizomatic validity, which seeks out multiplicity; and voluptuous validity, which seeks out ethics through practices of engagement and self-reflexivity’ (pp. 124, 125). Ellis herself, thinks the work should have verisimilitude. It should feel believable, lifelike, and possible. But she also agrees with Bochner (2001) and Plummer (2001) who suggest that an autoethnography or story should be judged by its usefulness and the consequences that come from it, as well as its aesthetic value. She adds though, that it should have therapeutic value.”



“But I thought that writing for therapeutic value wasn’t considered legitimate research,” says Charlotte.

“I guess it depends on one’s idea of legitimate research. Leah Fuller (2001), for example, suggests that interpreting or analyzing autobiographical research is like peeling the layers of an onion and that psychotherapeutic ethics is one of the layers. But I just read an interesting article by Holt (2003) who was struggling with the same issues when trying to have an autoethnography published. I really like the five criteria he found for evaluating the validity and reliability of autoethnography that were suggested by Laurel Richardson (2000). Richardson, he says, suggests that the criteria include:

(a) Substantive contribution. Does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life? (b) Aesthetic merit. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfyingly complex, and not boring? (c) Reflexivity. How did the author come to write this text? How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? (d) Impactfulness. Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to action? (e) Expresses a reality. Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived experience? Autoethnographic manuscripts might include dramatic recall, unusual phrasing, and strong metaphors to invite the reader to ‘relive’ events with the author. These guidelines may provide a framework for directing investigators and reviewers alike.” (cited by Holt, 2003, p. 12)

“That sounds like a lot to live up to,” observes Charlotte. “How are you going to write it?”

“I’m trying to write it in the first person as a story that takes place in the faculty over a period of time. I hold conversations with various characters or players that bring out several of the issues that emerged from the interviews and focus groups I’ve done.”

“Well as long as it doesn’t end up to be 500 pages,” Charlotte teases.

“I know. That could be a problem,” I admit. “I interviewed a lot of people and I have a lot of data, so it’s hard to know what to leave in or take out. I think that I might

just collapse some events and create a few characters that are composites of people I have interviewed.”

There is a long pause. “Hmm,” she says. “I wonder if by doing that, you might be missing some of the important or unsaid things.” She pauses and looks at me carefully.

“Do you understand what I’m trying to say?”

I don’t really understand and I feel myself getting defensive. “Well it’s a common technique in narrative work” (Ellis, 2004).

“Perhaps it is,” concedes Charlotte, “but I’m just saying that my sense of it is, you might be losing some authenticity. The reader might not be able to hear a voice that sounds authentic. Maybe you could create episodes from each interview.”

“I suppose you’re right. Losing that sense of authenticity certainly could be a problem. On the other hand, I’m afraid that people will be easily identified if I don’t create characters. I’m really worried about the ethics of the situation and I don’t want anyone to be hurt inadvertently. Ian Mitchell (2004, p.1440) for example, raises some questions that really have me thinking about how I might report my data—questions such as: *How potentially damaging are the data in their interpretation and who can be damaged? To what extent will the data reporting allow individuals to be identified? Are non-consenting others appearing as players? If so how likely are they to be hurt and identified? Are consenting others positioned to be described in ways they neither expected nor consented to? If so, how likely are they to be hurt and identified? How well will the person know that something is coming and how likely are they to read it?*”[Italics in original text.]

Charlotte nods in agreement. “I know what you’re saying. A colleague and I just had an article accepted to an international journal that was a dialogue between the two of us. But now it’s out there for all the world to see.”

“That’s wonderful!” I exclaim.

“Yes, but I can’t tell you how much I feel violated and exposed by it,” confesses Charlotte. I nod in sympathy.

“But my sense of it is,” she continues, “is that there are no easy answers, but the fact that you are thinking about them and naming them, and caring about other people helps to open up a space for dialogue among researchers who are struggling with the same issues. You’re not making people into objects and we can’t objectify ourselves.”

“I know,” I sigh. “According to Vicki Kubler Laboskey (2004), there is still much to work out in terms of our theories and methodologies in self-study research. I guess it’s an evolving process and the more we explore different ways of doing things and talking with others who are involved in the same work, the more insights we may have into how we can transform ourselves, our classrooms, and in turn, society to work for the betterment of all living things. I like what Carolyn Ellis says though: ‘The goal is to practice an artful, poetic, and empathetic social science in which the readers can keep in their minds and feel in their bodies the complexities of concrete moments of lived experience’” (2004. p. 30).

Charlotte smiles and rises to leave. “Well good luck with that. Let me know if you want me to read anything. I’ve got to run.”

“Thanks for listening and being a ‘critical friend’. I can always count on you to help me consider other ways of looking at things.”

After Charlotte leaves, I feel somewhat disturbed by her questions concerning authenticity and voice if I create composite characters. Certain that Ellis had suggested this as an approach to writing the data, I pull out my copy of the *Ethnographic I* and search through the index. *Here it is on page 125.*

*Say you want to protect the privacy of a research participant you've made into a character in your story. You might use composites or change some identifying information. Or you might collapse events to write a more engaging story, which might be more truthful in a narrative sense though not in an historical one.*  
[Italics added]

*Ah ha. I knew it!* I read further and become less self congratulatory as I read her caveats. Ellis goes on to describe how some traditional ethnographers omit details that don't fit their analysis or downplay their importance, and reach beyond description for all kinds of interpretation. For example,

[t]hey create that typical person or day, the common event. They use ambiguous descriptors like 'most', 'some', 'frequent', and a 'few'. They also reify concepts such as social structure and organizational climate. I did this too, in my dissertation, the study of two fishing villages. And, let me tell you, when community members read what I wrote, what I saw as typical was certainly not what they saw as typical. What I wrote told you more about how I organize my world, rather than how they organized theirs. (p. 125)

The way to overcome this problem, Ellis tells her students in the text, is to construct the story as close to the experience as you can remember it, especially in the initial version. This helps to work through the purpose of this story. She reminds people that Art Bochner (2001) believes it's not so important that the narratives represent lives accurately, but that the "narrators believe they are doing so" (p. 126).

*So I guess Charlotte was right. I do have to be careful that I don't miss subtle details or what was left unsaid.* I put the book down and open the binder of data again.

## CHAPTER VII

### Troubling Stories

Even teachers need to be open to raising questions about the limits of their knowledge and their assumptions about what is normal. In fact, sometimes when teachers raise questions about their own cultural assumptions, they can model the kind of self-critique and vulnerability that they invite their students to experience. (Kumashiro, 2004, pp. 87-88)

#### *Replicating Curricula*

“Carol, I have a question.” One of my B.E.A.D.<sup>18</sup> Elementary Education pre-interns raises her hand to get my attention as the students work in groups brainstorming ideas for their unit plans. I go over to see what she wants.

“Is it true that we have to incorporate the Native culture into our unit plans?”

“You’re not supposed to say *Native*. It’s *Aboriginal*,” whispers one of her table mates.

“One of our other instructors said we’re not supposed to use the term *Aboriginal* either. She said we can only use *First Nations*,” says another student to me.

“It sounds as if there is a bit of confusion here and I suspect others have questions too,” I say to the table group. “If you don’t mind, I’ll address the whole class on this topic.” I call for everyone’s attention and ask for a show of hands to indicate who would like some clarification on incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives into the unit plans and on the correct terminology to use. Nearly everyone’s hand goes up. As it’s near the end of the class, I promise that I will address their questions the next day.

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<sup>18</sup> B.E.A.D. stands for Bachelor of Education After Degree. These are students who have one or more degrees and who have been accepted into the Faculty of Education in the preinternship year with undergraduate students who are in their third year of their B.Ed. program.

During the next few classes I bring in the computer cart that holds all the iBooks as well as a cart full of curriculum guides and resources and several copies of a resource document entitled, *Aboriginal Cultures and Perspectives: Making a Difference in the Classroom* (Farrell Racette et al., 1996). I ask the students to work in groups with the resources to find information on appropriate use of various terms that name original peoples and the rationale for incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives in the curriculum, with suggestions for how they might do that. They go on-line to the Department of Learning website and open the curriculum guides and resource booklet. A while later the small groups are ready to report back to the class.

The class discusses the importance of names and how names determine the way we perceive ourselves and are perceived by others. They seem to understand that names can either support or detract from the way people wish to be perceived. Students report that names evolve over time and it is important to use the appropriate, contemporary terminology relative to the community in which they are working. The students find out the names of the various Aboriginal cultural groups in the province and their approximate locations. They also find out that there are many Métis people in the northern part of the province who speak Michif, a combination of Cree and French.

The students seem to have some knowledge of the history of the colonization of First Nations people and the systematic attempts at assimilation through the residential school system. They seem to know very little about the Métis however, and just assume their history is the same as First Nations' histories. I tell them that Louis Riel Day is coming up on November 16. I ask them to research a bit about the history of the Métis in Western Canada and suggest some resources such as *The New Peoples: Being and*

*Becoming Métis in North America* (Peterson & Brown, 2001); *The Métis: Canada's Forgotten People* (Sealey & Lussier, 1975); *Indians Without Tipis* (Sealey & Kirkness, 1973), and *The Education of the Manitoba Métis* (Sealey, 1977). A few students do a Google search and suggest some web sites as well, including *The Métis: A History of the Métis* by the Turtle Island Production company; a web site established by the Gabriel Dumont Institute, the *Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture*; and numerous sites describing the life of Louis Riel such as the ones at the *Louis Riel Institute* and the *University of Saskatchewan Library*.

A week later, the students are starting to have a better sense of the history of the Métis: of contributing to the flourishing fur trade; of becoming successful farmers and laying the groundwork for the establishment of the province of Manitoba; of receiving 1.4 million acres of land under the Manitoba Act of 1870 and then having it systematically taken away through unjust laws; of enlisting the help of Louis Riel and the ensuing battle at Batoche where a few poorly armed men valiantly fought legions of government soldiers who captured Riel; of being forced to live on road allowances and chased from their land by racist settlers; of the children not being allowed in provincial schools because the Métis were forced to be squatters so didn't pay taxes; of not being allowed into church or band schools unless there was room, or unless a church or charitable organization paid their tuition; of finally being recognized as a distinct group of Aboriginal peoples in the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

One day in class I read a story from *The Road Allowance People* (Campbell, 1994). At first there are looks of confusion on students' faces until they become accustomed to the way it is written—as if an older Métis person with a Cree/French

accent is speaking. Soon however, they are caught up in the story. I point out the art work in the book and tell the students that the people depicted in the illustrations look like many of the people in the artist's (Farrell Racette) life. From the ensuing discussion I can tell the students' research has raised their awareness of the injustices suffered by the Métis, and Maria Campbell's translation of the stories has had an emotional impact. Several students decide to create lesson plans about Louis Riel and the Métis.

Another day I bring in a class set of the document outlining a *Common Curricular Framework for Aboriginal Languages Programs* (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004) to help the students with their planning when the discussion turns to languages and why they are so important to a culture. The residential school system comes up as one student says, "It's terrible that they weren't allowed to speak their languages or practise their beliefs at all."

"And if they didn't go to the residential schools, their parents probably wanted them to fit in with regular society and not be ridiculed, so the children were told to say they were Scottish or whatever and not to speak their language," says another student.

Candace, the only Cree student in the class—and in the whole Elementary Program for that matter—speaks up and says, "That's what happened to my mush—to my grandpa."

*I wonder if that's what happened to my maternal grandmother as well. Her mother and siblings certainly didn't look Caucasian but Grandma insisted they were Norwegian. If Mom had been my grandparents' birth daughter instead of their adopted daughter, I might have had brown skin too.*



The students wonder what an Aboriginal world view is so I ask them to turn to Figure 1 on page 17 that shows a circle surrounded by four goals: to live in balance with the land, to live in balance with the Creator, to live in balance with one's self, and to live in balance with others. The following page discusses the *Framework* that embraces three Laws of Relationships: the Laws of Sacred Life, Laws of Nature, and Laws of Mutual support. These laws are based on the following principles:

- All parts of creation are interconnected and manifest in the spirit of the Creator.
- Humankind must live in respectful relationship with all that has been created.
- Spiritual forces are gifts intended to aid survival rather than threaten it.

I turn to Candace and say, "Candace, I hate to put you on the spot, but would you agree with this depiction of a world view?" I am suddenly aware of my discomfort talking about Aboriginal content and perspectives with Candace in the class.

*I don't want to be always putting her on the spot and making her the Aboriginal expert to whom we defer all the time. This happens all too often in schools where there is one First Nations or Métis teacher. Somehow they are supposed to be experts even though most Aboriginal people have been taught by non-Aboriginal teachers.*

Candace looks a little embarrassed but says, "Yeah, I guess so. But in my family we don't really talk about anything like that. My grandparents are quite traditional and I guess those beliefs show up in the way they live, but they don't talk about it."

Suddenly I'm the one who is embarrassed. I thank her and then say, "Okay, let's move on." We go on to protocols for inviting an Elder into a classroom and suggestions

for teaching Aboriginal children, which are basically the principles of good teaching for all children.

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The following week as I am sitting in my office, I turn to the knock on my door to see one of my Elementary Education students standing there. "Hi Janet. Can I help you?"

"I hope so. Do you have a minute?" She asks hesitantly.

"Sure come on in." I motion for her to take a seat.

"Sorry I didn't make it to the workshop on using Aboriginal resources. I had to work," apologizes Janet.

"The presenter had a lot of interesting resources," I say, but there weren't very many people from our class there. Anyway, how can I help you?"

Janet tells me that she and her teaching partner, Amy, have to teach lessons about Aboriginal people. Amy is supposed to do something with an emphasis on legends or crafts such as dream catchers. Janet is supposed to teach a unit on plants and how they were used by First people as medicine. "Amy was able to find some directions for making a dream catcher and a bunch books on legends, but I have no idea where to get the information I need," Janet says apologetically.

I lean back in my chair sensing a knot forming in my stomach, and I try to think of a way to reply professionally. *Why do they do that? Probably because most teachers are uncomfortable teaching Aboriginal content and perspectives themselves (Longman, 2005) and they think that university students are being well-grounded in that area, so they ask our students to do it.*

“Well,” I say aloud, “that’s pretty specialized knowledge that some Elders have taken their whole lives to learn. I don’t think it’s something you can do, except in a very general way, unless you want to invite an Elder into your classroom. But I don’t think it’s something they would want to do. Could you go back to your co-operating teacher and say that you are not comfortable with doing this? Or would you rather that I call her?”

“No,” says Janet. “That was just a suggestion. She said I could do anything I want but it has to be about First Nations people and the topic Heritage.”

“Well let’s take a look at the curriculum guide for Grade 4 and see what it says,” I suggest. We spend the next hour looking at possible units from the social studies curriculum under the theme of Heritage that includes Saskatchewan’s First Peoples, Explorers, Fur Traders, The Métis Peoples, Early Immigrants, Treaties, Immigrants and Settlers.

Janet has trouble choosing a topic. I empathize with her. There are many suggestions including bringing in oral historians or Elders; teaching about identity formation through language using the story of Dr. Diane Anderson, a Métis woman who learned Cree in her adult life; and suggestions for teaching about governance. There is also a topic on the Treaties. Without a careful reading of the suggestions however, I can see how many of the topics could lend themselves to the stereotypical depiction of First peoples that has become embedded in our collective identity as Whites. “We’re having a workshop on *Treaties in the Classroom* after you come back from the field experience,” I tell her. She decides to wait until the workshop before addressing that topic.

Finally, Janet chooses to have the students engaged in a simulation where they will review the reasons why people move and settle in different areas. She will have

groups of students look at maps and other visuals showing landforms, natural vegetation, and animal life, and have them act out: Why did First Nations communities live in particular areas? What resources were available for food, shelter and clothing?

We're both relieved and satisfied that she has a plan and sure that her co-operating teacher will be receptive to it. "I think I'll have a resource person from the Department of Learning come in to talk with our class about incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives though," I tell her. "I still have a lot of questions about that," I admit.

"That would be great," Janet says. "Thanks for all your help." After she leaves, I'm drained. *I'm glad I don't have to do that anymore.* I recall my first year teaching when I prepared a unit on pioneer days and had the students come dressed as pioneers. They made grey-looking buns, churned butter (or rather shook some cream in a jar until it turned to butter), crafted a small quilt, and did some square dancing. Mostly they just ran around laughing and yelling. At that time I didn't even think to include Aboriginal peoples in the history of the province because to me, First Nations and Métis peoples were invisible. I shudder slightly at the memory of my incompetence and turn off my computer trying to summon up the energy to go home. *Dance class tonight. Yay.*

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A couple of weeks later, Nancy Smith, a consultant from the Aboriginal Education Branch of the Department of Learning gives a guest lecture at my request to help clear up any remaining confusion about trying to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives. She tells the students a bit of her own history as an educator. She considers

herself bicultural and is comfortable in both worlds. She often asks the advice of Elders to help guide her in her role as a consultant.

The message she gives to the students is to get to know the community, teach only what you know, use a variety of resources and teaching methods, and have high expectations of the students. She also talks a bit about curriculum renewal and different approaches to curriculum as described by Banks (1999) and tells them that most of the guides show only a contributions approach. People at the Department are trying to rewrite the curriculums to make them transformative. Her final message is to have an open mind and try to see from another's perspective. To emphasize the point and bring a little humour to the discussion, Nancy passes out the script for a role play developed by a couple of her colleagues whose names I recognize. The role play is about an Aboriginal teacher who is teaching her Aboriginal students about a nutritious breakfast based on a traditional food, such as bannock with lard, which is eaten in some homes. The few non-Aboriginal students in the fictitious class are ridiculed for their breakfasts. The role play hits its mark as my students see how the non-Aboriginal students are stereotyped in the reverse roles. I can see some looks of disgust on a few people's faces at the thought of eating bannock with lard. *I guess some people will never get it. Too bad they're going to be teachers.*

At the end of Nancy's presentation a student thanks her and hands her the card they have all signed. Back in my office, I journal a bit about the presentation and read over the notes I had made about a workshop that I attended the previous week.

*I attended a workshop at a conference on incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives into the curriculum. It was conducted by a middle-class, young woman*

*(Métis, as she identifies herself) who did a PPT presentation with excerpts taken out of the curriculum and some statistics from Stats Canada about the growing Aboriginal population in the province. Her presentation style reminded me of mine on occasion. I don't know why I thought it would be different. She did have a number of beautiful books that depicted historical and contemporary First Nations, Métis, and some Native Americans as well as some beautiful posters on values that I would like to purchase. I thought there were numerous stereotypes in some of the resources, but I wonder if I am starting to see stereotypes in everything now as my awareness increases.*

*Anyway, I really wanted to hear her story, so I asked her how her experiences were reflected in the resources. I don't think she or anyone else knew what I was trying to get at. Maybe I didn't either. People who attended the workshop thought it was excellent, and I have to admit, the young woman was engaging and had a lot of information. I am still uneasy about what I saw as stereotypes though.*

*This young woman is a product of one of the TEP programs, so many of the graduates of these programs have been taught by non-Aboriginals in some cases. As a result, what is put forth as Aboriginal education sounds authentic to some people because the message is coming from Aboriginal people, but it is the same thing that has been taught by non-Aboriginals. The infamous "they" was used quite frequently as if she didn't identify with the children in the books at all—which she probably didn't.*

I sit back and laugh at myself upon realizing that I am one of those people whom Tom King (2003) makes fun of in his stories about Whites who have expectations about how Indians should look or act. Maybe I expected her teaching to be different, not the typical lecture like most of us give. I guess her teaching wasn't "Indian enough".

### ***Challenging Identities***

A new semester has begun and I ask the students to bring for the following day some artifacts that represent aspects of their identities. Students come with musical instruments, sports equipment, heirlooms, photographs, and various other items to show their classmates who they are. I bring in my gold ballroom dance shoes and pictures of my grandson and family. I begin by telling the class a story to illustrate the notion of multiple identities.

“I volunteer at one of the community schools once a week in a grade 1 classroom where most of the children are immigrants who don't speak English very well. The other day when the teacher introduced me, a little girl from Sudan looked at me quizzically and asked, ‘Are you a teacher?’ I told her yes, I was. And she said, ‘But you look like a grandma!’”

The class laughs sympathetically and I show them a picture of my grandson as well as my other artifacts. I realize the story is somewhat self-serving because I want to let my class know that I'm not a relic and as out of touch with the field as I suspect they think I am. Someone asks me (jokingly, I suspect) if I can salsa or tango and I say I can. That probably impresses them a little more than the fact that I volunteer in a grade 1 classroom, and hopefully it challenges their images of what a grandma does. “And I don't bake cookies,” I add.

*I wish I had thought to have them place their artifacts on the table and have each person take one and talk about the person they presume is represented by the artifact. That exercise would be similar to the one Sumara (Davis, et al., 2000) describes where he had his class write stories about each other's shoes. The point of the exercise was that*

*each person thought of themselves differently after they heard someone else's construction of their identities.*

I then give the students a "Flower Power" handout that has the picture of a flower with various petals representing different social roles. I ask them to discuss whether or not they have power with respect to each of these roles. The roles include gender, social class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, occupation, age, and so on. I also ask them to discuss who has the power in each of these areas if they don't perceive they have it. The students can identify who typically has the power and why and attribute the reasons to historical, social constructions that are still prevalent today. One young woman whose parents immigrated here from Jamaica tells how racism affects her. Even though she went to a private school and her family is quite wealthy, she is often watched by clerks in stores. She tells us that she was particularly angry when one of the young people for whom she is a voice coach in a musical theatre company said to her, "Well it's not hard for you Black people to sing. You have a natural ability."

Just before the class ends, one male student notes that the norms are changing and it is a disadvantage to be a White, middle-class male because of equity issues in hiring. He suggests that employers are feeling the pressure to give jobs to females and Aboriginals. For a moment the class sits there in stunned silence, presumably not knowing whether or how to respond. Then several females start talking at once, offering counter arguments to his. "White males have always had the best opportunities; it's time that other people did too!" "Employers look at the best person for the job, not what gender they are or skin colour. If it happens to be a female of colour, she gets it and it's



about time!” Unfortunately the conversation has to end there because another class is waiting outside the door.

Because I don’t see that group again for another week, I forget about the emotional debate that had started and I don’t pursue it again in the next class. I miss an important opportunity for some in-depth discussion about why the male student and many people like him think this way.

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That night the issue of identity causes me to lose some sleep. I think about what I have been teaching my students about identity and decide to journal for a bit.

*I remember hearing in a workshop that the way people identify themselves falls along a continuum depending on how closely they relate to their ethnicity. I then passed that same information along to my students. The facilitator (Cree/Métis) had drawn a chart on the board, which I also drew for my students, with the categories ranging from:*

*Traditionalists      Neo-traditionalists      Bi-cultural      Assimilated      Lost.*

*“The people who are lost—who have no sense of identity—are unfortunately the ones who are having the most difficult time in society and are the ones who fulfill every negative stereotype that mainstream society holds with regards to Aboriginal people,” is what the facilitator said, so I passed that along to my students as well.*

I blush a little, recalling the comments from Sherry, one of my committee members, when I introduced a similar model proposed by Schultz and Kroeger (1991, p. 16) in one of my comprehensive exams. Sherry wrote:

*In particular, Carol needs to be cautious about using the model from Schultz and Kroeger. The genealogies of these models often reveal that they do not emerge from indigenous people, but are constructions of non-Aboriginal scholars, that may be later applied or misapplied. The term "Assimilated" is a really loaded*

*and judgmental term. I have known many outwardly conservative people who were more knowledgeable of tradition than those who espouse to be "Traditional". To apply this highly problematic model seriously undermines Carol's discussion.*

*Maybe I shouldn't even be focusing on this topic for my dissertation. Am I perpetuating stereotypes by doing this? Am I continuing to make First Peoples the other by asking these questions? But what do I do about the ignorance that is perpetuated by schools? What did Sherry call it? Systemically-induced ignorance? I am a product of that system so I embody that ignorance too. What about well-educated Aboriginal educators? Are they contributing to the ignorance as well? St. Denis (2000) thinks so because they were educated by the dominant system. What questions should I be asking? I don't know, I don't know, I don't know.*

I get up to fetch an article I had found by Jean Paul Restoule (2000) in which he discusses issues of identity and identifying. He writes about a discussion he had with a woman in whose community there was no choice about identity—they were *Aboriginals*. But she felt there were more pressing issues to deal with than worrying about identity—drug abuse, AIDS, diabetes, unemployment, spousal abuse, and others. Restoule writes:

Her words had quite an impact on me. How can some of us talk about the struggle for identity when on a daily basis so many of us struggle just to survive? Is writing about these matters really helping to change anything? I keep coming back to this idea that some of the people in her community would hide their Aboriginality if they could. Understanding what influences our pride or shame in identifying as Aboriginal people is important. How we feel about ourselves contributes to and arises from the issues my colleague felt were more urgent to discuss than identity. They are entangled. Hence we must address all the issues simultaneously. I have seen examples where pride in Aboriginal identity is the basis for fighting addiction and where shame in identity is a factor in developing a habit of substance abuse (Restoule, 1999). It is important to explore what identifying as Aboriginal means and what is gained and lost in attempting to erase that identity, as well as what it means to change the referents of what is meant by Aboriginal identity.

I lie back on the pillow and think about how people are identified by others. *What about my identity? Like many educators in this country, I am female and have been taught to be nurturing, to give pastoral care. I am a product of a heritage that felt the missionary zeal to save Aboriginal people from hell, from ignorance, and now from oppression. I am cloaked in a White settler identity (Razack, 2002) that has given me a sense of entitlement to this land. After all, didn't my ancestors have to work hard to "tame" this land?* I think sardonically. I pick up the copy of *The Little White Schoolhouse*, (Charyk, 1968) and turn to pages I have marked.

*"The Little White Schoolhouse was the bulwark of civilization in a new and primitive land [italics added]. . . . If we as Canadians are to acknowledge ourselves as a nation we cannot ignore the part that the one-room school had in shaping this destiny. (pp. 2-3)*

*My grandmother taught in one of those schoolhouses. I still have the brass bell she used for calling the children. I remember her fear and dislike of Indians, too. I wonder how many children were influenced by teachers like her.*

I turn to another page that describes the visitors one teacher had after she had given some women from the nearby reserve some tobacco. "[F]or the most part, the squaws were always underfoot and from that time her teacherage was theirs. . . . The teacher finally accepted the Indians as a cross she had to bear" (pp. 220-221).

*I can certainly see where some of the attitudes we have today have come from. Even the title of the book is telling.*

*Granted, my White settler identity, from which the occasional racist thought springs at times, is part of who I am, but I have several identities that shape and are shaped by other people's identities depending on the context. Is this not the same for everyone? Or does the weight of one particular identity imposed on groups of people by*

*members of the dominant group crush the other intersecting, multiple identities? What about the people of mixed blood who face discrimination by both the First Nations and White communities (Lawrence, 2004)? Do we see people as sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, parents, artists, dancers, doctors, poets, musicians, and so on, or do we see only the identities that are not like us?*

*The newspaper (Blevins, 2005), for example, devoted a whole section to 17 young Métis and First Nations people and called them the “Chosen Ones”—chosen by the paper to illustrate that some of the province’s best and brightest young people have Aboriginal “blood flowing through their veins”(D2). Some of the people showcased included one of the province’s youngest doctors, a young Chief (who was one of my former Rec Tech students), artists, athletes, dancers, educators, musicians, scholars, and others. Would they have been showcased if they were not Aboriginal?*

*Undoubtedly the paper was trying to combat racism for it stated, “In today’s world, it should not matter what colour their skin is, how their last names are pronounced, from what socio-economic depths they have risen—and maybe someday it will not”(D2). If the paper’s intentions are so noble, I wonder why it frequently has stories that do not show Aboriginal people in such a positive light, where the language is either somewhat patronizing or filled with derogatory stereotypes as in the case of the articles related to the disappearance of 5-year-old Tamra Keepness?*

*What about Darryl Knight and other Aboriginal men who were said to have been dropped off outside of Saskatoon on cold winter nights by the police? The police only saw drunks who weren’t White.*

*What if you're an Aboriginal lesbian woman, or an Aboriginal woman prostitute like Pamela George who was brutally beaten and murdered by two White men, or an Aboriginal girl of 12 who was raped by three White men? What about all the Aboriginal women who have gone missing in the last few years (Amnesty International, 2004)? There doesn't seem to be a lot of public concern over these matters. It seems that having those identifiers means you're disposable, of no consequence, if your attackers are White and male. Some identifiers carry more significance than others I guess.*

*When I brought up these cases in class one day, one of the students said she went to school with one of the men who killed Pamela George and seemed to be almost excusing him, perhaps because she knew him. McNinch (2006) discusses how Kummerfield and Ternowetsky who murdered George in 1995 and Edmundson, Brown and Kindrat who were accused of raping a 12-year-old girl near Tisdale, seemed to be excused by both the defense layers and the media. The men were portrayed in the media and courts as normal "boys" who were caught in embarrassing situations or driven to commit these acts of violence because of alcohol. The females however, were portrayed as Indian sluts. What is even worse, the judge in the trial of three Tisdale men was the lawyer who defended the men who killed Pamela George! Racism is rampant in the judicial system, too.*

*As McNinch points out, because we live in a province with a small population that grew from White, European settlers, metaphorically, these men are the "brothers of my students with whom they share the same discourses and narratives" (§11). How then do I help my students come to terms with their privilege that allows such acts to be excused? How do I help my students identify with the other? My students are going to be the*

*parents and teachers of the future lawyers, judges, police officers, social workers, health care providers, bankers, politicians, business people, and educators. If I look at it that way, my responsibility is enormous.*

*I head to the fridge to pour a glass of milk. Good thing I only have milk in the house. These issues could drive me to drink.*

### ***Contesting Traditions***

During the following weeks and months the faculty becomes embroiled in a controversy around OCRE. Newer faculty members see no need for it and question its relevance, arguing that spending 2 to 3 days off campus with the whole group of Secondary preinterns is a waste of time and resources. Long-term faculty members stoically defend a practice that they see as necessary for helping students learn how to take education beyond the four walls of a classroom. Besides, they see OCRE as part of our identity as a faculty. Some people argue that doing OCRE the way it was done the previous year trivialized Aboriginal education and that the faculty should be concentrating on anti-racist education instead. Others feel that it is important for students to develop an appreciation for the Aboriginal cultures of the province, and because there is no mechanism in the Secondary Program for the students to develop those appreciations, OCRE is one way to do it. Besides these issues, the subcommittee is faced with finding a venue for OCRE because the facility we have used for years has shut down.

As a compromise, the OCRE subcommittee proposes that each subject area plan its own OCRE with the theme of cross-cultural education and/or anti-racist education

incorporated into their plans. At pre-and post-OCRE sessions, the subcommittee decides to have all the preinterns listen to a number of guest speakers who will give talks on the need for cross-cultural education, anti-racist education, and the importance of School<sup>PLUS</sup>.

At a subcommittee meeting, I say to the group, “I was talking with one of our faculty administrators who isn’t sure we should invite guest speakers to talk about cross-cultural and anti-racist education. I wasn’t able to ask why s/he felt this way because we were interrupted by the secretary.”

A couple of people on the committee are outraged that the administrator didn’t see the importance of this and one person states, “Well this important, so I say bring it on!”

*Oh no. I wish I could have determined the reasons for the administrator’s feelings regarding this. Maybe I am only serving to further divide the faculty.*

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After OCRE is over, the subcommittee reconvenes to look over the student evaluations and make recommendations for the following year. Student responses are generally positive except for one group of students who feel “ripped off” because they think too much time was spent indoors listening to guest speakers from the Aboriginal community. They would have preferred to go on a cultural camp and sleep outdoors in a tipi like some of the other students did. Some enjoyed the museum tours where they were able to clearly identify who is depicted and who is missing from the artifacts (very few Aboriginal people are shown in museums showing the province’s history, other than in the museum/cultural centre dedicated specifically to First Peoples), and they appreciated going on a tour that showed the racism toward the Chinese community who settled in the

area after they were no longer needed to build the railroad. Others liked their visits to schools where the number of Aboriginal students was high. Regarding the pre-and post-OCRE sessions, the students' evaluations are generally very positive.

"I think the students really enjoyed hearing Susan's story of how she became a teacher and eventually moved on to the Aboriginal Education Unit in the Department," I say to the group and they laugh in agreement remembering her easygoing manner and sense of humour as she related incidents that she and her family had encountered. "She got quite a laugh when she told the story of when her son's class had to dress in ethnic costumes to show the diversity of immigrants who came to this country, and he didn't know what to do because his ancestors didn't come from anywhere. I love it that she told him to dress in the outfit he wears for powwow dance competitions and greet his classmates at the door and say, 'Welcome to my land,'" I chuckle.

"Yes, and I think the students were quite surprised that she and her husband were told they were at the wrong school when they went to register their children at a school in the most affluent area of the city. It's typical that the secretary assumed they didn't live in that neighbourhood because they were Aboriginal," Bob adds.

"I think Connie and Ellie did a great job too," pipes in Judy. "Connie's talk about recognizing our privileges as Whites followed by Ellie's down-to-earth talk about ways to interact with people respectfully provided a nice balance of the theoretical and practical ways to address racism." Then Michael's talk about School<sup>PLUS</sup> was well-received, too." Everyone at the table agrees that having the guest speakers was helpful in raising students' awareness of issues related to racism, culture and working respectfully with communities.



“I’m surprised that Erica didn’t tell the students what it was like to be an Aboriginal student going to a predominantly White school,” I say. “I know she has some horror stories, but she kept it really low key and talked only about positive experiences. It made the students feel good, but it didn’t show the reality faced by most Aboriginal students.”

“I think I understand why now,” says Veronica, “and I think we made a huge mistake in asking her to do that. After all, she is only a preintern like they are and it could cause a backlash if she were to tell them things about themselves they don’t want to hear. I just read an article by Sherene Razack called, ‘The Gaze From the Other Side: Storytelling for Social Change’ from her book, *Looking White People in the Eye* (1999) where she talks about the difficulty people of colour have in sharing their stories in mixed racial groups.”

“Could I get a copy of that?” I ask.

“Sure, come to my office after the meeting and you can pick it up,” answers Veronica.

The meeting finally concludes with a recommendation to keep OCRE under the control of the various subject areas and keep a focus of Aboriginal and anti-racist education. We have a feeling the controversy isn’t over yet though.

I head to Veronica’s office to pick up the Razack (1999) book and make a copy of the article for myself. Back in my own office I read it as I sip on some coffee. Lines from two paragraphs in particular jump out and punch me in the gut:

I recall of trying clumsily to explain to a colleague that *we* (people of color) are always being asked to tell our stories for *your* (White people’s) edification, which you cannot *hear* because of the benefit you derive from hearing them. (p. 48)

Denied any other role but the role of the exotic Other, the woman of colour is condemned to representing herself as she is seen by the dominant group. (p. 52)

“We are so sorry, Erica,” I say aloud to the image of a brave young woman standing nervously on the stage in front of 120 of her classmates, and being expected to tell them they’re a bunch of racists. “We are so clueless sometimes.”

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“I have a present for you.” I turn around as Greg tosses me the ball of hardened tangled vines that he picked up from the craft store. I turn it over in my hands and immediately recognize its significance. “It’s everything!” Greg exclaims.

Greg is a senior faculty member who has the gift of making people laugh. But in recent years it seems to me his humour is laced with cynicism at times, frustrated perhaps by the feeling of not being taken seriously. On numerous occasions in faculty and program meetings, Greg has tried to bring home the importance of developing a holistic, integrated curriculum for teacher education that includes environmental education because, as he emphasizes, “Everything is interconnected. If we don’t start doing something about sustainability and soon, we’ll all be up the creek with no paddle.”

We talk briefly about our disappointment in the Secondary Program not taking our suggestion to change the name of the off-campus experience, OCRE, to PLACE – Professional Learning as Community Experiences. We think that the name change might detract from the negative feelings that some faculty members have towards OCRE. Besides, we recognize the significance of place to many indigenous communities (Cajete, 1994; Deloria, 1999) and thought it would help our students develop an understanding of how the notion of place is greatly tied to our identities (Hurren, 2003).

“Oh well, at least each of the subject areas are still going to take the students off-campus for learning in the community,” says Greg. “By the way, how’s the research coming?”

I hold up the tangled ball of vines. “Kind of like this,” I frown, thinking of Nespor’s (1997) challenge of trying to describe the tangled-upness of networks of larger social systems with individual subjectivities (cited by Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 119).

Greg laughs. “Well good luck. Gotta run.”

“Thanks for this,” I call after him as he scurries down the hall. I look at the ball.

*Hmm. Maybe I can use this in my class tomorrow somehow.*

### ***Teaching Passions***

“Good morning, gentlemen. How did your classes go?” I ask of the other three instructors who are teaching Education Professional Studies (EPS) in the preinternship year of the Secondary Education program. I pour them the coffee I have made as we gather around the table in the staff lounge for our weekly meeting.

“You don’t have to wait on us,” says Jack.

“Isn’t that my role as a woman?” I laugh.

The conversation soon turns to the Teaching with Passion modules we have just finished and the students’ evaluations of them<sup>19</sup>.

“It looks like most of the students’ comments are very positive,” says Les. He proceeds to share some of these. “But I have one student who says he didn’t learn

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<sup>19</sup> The Teaching with Passion Modules refers to the seminars the instructors conducted with each section of preinterns. Topics focused on our particular passions related to issues in social justice: Students with Special Needs; Gay, Lesbian Bisexual, and Trans-gendered Youth; Global and Environmental Issues, and Schools as Oppressive Sites.

anything and thinks all the presentations were too biased.” We all laugh, knowing the modules were absolutely biased.

“I don’t think they understand yet that everyone is biased. Many still think the teacher has to be objective,” Doug observes.

“I think some of the students were definitely out of their comfort zones,” says Jack.

“That’s for sure,” I interject. “We had quite a discussion in my section about supporting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Trans-gendered students when the teachers’ religious beliefs don’t agree with their so-called lifestyle, whatever that is supposed to be. Many students talked about Jack’s session being extremely valuable in that they had never realized the discrimination that some students face because of their sexual orientation. But a couple of my students felt we should be teaching just the curriculum and not concerning ourselves with these other things—except for the needs of students with disabilities. They really liked your presentation, Les, and want to learn more about ways to adapt the curriculum and instruction for students with special needs. I think this topic was safer in that they saw it as more practical and not so political—not that you didn’t do a fabulous job too, of course!” I reach over and poke Les. He laughs and fires back a comment to me.

I continue. “For my sessions I could tell a number of students were really interested in global and environmental issues, but the body language of some people told me they did not like what they were hearing. Some people seemed particularly agitated when I suggested that maybe we shouldn’t be driving SUVs or supporting companies that have sweat shops in other parts of the world, or that maybe we should move more to

organic farming and eat less meat. That last part really got a rise out of students whose families are farmers and ranchers. I suppose I went on a bit of a rant too,” I admit.

“I felt the same in my sessions,” pipes in Doug. “I was trying to help them see that schools are really violent places—not so much in the physical sense—but in the sense that they don’t allow people to be safe if they are different in any way. I think some students got it, but most had good school experiences and couldn’t relate to what I was saying.”

“Well isn’t that the reason that the majority of our students are here? They want others to have the same success stories they had in high school. Our whole selection process ensures that only the students who were successful in the system make it into our programs.” We voice our agreement to Jack’s observation and go on with the meeting.

“Oh, remember that we are combining two sections for Bill’s presentation on Aboriginal epistemology on Monday and again on Wednesday. I’ll get the handouts copied that he wants the students to read,” I remind the others as we start to wrap up the meeting.

“I think we should probably do a follow-up with the students after his session,” suggests Jack. “I have heard that he focuses on culture and traditional knowledge and I know our colleagues who believe we should be focusing on anti-racist education and White privilege think his views border on essentialism. We’ll have to help the students negotiate those two perspectives,” Jack says. We agree and gather up our materials to end the meeting.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Contesting Stories

When educators refuse to foretell who students are supposed to be and become, students are invited to explore many possible ways of learning and being. Students are not forced to merely repeat the teachers' expectations for them, which is a process that denies students their agency and limits the possibilities of change to what is imaginable within the partial knowledge of the teacher. Rather, students are invited to take responsibility for their own learning and to do the labor necessary to find and create identities and relationships with a teacher who expects only multiple, shifting ways of learning and being. (Kumashiro, 2002 Teaching against Repetition section, ¶ 11)

#### *Negotiating Perspectives*

He stands at the front of the room waiting for the two classes of Secondary Education students to find seats and settle down. A PowerPoint presentation is set up and a guitar case sits upon the table.

I introduce Bill as someone who has developed a number of modules related to Aboriginal education and say that he will be talking to them about Aboriginal epistemology and its relevance for teaching. After the polite applause, Bill apologizes for misleading the students somewhat. "I know I had you read an article on Aboriginal epistemology (Ermine, 1995), but what I really want to talk about today is identity and understanding other perspectives. You see my guitar case? Right away you have made some assumptions about me—possibly that I am a singer—because this signifies a particular identity." He talks a bit more about identity and the role of language in the production of identities then picks up the guitar. Soon Bill's audience is captivated by a beautiful song sung in Spanish, which he somehow manages to link to his topic.

Bill then relates a bit of his life: of coming to Canada and meeting his wife, Joan, who is a Cree woman from Northern Ontario, and of being adopted as a Cree man by an uncle in his wife's family. He then talks about injustices in the world and draws similarities between the Holocaust in Germany and the holocaust of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

As I listen to Bill, I wonder how many people know about Bill's and Joan's work with the Sierra Club and the government as they tried to stop DeBeers from expanding an open-pit diamond mine on her home reserve. I think of the conversation I had with them one evening as they told me about the environmental assessment auditors who were hired by the mining company to say there would be little environmental impact; of the little compensation her Band received for the land that will be destroyed for generations to come, thus effectively starving her people; of trying to get the company or some government department to do something about the sludge the company dumped into the community's sewage system causing sewage to back up into and out from under people's homes, yet the health inspector said it was "grey water". *I'll bet those stories would shake up some of these students for sure.*

I look around the room to observe the students' faces. Most of the students look interested, some look quizzical as if they want to ask a question, some people show no expression, and three young women have slight smirks on their faces and are making eye contact with each other. I watch one young man whose ball cap is covering his eyes but who is leaning forward staring at the floor as his knee pops up and down giving the impression that he's greatly agitated. Another young man is sleeping. I notice my own

*This must be in response to some of the criticism he said he has been getting for being essentialist. I think his views are balanced. Maybe I don't understand the meaning of essentialism. I thought it meant ascribing a fixed essence or identity to a group, yet indigenous groups talk about their cultures being dynamic and changing.*

Bill also tells the students that in Canada there are many different Aboriginal cultures with their own beliefs, languages and traditions, but that there are some common threads that run through the beliefs of traditional indigenous cultures throughout the world thus tying them together (Cajete, 2000). These include beliefs such as the importance of the land and place, the interconnectedness and sacredness of all living things and the reverence for the Earth; the importance of language, and the necessity for balance in life—spiritual, physical, social/emotional, and mental. The main message I hear is that students shouldn't be assuming they can incorporate Aboriginal content into their lesson plans, because they will get it wrong. He advises students to become involved in the community and to use resource people whenever they can. The overall message seems to be to have an open mind, to try to see from another's perspective, to only teach what you know, and to stand up against injustices. I notice that his message is the same as the message from Aboriginal people at the Department of Learning and Elders who have spoken to the students.

During the question period, I ask Bill whether he thinks it's a good idea to bring in an Elder if teachers are working in an urban school where students and their families have no real ties to their traditional heritage or where there are mixed cultures. Furthermore, many of the students don't see any relationship between their heritage and



their lives, and they are under intense pressure to conform to the group (Cleary & Peacock, 2000; Currie & Tymchak, 2003; Reid, 2001).

Bill replies that he thinks it is a good idea because students will identify with something, and it is better to identify with an Elder than with a gang. "Maybe something will click," he says. *Makes sense to me. I wonder why some people criticize his views?*

After the lecture is over and we're leaving the room, I approach the student who had been looking agitated the whole time.

"So what did you think of that?" I ask.

"Well, I don't want to be disrespectful, but I don't see why we have to listen to a White guy talking about Aboriginal epistemology. Shouldn't we be having an Aboriginal person doing that?"

"I think he has some pretty good insights into it, considering he has been adopted into a Cree community, but he didn't talk about epistemology very much. Did you hear some of the other things he said?" I ask.

"Not really. I guess I wasn't paying much attention because I didn't think a White guy should be doing that," he says. "Sorry." I watch him walk away as he plugs the ear buds for his mp3 player into his ears.

*I wish this course weren't graded as pass/fail. I wonder if I could fail him for that attitude.*

Just then another student, Stacey, who is the daughter of an administrator at one of community schools where I conducted a focus group, stops me.

“That was really interesting, she says, “but I still have so many questions. I mean, on whose terms are we educating Aboriginal students? Even with all the great programs in School<sup>PLUS</sup> schools, whose agenda is it?” Stacey is really wound up.

“Well hopefully it’s a shared agenda. It sounds as if the staff at your dad’s school for example, are working collaboratively with the people from the reserves to ensure their children receive a good education.”

“Yes, but aren’t we still trying to get Aboriginal students to succeed so they can be like us, so they can be productive members of society?” she says emphasizing “productive”.

“That’s a difficult question,” I say, “but here comes someone who might be able to help you,” I say as I see Sonia coming toward us. Bill is tied up in a conversation with another student so I wave Sonia over.

“Sonia, this is Stacey. She’s really interested in Aboriginal education and anti-racist education and has a lot of questions. Could you talk with her? I have to run to my next class.”

“Sure, I’d be happy to. Come on to my office,” Sonia says to Stacey and smiles back at me as I mouth a thank you to her.

As I make my way to the next class, I think about Stacey’s questions. *She’s struggling with the same issues I did when I left that school 15 years ago—and I still don’t have the answers. I wonder what Sonia will have to say?*

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Because Sonia is a storyteller, I invite her to come into one of my classes and tell her own story. She agrees. From the moment Sonia enters and begins to speak until she walks out the door an hour later, she has the students spellbound.

The students' eyes follow her around the classroom and they hang on her every word. She has them laughing and crying as she relates some of the ridiculous things that happened to her as she was growing up. For example, when she was in Grade 1, a teacher asked Sonia if her mother would come to the class and teach them to do beadwork. Sonia replied, "My mom doesn't do beadwork, but she does social work. Would that be OK?"

She tells another story about not being able to play sports with her male friends as a teenager any longer, because one of the boy's parents assumed Sonia would get her son into trouble by getting pregnant. She has other stories of spending time in the university library as her dad worked on a law degree and her mom worked on her social work degree; and of gatherings around her kitchen table as her parents and their friends laid the groundwork for establishing organizations such as the National Indian Brotherhood.

She warns the students that often when they learn about the injustices done to Aboriginal peoples, they are filled with GAS—guilt, anger, and shame, but then they have to move on but use the memory of those emotions to work against injustices. One of my students leans over and whispers to me, "I thought she was going to say generalizations, assumptions, and stereotypes."

"That too," I whisper back.

Sonia also tells the students that rather than feeling overwhelmed and helpless when challenging systemic oppression, they do have certain "zones of control" that help to create a climate of respectful, collaborative relationships in communities. For example,

they have choices regarding the instructional strategies and resource materials they use, how they evaluate students, how they treat their students, what they put on the walls of their classrooms and school hallways and how they communicate with parents. Sonia tells the students the story of a principal who learned the language of the community and by doing so showed tremendous respect.

I can tell by the students' reactions that Sonia's stories evoke numerous emotions that have etched her implied messages into their ways of being. I know her stories will remain with them as teachers and hopefully they will never make the same mistakes her teachers did.

### *Silencing Voices*

I lie in bed still wrestling with guilt from an incident that happened earlier in the day. I get up and try to exorcise the demon by writing it away. I write a story filled with the vivid detail and raw emotions of the incident and try to show both my student's and my points of view. *It's a good story*, I tell myself. *But wait a minute. Good for whom? Who will benefit from it? Me? Is this simply a self-confessional tale (Van Manen, 1990) that will provide some needed therapy? Is it self-serving in that it might make the dissertation more interesting? Will others who read it benefit by learning from my mistakes? Will my student benefit if she reads it? Will she be hurt by it? Would it be ethical?*

Reluctantly, I delete the story. Without giving away any details that could identify the student, I will just tell you that the story had to do with my pushing my political

agenda on the class butting up against a student's religious beliefs. She had the courage to call me on it.

As I sit at my computer, I recall a similar story I had written the previous year. I open the file to read it and decide to use it because the student is not so identifiable, and she represents any number of students in the faculty. Besides, the wounds from this story are not so raw.

*April 15 - On Religious and Other Points of View*

*At the end of each semester, EPS instructors hold conversations with students about their professional growth over the year and what they want to work on improving during internship. I had a conversation with one student today, J, who, at the beginning of the academic year had a very positive attitude toward teaching, but who, by the end of the second term, seemed sullen, withdrawn, and angry. The crossed arms and legs, the non-engagement in class discussions, the downcast eyes seemed to indicate she wasn't buying what I was selling. I asked her about the change I had observed over the course of the two semesters.*

*She admitted that at one point she had wanted to quit—partly because she was getting married in the summer and school just wasn't a priority, but also because she was tired of having other peoples' views forced on her. I invited her to elaborate on that, but she said she didn't care to do so.*

*I can only assume it has to do with her political and religious beliefs which are decidedly more conservative than the views expressed by most faculty members and probably most students. J and a few of her classmates frequently sent inspirational Christian messages via e-mail to their classmates and instructors and often complained*

*about the lack of prayer and religion in public schools. Most of my colleagues and myself, as far as I can tell, are for human rights, including gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered members of society; and (ironically) we are for freedom of religion and freedom from discrimination based on race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation. Many of us are also against American foreign policy in the Middle East and other parts of the world.*

*I remember one particular incident that seemed to mark the beginning of J's (and other students') change in attitude—toward me at least. We were discussing the war in Iraq and whether or not it was justified. (Perhaps this was a little out of the scope of my course syllabus but I told myself that we are all affected by and can affect various events in the world, but that our role as teachers is to critique these events and try to act in ways that work for the common good—and even for their own good. I often gave them information about upcoming peace marches and public lectures related to the war.) The class seemed to be split fairly equally—among the vocal students at least—in their opinions of the American President who ordered the war. A pretty heated debate ensued but I tried to stay out of it and just facilitate the discussion.*

*Anyway, J said—and several agreed with her—that at least the President stood for family values. I could hardly stand it anymore. I jumped in and said, "How could someone who stands for family values and families order the bombing of cities and consider the deaths of innocent children and their parents to be collateral damage? And what about the young men and women who have to leave their families and risk their lives to fight in a war they don't even support? " By jumping into the discussion, I*

*effectively silenced the class. I could tell that some felt that their side had won while others sat in stony silence.*

*I wish I were more skilled at facilitating such value-laden discussions that often feel like mine fields. I don't want to silence students and build up resentments and anger. That just undermines everything we are trying to do in our programs to promote social justice. How do we go beyond the idea that our views are the correct ones and it's our job to make the students see and agree with those views? Where is the dialogue, the dialectical theory that is supposed to arise from disparate points of view? How does one assist others in being able to hear anything but their own shouting? How do I do that for myself? Our programs have numerous students who come from conservative Christian backgrounds whereas many faculty members, including myself, have been strongly influenced by the writings of critical theorists and feminist scholars who represent the left end of the political spectrum. I had a student complain one year that he thought faculty members here couldn't see any other points of view and that we were trying to brain-wash future teachers.*

*Perhaps he is right. Despite our rhetoric about basing our programs on the assumptions of poststructuralism and decolonization theory which are supposed to allow for multiple perspectives, multiple voices, and help students identify issues of power and privilege, some students and faculty members have felt effectively silenced by those who are perceived as having stronger, more acceptable voices when the views differ. How is it we can talk about power and privilege to our students yet render them powerless?*

I lean back in my chair and think of the numerous conversations some of us have had over the years concerning the religious views of students, believing that these views

interfere with the anti-oppressive education agenda that we are trying to offer. *That reminds me of an article Monica gave me on the topic.* I dig it out of my files and read it again, this time with more attention. The article, “Liberation Theology and Liberatory Pedagogies: Renewing the Dialogue” by Sherry J. Stenberg (2006), speaks to many of the concerns voiced by students and faculty members. As Stenberg states:

in academic culture, religious ideologies are often considered hindrances to—not vehicles for—critical thought. This feeling may be especially true in regard to Christianity, which is often conflated with conservative politics and fundamentalism both in and outside the academy. But those of us who espouse critical pedagogy and embrace Paulo Friere’s visions of praxis and conscientization, work out of a tradition, often unknowingly, with deep ties to religious faith. (p.271)

She argues that students are complex subjects and that their “spiritual identity is the most defining component of their social locations” (p.272). It therefore “makes sense to discover ways to value and build upon students’ faith-based knowledge, rather than asking them to overcome these backgrounds” (p.272). Stenberg suggests that finding commonalities among religious and critical projects might be the better way to serve religious students.

The author goes on to discuss the similarities between Christianity and the liberation theology of Friere, as both have histories of working against oppression and toward freedom and justice for all. The “prophetic tradition”, which seems to be synonymous with “liberation theology”, combines faith and justice and sees the “teacher-as-prophet” who “serves as a social guide to reconfigure and transform culture” and is both “gut-wrenchingly critical of social surroundings” and one “who passes on a message of transformative hope” (Kanpol, 1996, p.112, cited by Stenberg, p. 274). Liberation theology also includes praxis: action and reflection. “That is, within liberation theology,



there can be no distinction between theory and practice. Truth is something to be done” (Stenberg, p.274). She points to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi as examples of people who combined critique, hope, and action.

Stenberg goes on to argue several points suggesting that critical thought is a form of rationality and there are historical reasons why it has become being privileged in the academy; that religious students often feel alone and marginalized, so they either reject the discourse or hide their religious identities; and that criticism is a vehicle for social transformation, but it would be better to begin from a place of compassion and solidarity with students while at the same time “engaging in ongoing self-reflection of oneself and one’s pedagogy that may hinder liberatory goals” (pp. 283, 284).

I think of the many articles I have read by critical theorists and I have to agree with Stenberg’s assertion that critical theorists provide no framework to guide the changes they advocate, while giving lip service to transforming society and spending more time in critique rather than participating in the transformation. Similarly, like Stenberg and some of the faculty members I interviewed, I believe that it is important to acknowledge the emotive responses that often accompany investigations of issues related to social justice. Stenberg insists that “compassion and love are essential ingredients for critical work” (p.286).

In summary, Stenberg reminds us that discussions of love, compassion, and faith are likely to feel risky and messy, but we need not to only critique, but to validate; not only to deconstruct, but also to reconstruct. She suggests the goals of liberatory education should include: “valuing student knowledge, enacting a reciprocal teacher-student

relationship, enriching critique with both compassion and action, and participating in ongoing reflection and revision” (p.289).

Stenberg’s hard-hitting article is all too familiar. I recognize the students who have felt marginalized because of their religious beliefs, and others for what most of us would consider their racist beliefs. I recognize that I am complicit in that marginalization. But I also think of faculty members who feel silenced by criticism for the ways they have tried to create bridges of understanding between our students and some First Nations communities by taking students to reserves or having Elders talk with them. Then there are those with whom I have talked who felt criticized for wanting to talk about their cultures. As one of my colleagues says, “We have become so invested in our theories. People who talk from experience are being silenced by the people who are supposed to be defenders of the voiceless.”

The thought of presenting at an upcoming conference entitled the Race/Culture Divide weighs heavily on me. The title itself and the call for papers give the impression that one had better be on the “correct” side of that argument. But why does there have to be a divide; a correct way of thinking about this? Is this not one of those binaries that we are so fond of critiquing? Why can’t we have *both-and* thinking instead of *either-or* (Moore, 2002)? Do I dare be a dissenting voice and try to show both sides?

I would suggest that same argument could be applied to learning about different faith traditions. As anti-oppressive educators are quick to point out, we all have multiple, intersecting identities with identifiers that can detract from or enhance our social positioning, depending on the context. These include, but are not exclusive to race, culture, social and economic status, religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, age, and

ability. Why then are we so quick to judge, deny, or ignore some of these identifiers and not others? Even when I think a person's point of view is absolutely wrong and oppressive, even though I know that Christianity is closely linked to colonialism and imperialism, by trying to impose what I think is right on others, am I not also guilty of imperialism?

Charlotte's words come to mind. "I think the issue is that the other is always the same as us and always different. I am like you and I am not like you. As long as I focus only on the difference, or as long as I focus only on the sameness, I miss a lot."

A comment by a student last semester really reinforces Stenberg's argument that we rarely practise what we preach when it comes to social justice. "We hear lots about social justice and engaging in transformative citizenship, but we don't see it modelled by our professors. Why aren't we writing letters as a class to our MPs? Why aren't we volunteering in some of the organizations that help the poor?" I didn't have an answer for her. Perhaps we *are* paralyzed by critique as Stenberg points out; paralyzed by the self-righteous drug that is produced when we feel we are doing something by simply raising awareness—the "paralysis of analysis".

In my quest to promote social justice, I tried to help students feel empathy for those victimized by oppression. I recall feeling angry therefore, when Monica first suggested I read an article entitled, "The Risks of Empathy. Interrogating Multiculturalism's Gaze" (Boler, 1999) because it challenged my assumption that empathy (not sympathy) was a good thing. I believed that empathy helps us see through others' eyes, allow us to "walk a mile in their moccasins", feel what they feel, experience

what they experience. But then, I have to ask myself whether we can we ever really do that.

It turns out that the article talks about our collective guilt when we hear stories of the Holocaust—and I extend that to the holocaust of Aboriginal peoples that happened in our own country. But Boler's argument is that emotion and guilt just allow us to distance ourselves from the horrors others suffer, all the while giving us the sense that because we can feel this pain, we are doing something. She says we “keep secrets from ourselves through the numb consumption of another's suffering, grateful for distances that seem to confirm our safety” (p.172). Boler suggests that our emotions, our “inscribed habits of inattention”, are not enough. Neither is historical knowledge. Instead we are asked to explore the origins of cruelty and “meet the text with [our] own testimony, rather than using the other as a catalyst or a substitute for oneself” (p.172).

Boler's arguments remind me that we do indeed, need to look at ourselves rather than “gaze” at the other. In my mind, however, she is confusing empathy with voyeurism, or perhaps sympathy. Implicit in my understanding of empathy is a call for action, for a response. As Sonia told my class, “Once you have heard another person's story, you can never be the same.” And while I agree that we need to interrogate ourselves, our histories and how we are implicated in such unimaginable acts of horror, without the catalyst of emotions, without the empathy, without the recognition that our lives are intertwined with others, I seriously doubt whether a rational analysis of these atrocities would motivate most people to do anything that isn't self serving. Perhaps empathy combined with courage in action is what is called for. In other words, it calls for great love.

I am also reminded of what Mary said of her volunteer work in the community. “It doesn’t bother me much if someone accuses me of it coming from my Christian background. I can’t help my background and I don’t think it matters where it comes from, as long as it’s there.” Mary is one who walked the talk and wasn’t paralyzed by critique. And then there is Ellie who received a prestigious honour from the Lieutenant Governor for her community work. She is fond of saying, “Those who do, do. Those who don’t, just talk about it.” Perhaps it’s her way of trying to mobilize more of us into action.

As I once again consider how we approach different views that seem to be working against justice and equality, the phrase, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink” comes to mind. Similarly as Charlotte says, I have to leave students room to find the need to change; I have to make opportunities and *invite*, but I also have to understand that many won’t and that they are supported in that “I won’t”, just as I am supported in my wish to do. But I can’t *make* them. As soon as I am prescriptive about this instead of descriptive, I get resistance.” Similarly, Dan Butin (2005) reminds us that:

The classroom should not be viewed as a neutral site conducive to knowledge transfer but as a space of constant negotiation embedded within complex and overlapping layers of assumptions, practices, and structures. This suggests that we take the act of student resistance seriously. It is something that faculty must analyze rather than avoid, ignore, or attempt to simply push through.¶ 8

As I write my journal entry about my experiences over the past year, (See Appendix C), I think of the motto of the new Middle Years program that is intended to help students develop the skills and attitudes to teach for social justice: *Critique, Hope, Action*. Am I *prescriptive* rather than *descriptive*? Do I describe what social justice looks like through my actions and through my relationships? Am I modeling the motto rather

than just mouthing it? Perhaps not yet. I am a work in progress though, and I'm learning from all who touch my life—even if I don't agree with them.

### ***Disrupting Culture(s)***

The semester has ended, the papers and projects have been graded, and the first draft of my dissertation is nearly complete. Now, however, I must now change my focus and prepare for a presentation I have agreed to give at an upcoming national conference hosted by our university. I feel somewhat resentful as I head to my office preferring to focus my attention on finishing the dissertation.

The conference is entitled the Race/Culture Divide where a number of scholars from across Canada in several disciplines including, education, human rights, law, medicine and social work are presenting arguments against educating for cultural differences as a way to promote equity and social justice. I recall my thoughts when I saw the call for papers. *I wonder why the title is set up as a binary? Why does there have to be a divide? The slash is interesting. Perhaps I need to ride down the slash and explore that space between the words, the 'intertextual' space of 'ambiguity,' 'ambivalence' and 'uncertainty' (Aoki, 2003; Hurren, 2003). It is in the exploration of this space that new understandings may arise.*

I meet two colleagues coming down the hallway and ask whether they are going to the conference. One person replies, "No, I live with race and culture every day. It's interesting to be the *object* of social justice."

"That's interesting," I say. "Someone else said they didn't appreciate being positioned as the 'Other' by anti-racist discourse. I want to show the different points of

view in the presentation I'm supposed to give on teaching for social justice in our new Middle Years Program." My colleagues wish me *bon chance* and disappear into the elevator.

Back in my office I stare at my computer trying to articulate my thoughts. *I think anti-racist education is extremely important and necessary, but as Butin (2005, ¶5) suggests, "Put simply, the teaching for social justice often prevents the learning of social justice." Maybe we've taught our students too well and they are turning the critique on us. But I sometimes wonder whether the message isn't lost in the medium. Or perhaps the medium is becoming the message and some people are seeing anti-oppressive education as another form of oppression. I certainly felt that message from some faculty members and students—and not just the students on the Christian right.*

I look through various books and articles I have gathered such as Butin's (2005) article, "I Don't Buy It. Student Resistance, Social Justice and Identity Construction"; Ellworth's (1989) article, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy"; Garoian's (1999) *Performing Pedagogy. Toward an Art of Politics*; Grande's (2004) book, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social And Political Thought* and Calderón's (2006) review of it; Howard's (1999) book, *You Can't Teach What You Don't Know* (1999); Kumashiro's (2004) book, *Against Common Sense* and his article, "Against repetition: Addressing resistance to anti-oppressive change in the practices of learning, teaching, supervising, and researching" (2002); and Stenberg's (2006) "Liberation Theology and Liberatory Pedagogies: Renewing the Dialogue."

I search for quotations to support my arguments which are:

- That critical pedagogy, which is based on Western rationality, reinforces power dynamics in classrooms and can actually work against what we are trying to do (Bowers, 1995; Butin, 2005; Ellsworth, 1989; Kumashiro, 2002; & Stenberg, 2006). Ellsworth for example, argues “that the key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to the literature on critical pedagogy—namely ‘empowerment,’ ‘student voice,’ ‘dialogue,’ and even the term ‘critical’—are repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination” (1989, p. 298). Ellsworth’s arguments are supported by a number of other scholars such as Bowers (1995), Butin, (2005); Ellis (2004), Kumashiro (2002), and Stenberg, (2006) who believe it is problematic when educators continue to privilege rationality without questioning ways that it can perpetuate oppressive social relations. Students have often argued that instructors espouse the deconstruction of power relationships, yet fail to recognize ways in which they attempt to control students.
- That by privileging critical pedagogy and ignoring or challenging the concerns/beliefs/values of students, I am creating barriers between myself and the students. This barrier makes it difficult for them to be willing or able to hear what I am trying to get across. As Stenberg (2006) states, “Because of this potential threat to their identities, students whose values and knowledge are dismissed by critical approaches may do one of two things: reject them entirely and resist the pedagogy or, if they want to be accepted within a new discourse community, keep that identity closeted” (p. 279). I saw examples of these two responses among several Christian students who believed that our program has a “left wing” agenda.



- That the rhetoric of “blame and shame” Whites, locks people into “resistance and self-protection rather than responsible reflection” (Howard, 1999, p. 110).  
Furthermore, “the analytical approach of ‘Whiteness-equals-oppression’ will merely serve to alienate White educators (and preservice teachers) rather than inspire them to become co-responsible for positive change” [parentheses added] (p. 111). This was evident in student responses to different articles on White privilege, and in the responses by some faculty members when criticized for trying to promote cross-cultural understanding.
- That critical theory seems to provide plenty of critique, but few suggestions for how we might develop alternative ways of doing/knowing/being. As a result, people often feel overwhelmed and paralyzed. (Howard, 1999; Stenberg, 2006). For example, Stenberg (p. 286) notes, “Too often students are asked to engage in deconstruction and critique for the sake of critique without being asked to imagine new possibilities for change. The result is often paralysis leaving them asking ‘What now?’ and ‘How?’” My students (and I) have often asked these same questions.
- That those of us who engage in critique must also engage in actions that model what we espouse. As Stenberg notes, because “critical theorists do not want to be labeled as *technocratic strategists*, *essentialists*, or *pragmatic*, [emphasis in original] they offer no clear plan or normative framework to guide the changes they advocate. In many senses, despite the validity of their critique, critical theorists have become stymied by an intolerance of praxis” (p. 286)). This was evident to some students who wondered why professors didn’t model the actions they were telling students to undertake. That there are numerous ways to engage people in the struggle against

oppression and one of the most powerful is through the performing arts. As Gorian (1999, p. 10) suggests, “performance art pedagogy resists cultural conformity and domination by creating discourses and practices that are multicentric, participatory, indeterminate, interdisciplinary, reflexive and intercultural. In doing so, performance art pedagogy is the praxis of postmodern theory<sup>20</sup>.” It also seems to me that the arts speak a language that the whole body understands.

*I’m pretty sure that these views aren’t going to be too popular at this conference. I wonder how I can present this paper in a way that I won’t get into a lot of trouble. “I am Canadian. I don’t like conflict and I’m proud of it!”* I momentarily imagine myself standing on a bar brandishing a beer glass and shouting my philosophy to anyone who will listen. I turn to the knock on the door to see Melanie, one of my former students.

“Hi, Carol,” she says. “Do you know anything about the Race/Culture Divide conference that is coming up? I’m thinking of attending it.” I tell her I do and give her the registration information. We chat for a bit about how the semester went, about her young children, and her plans for the summer. Suddenly I have an idea.

“How would you like to present with me at the conference?” I ask. I tell her the main points that I want to emphasize, and that I’d like to do it in a creative way (probably because I think that if I use humour, people might be more open to what I have to say). I

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<sup>20</sup> I witnessed a powerful example of this as one of my preinterns, engaged a group of Grade 7 and 8 students in Forum Theatre to address issues of bullying in their classroom and school. According to their teacher this class had always been regarded as the “misfits” by the rest of the school. By the end of the preintern’s field placement however, the young students performed moving dramatizations, poetry and narratives that had emerged from their experiences and their engagement with Forum Theatre. They also acted as facilitators in conducting a Forum Theatre workshop with the preintern’s classmates. As one of the Grade 8’s said proudly afterward, “This is the first time we’ve ever worked together on anything.”

also tell her I'll pay her registration fees. Melanie enthusiastically agrees. We decide to role-play a conversation between us where she tries to bring out some of the concerns expressed by her classmates. Because one of her previous degrees was in Drama, she feels excited about the prospect. We set a time to meet and discuss what we will do.

To set up the conversation between us, I write a short play to satirize the various approaches teachers have used for teaching *about* the 'Others'. One of the characters is racist, another is patronizing and uses a 'food, dance and celebrations' approach, and another assumes that raising children's self esteem and teaching them skills to fit in with the dominant group is the answer. These approaches have been critiqued in our courses in our attempts to help students understand how inequities persist. The guiding metaphor for the play is Spence's (1973) comparison of culture to a steamship. Spence states:

The culture of a people may be compared with a great steamship moving across the surface of the ocean. We see only the superstructure and a little of the hull. We see only those activities of the ship's company which they choose to display. That which determines their course, and the motive power that drives the ship is hidden from sight below decks. (Spence, 1973, p. 56)

The play takes place on a large ocean liner 200 years into the future after the polar ice caps have melted. I want to show how the Others in the play have been ridiculed, patronized and excluded and that not much has changed in over two hundred years. We are still arguing about the best way to teach the Others, but we have also neglected what we are doing to the planet.

Scene Two of the play is intended to show how and why my attempts at anti-oppressive education have met with resistance by some students. Through a conversation between Melanie and me in the play, we plan to bring out Melanie's main points, which

she contributes to the scene. Her points are based around 3 organizing themes: critique, hope and action: Melanie's arguments include:

#### Critique

- I have a better understanding of how to choose materials that provide the students with more perspectives, the voices of those often unheard.
- My actions have a political and moral impact. I am shaping students' experiences and therefore influencing their views.
- I and other White people have unearned privileges.

#### Hope

- I feel like I have lost hope. My religious/political perspective is not valued.
- If I share it I feel I might be viewed and marked negatively.
- This perspective assumes that with more education, more readings, more listening that I will adopt a left wing agenda.
- Who's to say I am White? I'm not. Does my father want to be saved? Why do you devalue his "being" the way he is if he doesn't want to be saved?
- If White is privileged, what am I and other non-White learners?
- There is an age gap, you have more experience, but you expect us to know what you have taken years to learn.
- We are growing up in a different generation that is more accepting of difference
- Scare me off now I won't do this!

#### Action

- What do you want me to do with this? [anti-racist information]
- You give us this theory that you expect will trickle down to our classrooms.
- What does this look like in a classroom?
- Do I tell my White students that they are responsible for oppression? Are my non-White students exempt from responsibility?
- I will make this my OWN and this is what it looks like to me. An ethic of caring and respect. An attempt at presenting and listening to multiple perspectives. Yes, some personal reflection of power, but a focus on how that power can be used to help emancipate ourselves and others from oppression.

Melanie is enthusiastic about the play and is pleased I am willing to incorporate a number of different students' perspectives and concerns including her own in my presentation. Feeling buoyed and enthusiastic about our play, we decide to enlist the help of another of Melanie's classmates. I feel somewhat confident about what I have to say now.

## CHAPTER IX

### Revitalizing Stories

While the mass of the people maintain intact traditions which are completely different from those of the colonial situation, and the artisan style solidifies into a formalism which is more and more stereotyped, the intellectual throws himself in frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavourably criticizing his own national culture, or else takes refuge in setting out and substantiating the claims of that culture in a way that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive. (Fanon, 1994, p. 45-46)

#### *Changing Assumptions*

The day of the conference, people from across Canada greet each other in the rotunda. Many are well known in the area of anti-racist education. The first evening starts with a presentation by Dr. Verna St. Denis entitled, “How I Learned to Stop Talking About Culture”. She argues that the notion of cultural revitalization came from anthropologists in the early part of the 20th century who recognized the injustices suffered by indigenous peoples. Their solution was to promote the revitalization of indigenous cultures and languages in order to create a strong sense of identity within indigenous peoples. Proponents of cultural revitalization believed that if people had a stronger sense of identity, they might be better able to resist the effects of racism.

This idea was picked up and supported by the Hawthorne Report and the National Indian Brotherhood who argued for Indian Control over Indian education in the early 70s. Since then numerous indigenous scholars have made a case for the revitalization of languages and cultures believing that it helps to create a strong sense of identity.

St. Denis’ argument however, is that this approach has not helped reduce inequities and that it further entrenches racism. Neither does it consider the experiences of Aboriginal people who live on the borderlands—in between communities—and who

identify with more than one community or no particular community. Furthermore, people attribute problems experienced by Aboriginal peoples to cultural deficiency or cultural discontinuity rather than to poverty and racism.

After Dr. St. Denis' presentation, a colleague leans over to me and says that she had read an article showing how the four coloured Medicine Wheel which was adopted by some indigenous peoples, was originally the construction of an anthropologist who believed in the four races of man. "Highly problematic," she whispers.

I have heard Verna St. Denis speak before, and I have read and quoted her work (St. Denis, 2002). Her message somehow seems much clearer to me now though. *Maybe it's finally sinking in.* I feel my body relaxing and the resistance dissolving. I suddenly understand the importance of what she is saying and how the notion of culture has become synonymous with difference and this difference is interpreted by the dominant group as 'not as good as'.

Discussants in all the sessions I attend, whether the sessions have to do with medicine, the law, human rights, social work, or education, offer the same message: Cross cultural education/training masks the dominant assumption of superiority while attempting to make the various professions culturally relevant. Although the stated goal in many of the professions is to build better understanding and relationships between themselves and racialized minorities, the implicit message is that the dominant group has the answers to solving minority peoples' problems provided they adopt the dominant group's agenda. Several speakers note that the only time White people refer to culture is in reference to minority groups. The culture of the dominant group remains invisible. As one presenter said, "The last thing the fish notices is the water."

For my session, I present the play my student and I created. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, very few people attend the session because it is running concurrently with sessions by well-known scholars. My subtle attempts at humour are completely lost on the small audience, and I wonder whether they realize the first part is a satire. My greatest fear is that some people think I am trivializing such an important issue as racism. I also wonder whether they understand the concerns raised by the students. My belief is that our students are our messengers (delivering the ‘trickle-down academics’ as one of the students calls it) and if we ignore their concerns, or if our message is inconsistent with our practices, students will dismiss it and the message will never reach the schools.

In retrospect, trying to deliver my message performatively may not have been the wisest decision. One must consider the audience. Perhaps this might have been more appropriate for a group of teachers. When people come to an academic conference, they are used to familiar patterns of interacting and disseminating information. They expect to hear papers presented and discussed in academic language. Who am I to think I can step out of this path and be noticed among this group of highly regarded scholars, especially when my understanding is still so partial compared to theirs? Or perhaps I am noticed now, but regarded as a non-academic and therefore without anything of significance to say. I definitely have that sense when one of my colleagues asks me without smiling, “So, how do you feel about your presentation?” I wonder whether there will be political ramifications from my attempts to change the medium and the message. I try to put my uneasiness aside and focus on how my understanding is changing; how my incomplete picture is being filled in through discussions with other conference attendees over meals and at the social gatherings.

By the end of the conference I am beginning to understand why some people have been so adamant about not reinforcing the idea of cultural differences because difference in the dominant culture has come to mean inferior. I begin to feel as though I have had an epiphany. I finally understand how the culture concept has been implicated in the othering process. By talking with the women and men at this conference and hearing their stories, I sense some of the frustration and anger they feel at the ignorance and arrogance of White-dominated society. The barriers to my understanding of this argument are coming down and allowing me to momentarily wallow again in the familiar pool of guilt, anger, and shame. I catch myself however, and resist going any deeper as soon as I realize what I am feeling. This is a luxury I can no longer afford.

If I am to be an ally in the struggle against racism and oppression, I need to pay attention to what decolonizing theorists are saying about the concept of culture. As much as I dislike having my familiar patterns of thinking disrupted, it helps me see another point of view. Yet, I am still troubled by what seems to be my different understanding of the terms “culture” and “essentialism”.

In postmodern discourse, for example, essentialism has a derogatory connotation and critics reject the notion that objects or concepts have a fixed essence or meaning that is not socially constructed. I agree that certain groups have been described as having a particular essence with no regard for the various differences among individuals within these groups. That’s where the postmodern critique has been particularly useful in helping us to understand how stereotypes arise.

There is, however, another meaning to essentialism that comes from Marxism that sees essentialism as the dialectical unfolding of the thing through successively deeper



meanings. “Essentialism then is concerned not with some *final* essence which can never be revealed, but rather is concerned with the *process* of revealing ever deeper meanings” (Basgen & Blunden, 1999-2004). This definition seems to be more consistent with the writings of many indigenous scholars who talk about the fluidity and dynamism of cultures and how they are constantly changing. Many believe, however, there is tribal knowledge about the relationships that humans have with Earth and non-humans that has been passed on for generations (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1994, 2000; Calderón, 2006; Cardinal, 2001; Deloria, Jr., 1999; Grande, 2004; Henderson, 2000; LaDuke, 2005, Little Bear, 2000).

I think back to some of the people with whom I spoke who said, “So what? It’s what works for us. Who are White people to tell me what I can believe?” On the other hand, another professor who also agrees that we should not be teaching about cultural differences said, “People can have their own beliefs and practices, but it’s not for White people to tell them what to believe.” There seem to be some inconsistencies in the messages indigenous people are receiving, or perhaps some people are taking the message that is intended for White folks and interpreting that as a directive for themselves.

I decide to ask two indigenous scholars who have been invited to present at the conference and with whom I have lunch, for their interpretation of the terms, “culture” and “essentialism”. Unlike many of the other presenters, they tell me they still believe that some indigenous peoples have a different way of seeing the world and that reclaiming their cultures is a way to reproduce their identities on their own terms. They suggest I take a look at some articles by postcolonial theorists.

After the conference I follow the women's advice and begin to wade into postcolonial literature only to find myself somewhat over my head as I try to fathom the depths of thinkers such as Homi Bhabha (1994), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), Franz Fanon (1967), Edward Said (1978), and Trinh T. Minh Ha (1989). I begin by checking out their books from the library and then resorting to summaries of their works on the Internet. Criticisms and contradictions abound, even with the term "postcolonial" and I begin to wonder where the rabbit trails are leading as I search for understanding why there are such disparate points of view among postcolonial scholars. A citation by Graves (1998) of Homi Bhabha's introduction to *The Location of Culture* (1994, ¶ 2) provides a clue:

It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?

Graves explains how the liminal space that Bhabha talks about is a "hybrid" site where cultural meaning is negotiated and produced. Yet, Graves wonders whether Bhabha's liminal space itself becomes a privileged, textual, discursive space accessible only to academic intellectuals rather than to the exiled working class who experience diaspora.

Finally a friend loans me a book that is a collection of articles by postcolonial theorists (Williams & Chrisman, 1994), which helps to provide a basic understanding of the field. In the reader I come across what I was hoping to find: different definitions of the term "cultural identity", which are provided by Hall (1994).

The first definition describes cultural identity as that which reflects a people's cultural codes and common historical experiences and provides them with "stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" regardless of what is happening in the actual history (p. 353). It is this definition that seems to be what people mean when they warn that focusing on cultural identity essentializes people.

Hall also cites Franz Fanon who argues that in trying to regain their cultural identities, colonized peoples are not simply just uncovering traditions that were buried by colonialism; rather they are *producing* their identities by retelling the past.

The second definition of cultural identity is then defined by Hall (1994) in which he states:

[C]ultural identity in this second sense is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being". It belongs to the future as well as the past. It is not something that exists but it transcends place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being externally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power. (p. 394)

This definition strikes a familiar chord and is similar to my understanding of the way in which cultural identities are constantly changing. It is also similar to the notions expressed by the indigenous participants in my study.

Finally, two occurrences help me begin to understand why there has been an effort to revitalize languages and cultures. The first is a quotation I discover by Fanon (1994) in which he argues that it is a way to renew contact with pre-colonial times and resist the oppression of colonialism. He states:

Perhaps this passionate research and this anger are kept up or at least directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others. (p. 37)

The second incident particularly drives the point home one evening at a practice dance class as I sit with my friends and my new ballroom dance partner, Ted.

### *Dancing Life*

Susan, Ted, Trevor and I sit at the table waiting for the music to begin at the practice dance one Friday evening. The other dancers haven't shown up yet. "Thanks for agreeing to be my dance partner," I say to Ted. "You're sure you don't mind that I'm old enough to be your mother? That would bother some young men."

"Not at all," Ted assures me. "I've been intending to get back into ballroom dancing but I didn't have a partner."

During our conversation I find out that Ted is Mohawk; he holds a Ph.D. in mathematics and teaches in the Math department. He also has been partnering with some Education faculty members to give workshops around the province for teachers on indigenous knowledge in mathematics and science. I tell him about my dissertation and he seems genuinely interested in hearing more about it some time.

Because I am still somewhat perplexed about the race/culture debate, I ask Ted where he stands on the issue of revitalizing languages and cultures.

"Well," Ted says carefully, "I have heard that some of my First Nations colleagues don't necessarily agree with de-emphasizing the importance of culture and language. Although I understand that celebrating cultural differences doesn't address systemic inequities and social problems brought about by colonization, in some ways I agree with my colleagues. I grew up in a city, but in my early 20's I went back to live on the reserve and renewed contact with my dad's family. I also spent a lot of time talking

with the Elders. I've come to appreciate the different ways of seeing and thinking about the world, which I think are important concepts for all students to understand. And I also think it is important that students have some anti-racist training and start to question the ways they have been taught to see the world.

From my own experience, I can't tell you how affirming and rejuvenating it is to go back to my community and listen to the Elders, to participate in our ceremonies, and in the songs and dances. When I hear the sound of the drums and the clear, sweet voices of some of the singers, it's as if something goes through me and melts away all tensions and worries and gives me new strength. It's really hard to explain," says Ted.

"So you don't feel you are othering yourself by doing this?" I ask. Ted looks at me quizzically to indicate he doesn't know what I am trying to say so I try to explain. "Some of the people I interviewed said they had been told that by participating in cultural traditions such as singing and dancing or by using a Medicine Wheel to explain their community's beliefs, they were othering themselves, or reinforcing the notion of difference, which in the dominant society is often interpreted as 'not as good as'."

Ted laughs. "I'm not sure how we can 'other ourselves', especially when we practice these traditions away from White society. We do it strictly for ourselves because it brings us joy. My dad and grandparents didn't always have the privilege of being able to practise our cultural traditions. At one time practising the traditions was outlawed so people had to do it in secret. It wasn't until the late 60s or 70s that Indians won back the right to practise our traditions after many people fought long and hard for that right, so I feel a sense of responsibility and also an honour in being able to participate in our ceremonies.

“I think I understand,” I say. “A few people I interviewed said the same thing. One friend told me that she and some of her friends and their children went to a powwow, or maybe it was a conference, and many of the adults were crying because it was such an emotional experience. Her daughter asked, ‘Why are you crying, Mom? It’s nice and everything, but I don’t get why you’re all crying.’ My friend said the younger generation doesn’t understand how important the cultural traditions are to her generation who lived through the time when it was against the law to sing and dance.”

“That’s right,” agrees Ted. “Practising one’s culture has much greater significance to some people than to others who have never had to fight for that right,” he says.

Suddenly I feel the familiar sting in my eyes and I pretend to look for something in my purse. Ted pretends not to notice. Then Susan’s voice interrupts our conversation.

“Oh, I just went to an excellent workshop today in the leadership course I am taking! Susan exclaims. It was called ACT—Anti-racist Cross-Cultural Training. It used drama to look at issues of racism and poverty, and it was very powerful. Have you heard of it?”

“Yes,” I say. “In fact we just had a workshop with our Secondary Education students. It’s something in which we are trying to involve all our students. It’s based on a kind of informal theatre developed by a Brazilian engineer by the name of Agusta Boal. He worked with poor people in his country using drama to help them develop their voice and overcome some of the inequities and injustices they face. It’s also called Forum Theatre or Theatre of the Oppressed. I’m going to *Power Plays* next week where they use a type of Forum Theatre called Legislative Theatre to identify community issues and make recommendations for legislative changes. David Diamond, who is an

internationally renowned drama educator will be here working with a group of people from the inner city where they will present some issues pertinent to their community<sup>21</sup>.”

“Yes, I want to go to that too,” says Susan. “Should we go together?” I agree and we make plans to meet somewhere.

“But one thing we talked about in the workshop today,” continues Susan, “was White privilege. And I just don’t see it.”

“No. Those of us who are White don’t see it. We just take our privileges for granted. They’re invisible to us, but anyone who is not White, sees and feels those privileges that we enjoy but which they might not,” I say.

“That’s right,” pipes in Trevor who has been sitting silently for a while. Trevor is and an exceptionally good dancer with whom all the women love to dance despite his outrageous flirtatiousness. He told me once that he is the son of an Ojibwa woman and a Métis father who taught him to dance at the age of 5.

“Like what?” asks Susan defensively.

Trevor leans forward to give some examples, but I jump in right away.

“Like people assuming you were hired because of your ability, rather than assuming you were hired to fill an equity quota; like not having people make assumptions about you based on your race; like not being faced with racist attitudes at work; like being able to walk into a store and use your credit card and not being asked if it’s yours; like not being told you’re a credit to your race; like . . .” and I go on and on with numerous privileges Whites enjoy. My speech has become louder and faster, my heart is racing and I feel my face getting hot.

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<sup>21</sup> See a discussion of Forum Theatre on the Vancouver based, Headlines Theatre at <http://www.headlinetheatre.com/intro.htm>.

“You go, Girl!” Trevor laughs as he turns to look at me.

“But don’t you think some of the attitudes we have are little bit justified?” Susan asks. “I mean, who is doing all the stealing of cars and break-and-enters in this city?” Suddenly Susan stops herself and looks at Trevor and Ted. “Not you guys. I don’t consider you in the same category.”

Trevor and Ted both start to say something, but I jump in again and I say, “People in poverty are doing the stealing. Poverty causes a lot of these social issues.

Trevor turns and looks at me again. “Oh. I was going to say people who don’t want to pay for stuff. My family was poor but we didn’t do that.”

That pulls me up by the reins rather quickly. Embarrassment fills me as I realize what I have just said. *Another stereotype. Shame on you. Let people speak for themselves!*

Trevor and Ted take over, calmly explaining some examples of racism from their perspectives. Susan is becoming less agitated as she listens to them. I can’t hear them for the waves of self-deprecating admonishments thundering over me.

“Well I would really like some more information,” says Susan. “I need to understand this.”

“I have a really good article that we give our students,” I say recovering slightly. It’s called “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh (2002). I’ll bring you a copy next week.” Susan thanks me and changes the subject as the music starts and she and Ted get up to dance.

Trevor turns to me. “I didn’t know you like Indians,” He offers me his hand. “Would you care to dance, Madame?”



## CHAPTER X

### Summarizing Stories

Within this fourth space of being, the dream is that indigenous and non-indigenous peoples will work in solidarity to envision a way of life free of exploitation and replete with spirit. The invitation is for scholars, educators, and students to exercise critical consciousness at the same time they recognize that the world of knowledge far exceeds our ability to know. (Grande, 2004, p. 176)

#### *Seeing Patterns*

“So how is the thesis coming?” asks Ted, my ballroom dance partner, one evening at a coffee shop after our dance lesson.

“I’m just about done,” I tell him. I’m in the process of writing the last chapter and trying to make sense of it now. It looks somewhat like a dog’s breakfast and I’m still not quite sure what to make of it all, but I keep reminding myself that out of chaos comes order (Wheatley, 1994). I think I am starting to see some patterns or themes emerging that are relevant to my topic, as well as many other themes, which if I pursued them, could lead me off in all sorts of directions. But my committee keeps reminding me to be selective and pick the dissertation I want to write. I can always save the other topics for later.”

“So what do you want to focus on?” asks Ted.

“Do you want the elevator version or the version that will act as an excellent sedative?” I say.

“The sedative version is okay,” replies Ted. “I’ll need it to counteract the caffeine in this pop if I want to sleep tonight.”

Ted seems genuinely interested so I proceed to tell him.

“Well, as you know, I was trying to find out how to prepare prospective teachers to work more collaboratively and respectfully in and with indigenous communities because I was really concerned about the racism in our province. I thought that I might be able to play some part in reducing racism and some of the systemic inequities if I could see how to influence prospective teachers. They are the ones who will influence future generations.”

Ted nods.

“So I started from the premise that I needed to look at myself first because I believe that until we become aware of and examine our own beliefs and assumptions, it is not possible to change our actions. And if we don’t change our own actions, we as educators will keep reproducing the status quo. I have a particular positioning in society in terms of my history, race, class, gender and so on, so I felt I needed to consider how these intersecting positionings influence what I do and believe.” I pause to scrutinize Ted’s face. *He’s still with me. A lot of my other friends start to tune out at this point.* I continue.

“I realized too, that my beliefs, assumptions, values and actions are influenced by my context and the people with whom I work. With that in mind I decided to interview a number of people: faculty members, teachers who are working with Aboriginal communities and educational partners who are Aboriginal, to see what their perspectives are and how these fit with mine. I thought I might learn something about myself by comparing their views to my own. I also kept a journal whenever I felt particularly upset or intrigued by something. Then I tried analyzing why I was feeling that way. By paying attention to my body and how I reacted to situations, I began to realize that my body was

sending signals when something was disrupting my familiar patterns of behaving or thinking.”

“Hmm. Interesting,” says Ted. “Did that happen often?”

“Pretty much every day!” I exclaim. “But I only kept track of a few of the major incidents that spoke the loudest to me, which I am starting to identify as themes. However, depending on their particular experiences or frameworks, I’m sure other people might see different themes arising from the data that will speak to them.”

“And what are the themes you are seeing?” asks Ted.

“Well, I see five major ones that emerged from the interviews I conducted and then there are a few others, which I see as subtexts arising from my interactions with the interviewees and other colleagues, with my students and with some of the literature I’ve been reading. Are you sure you want to hear them?” Ted nods affirmatively.

“Okay. The first major theme I see is *the importance of building respectful relationships*. Depending on their particular perspective, most people talked about how important it is to develop respectful relationships with communities, with students or with each other as colleagues. This, I think is the most important thread that runs through all the others.” I start counting on my fingers.

“Second is *the importance of ‘real’ experiences with ‘real’ people*. Many people thought that having our White students interacting with Aboriginal people might help to ‘demystify’ the notion of the exotic or stereotypical ‘other’ and help students to recognize people’s common humanity. You saw, for example, that our friend Susan thinks of you and Trevor very differently from the stereotypical notion she has of Aboriginal people, and I think that’s because she sees some common interests and has come to know you as

individuals. Socio-economic class may have something to do with her view of you too, though,” I admit. Ted nods in agreement and I continue.

“I noticed also that in the schools where teachers worked with high numbers of Aboriginal students, they saw the students as individuals each with their unique personalities, gifts and challenges. But whether we can help our teacher education students make connections with Aboriginal communities in meaningful and authentic ways rather than in ‘touristy’ or voyeuristic ways remains to be seen. But I think it is important to try. We’re trying to do that in the new Middle Years program.” I hold up a third finger and continue.

*“The importance of recognizing how identities are constructed and normalized and how these constructions influence power relationships is third,”* I say. This involves having students learn about the history of colonization, and how the notions of ‘White is right’ or ‘might is right’,” I make quotation marks in the air, “became unconscious legacies of colonization in the collective identities of the descendents of White, European settlers in the Americas and other parts of the world. Race, class, gender, religion and sexual orientation, and so on are intertwined in these concepts,” I add. “So I see this really as a need to help prospective teachers—and teacher educators for that matter—learn to think more critically about our assumptions and beliefs and from where these originate.” This theme, by the way, was underscored by an interesting subtext that I’ll tell you about in a moment. I uncurl and touch the fourth finger.

“Next is *the importance of rethinking our view of curriculum*. Many people saw the need to move beyond the notion of curriculum as the value-free content that teachers impart to students, and toward curriculum as enacted—the learning that emerges from the

interaction of people working together on projects or on a vision for their communities. I was always struggling with how to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives into the curriculum in meaningful ways, but when I found out that Aboriginal people's beliefs and traditions are as diverse as those in the 'whitestream' population as Sandy Grande (2004) calls it, the notion of Aboriginal content and perspectives took on a new meaning. Now I see it as the opportunity for all voices within a community to contribute to the shared vision of education. I also think it is important to use contemporary resources that include Aboriginal faces, voices and works along with those of other racialized groups, including Whites, in the resources teachers use," I add, "so that everyone's contribution to knowledge is normalized; so that the curriculum of the dominant group is no longer privileged and the standard by which all others are judged. Yet, there is a tension here, which is that prospective teachers are still expected to be familiar with and be able to teach the written curriculum if they want to be certified. I suspect many Aboriginal people would like to see their children become familiar with dominant curriculum as well." I move to my next point.

*"The need for collaboration and shared power and responsibility among community members, educators, service providers and students in the creation of healthy communities.* This is the vision of School<sup>PLUS</sup> to which our faculty is committed—at least in our visioning documents. I'm not sure everyone on faculty is committed to this. Are you familiar with School<sup>PLUS</sup>?" I ask Ted and he nods to indicate he is.

"But if we are not careful," I caution, "the concept of School<sup>PLUS</sup>, or whatever we call it in the future, will become a renewed attempt to assimilate people; to ensure they become productive members of society so they can contribute to the economic well-being

of the province, rather than letting communities decide for themselves what they see as contributing to their own well-being. Some of our faculty members criticized School<sup>PLUS</sup> as being similar to pastoral care giving, but I think it can become a metaphor for true collaboration in creating this shared and harmonious future that the government espouses—that is if educators and other service providers can learn to back off and let communities decide what they need in terms of services, if any, from the dominant sector.”

The waiter comes to the table with a pitcher for refills and I shake my head to indicate ‘no thanks’. “So those are the five main themes I saw,” I tell Ted.

Ted accepts a refill of his pop and says, “You said you saw some other subtexts as well?

“Oh, yes! One of big issues for me is *the shortage of ideas regarding how we might teach for social justice as it relates to Aboriginal education*. We keep giving our students readings—sometimes the same ones in different courses apparently—over and over and we discuss many issues, but as one of my colleagues said, students are often filled with GAS—guilt, anger and shame when we start the anti-racist education. And then they become almost paralyzed with the fear of stereotyping or essentializing people if they try to help non-Aboriginal students understand aspects of First Nations or Métis cultures. I see the same thing happening to some faculty members. I think what happens then, is people back off and resort to ‘just teaching the curriculum’ because they don’t know what else to do. At least that has been my own experience.”

Ted nods and says, “And I think sometimes with the focus on anti-racism we Indians come to be seen as the helpless victim too, but I certainly don’t feel that way. So

you are saying you think that there is too much emphasis on critique and not enough on practical ideas?”

“Partly. I think the critique is absolutely necessary because those of us in the dominant group do have to look at our histories and how some of our tacit attitudes and beliefs are formed, which in turn affect our conscious and unconscious actions in perpetuating dominance. *And* we need some strategies for putting the critique into action. We are teaching students to be great critics of social and political systems—and even of us—but more often than not we are leaving them feeling overwhelmed and helpless.

Some people believe it is necessary for students to feel discomfort in order to help them see how their positioning in society is implicated in the oppression of others, and that there is ‘no rush to decisionism’ as to what to do about it because it’s a process they have to go through. But I think discomfort is very different from feeling overwhelmed and helpless. As many people emphasized, students still have to go out and teach something to the students in their classrooms. Because I am an EPS instructor—general curriculum and instructional methods/professional development—rather than an Educational Foundations instructor, I am expected to help prospective teachers develop some practical skills and ideas they can use in classrooms. But I don’t want it to be just more of the same things we have always done.

One colleague said, ‘it’s the lure of the practical’ to which we as teacher educators succumb because our students think that only practical ideas have any value. But as I talked with different people, I started to see there are some things we might do to interrupt students’ familiar ways of being to make them uncomfortable—and I don’t

mean just angry at us—yet also provide them with some tools or ideas to use in classrooms so that they are not left feeling so helpless.”

“Oh yeah? Like what?”

“Well, besides the use of a variety of instructional strategies, resources and assessment methods, narrative seems to be one promising tool. Some of my colleagues use literature and poetry to help students see into the lives of those who are oppressed. These works serve as wonderful devices for exposing systemic inequities. Also, I watched my students’ faces and saw some genuine emotions as well as some lights go on when they were listening to peoples’ stories of being othered or even persecuted. As one faculty member told the students, ‘Now that you have heard this story, you will never be the same.’ I think at some level each of us recognizes the me in you and the you in me. It is not simply a case of feeling sympathy or even empathy for someone. Your story becomes part of my story and if I bear witness—not in a religious sense—to your experiences, we become connected (Wheatley, 2002). When I feel your pain, your frustration, your anger, I don’t want to do anything to hurt you further, because by doing so, I am also hurting myself,” I explain.

“Unless you’re a masochist,” Ted adds and I laugh. “I agree,” he says. “Of course in indigenous communities storytelling is the primary way to teach children personal and social values. We were never told directly this was wrong or that was wrong, but when we heard what happened to some of the animals in the stories because of what they did, it scared us into not doing the same things. Could your students read stories about some of the people in this area of the country such as Poundmaker, Big Bear, Louis Reil, Gabriel



Dumont, and so on who fought against the oppression of indigenous peoples? Those stories would be appropriate for their students as well.”

“Yes,” I have started to do more of that myself too, I say. I read the students Campbell’s *Road Allowance People* and it really interested them in learning more about the Riel resistance. I also gave one group Tom King’s “What Is It About Us You Don’t Like” from his book, *The Truth About Stories* (2003) which I thought was a good way to introduce the history of colonization. So that’s one way to help students understand.”

“King’s work reminds me that humour works well too,” adds Ted. Have you seen *Redskins, Tricksters and Puppy Stew*, which Drew Hayden Taylor directed?

“Yes! I ordered it from the NFB and showed it to the students. I like how it addresses issues of racism and Aboriginal identity in a way that is hilarious and serious at the same time. Parts of the film had the students in tears of laughter and it also generated some excellent class discussion. I think that any kind of emotion can have an effect on the way we understand the world. It doesn’t always just have to be *GAS*,” I say.

“As in a lot of hot air?” Ted raises an eyebrow.

“Good one,” I laugh. “Oh, and I happened to see in the film a beautiful woman who was our Elder in Residence for a while. Her presence really enriched our faculty. I used to spend a lot of time talking with her so it was good to see her again, even if only on the TV screen. She was part of the film audience when Jackie Bear and Sharon Shorty performed their hilarious imitation of two elderly women. I think our friend might be related to one of the women. You know, it just never ceases to amaze how people are connected.”

Ted smiles. “Six degrees of separation they say.”

I nod and we sit in silence for a while as I try to recall some of the other ways people were helping our students understand complex issues related to inequality. I start to tell him about all the great materials from the *Rethinking Schools* web site, which I have found quite useful. Then Ted asks a question that reminds me of another tool for teaching.

“How was the Forum Theatre that you and Susan said you were going to attend?” he asks.

“Oh, excellent. The night we went, there were two politicians in attendance because the purpose of the theatre was for the actors and the audience to identify and generate solutions to community issues that might require some changes in legislation. There was some good discussion around splitting up families when one sibling has to be taken care of by social services and the other is old enough to be on his or her own. The audience made some recommendations, but I don’t know if anything will actually happen as a result. But I happened to see a couple of my students there, so that’s a good sign,” I say.

“But your question reminds me of a point that I wanted to make about other ways to help students understand complex issues,” I continue. “I think Forum Theatre is extremely useful in this regard. We’ve had students participate in mini ACT—Anti-racist cross-cultural training workshops, which never do the process justice—but students at least become aware that this type of training is available. Most of the students thought the workshops were excellent and they wanted longer ones and more of them, but we did have a few students who thought it was too ‘touchy-feely’ and skipped out. Somehow there must be a way to reach students who are less affected by their emotions. I think the

arts in general, however, have considerable potential to change attitudes and beliefs. They speak to people at a visceral level and can help derail us from our familiar patterns of thinking and behaving.”

“So, having more practical ideas to doing anti-oppressive education is one subtext. Are you still interested in hearing more?” I ask.

“Sure. I’m in no hurry,” says Ted.

“Well another one that is closely related to this, is *our (in)ability to walk the talk*. There are a few people on faculty who are very much involved in the community, but there are others, including myself who seldom practice what we preach—at least not in ways that are visible to students. Students sometimes comment on it. Granted, there aren’t enough of us to do all the jobs on the various committees that keep the organization running smoothly and still participate in community projects. Then with demanding teaching, supervision and research agendas, we have little time or energy left at the end of a day. If we choose to become involved in the community, other areas suffer. It’s a constant tension. Some of us still want lives beyond the institution too—like dancing,” I add.

Ted smiles and motions to the waiter. “Anything else?”

“Yes, and this next one is a huge issue for me,” I say. I’m not sure if I even feel comfortable bringing this up in my dissertation because I know it will probably make people angry with me, but it is something that I have learned about myself as a result of this research. It’s not meant to criticize anyone else, but other people may identify with it and see it as a criticism of them.” I pause, perhaps waiting for some encouragement to continue.

“Well isn’t that the point—to help people recognize their own experiences that may have been invisible to them before?” Ted asks. “You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to, though. Or you can tell me and not name names. It’s up to you.”

It’s the encouragement I need so I proceed cautiously. “Well at first I was quite disturbed by what I saw as two opposing views on the faculty, and yet, I could identify with each one. Now I see them as two variations on the theme, *I Still Think I am Superior and You Are Inferior*, regardless of one’s particular ideological orientation, and I count myself in as one of the players of that tune. One variation of the theme portrays educators as the all-benevolent caregivers who will empower Aboriginal youth through education and our willingness to support them with services. In our benevolence we will pass on our skills and knowledge so that they too can participate fully in society. We will also try to help them regain their cultures that our ancestors took away.

The other variation is educator, or rather academic, as all-knowing and all-powerful. ‘I know what’s best for you, Aboriginal people—and it’s not practicing your cultural traditions. You are othering yourselves and keeping yourselves separate from and inferior to the dominant group by reifying your cultural differences’,” I say in my best patronizing teacher voice. Ted smiles.

“And, ‘I know what’s best for you, students—and it’s what I tell you to think and do. You don’t have the education or experience yet to know what you really think or need.’ Similarly, ‘I know what’s best for you, colleagues—because my way of seeing the world is the only good, the beautiful, and the true’.”

I shake my head. “Those of us who have adopted this attitude of knowing what’s best for someone else and speaking so authoritatively about it, might aptly be called

‘sanctioned scribes’ (Dubin (1999). Who sanctioned us, I’m not sure. Maybe we’re self-sanctioned ‘by virtue of being white’ (Schick, 2000). I read an article by Dubin, (1999, p. 152) who cites Brody (1971) as stating, ‘[e]ven the most sensible, humanistic and scientifically objective of the Whites seemed unable to avoid [or even recognize] attitudes that can only be described as paternalistic and racist.’”

Ted chuckles a little. “Yeah, I know what you mean.”

“I started to recognize this patronizing attitude when some Aboriginal people indicated they felt hurt and even angry at what they perceived as attacks on their beliefs and traditions and on their Elders. And then there were non-Aboriginal people who saw some people’s views as attacks on their good intentions to create awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures among our students. I know I even became a little defensive when someone suggested to me that I shouldn’t be focusing my energy on helping students understand or support communities in their efforts to revitalize their languages and cultures.”

Ted nods in sympathy but remains silent.

“Of course the response to my reaction might be that I am resisting hearing anything that does not support my identity as a liberal, kind, socially just teacher. Someone might say that I have a hard time coming to terms with my racism, and I guess in part that might be true. I finally had to acknowledge that the anti-racist stance really opened my eyes and started to help me think more deeply about how identities are formed and thus influence all we think and do.

Nevertheless, I just couldn’t see why there was so much concern by some academics about whether peoples’ views were considered essentialist or not when such

debates are rarely on the minds of educators and communities who are dealing with very difficult social issues in their schools. Granted, teachers have to understand how racism affects students and us all, and many teachers do, but I think we have to give people credit for trying to do the best they know how at the time. It's a process we work through together. There's no blueprint for how to change inequitable situations."

"I certainly didn't hear any of those debates when we were doing workshops around the province," agrees Ted. "But it did sound to me as if teachers just wanted some practical suggestions—a blueprint. But then it's not helpful to have the practice without any theoretical foundation or vice versa," he says.

"Exactly," I say. "The other thing I noticed is that some of my colleagues and I were going on about social justice, yet other people felt they were being silenced if they didn't hold those particular views of social justice, which seem to be so prevalent in our faculty right now. I was also guilty of silencing students who didn't hold my particular views. How is that social justice?" I ask. Ted doesn't say anything, but he still appears interested in what I am saying so I continue.

"On the other side, people who argued we should be having the students engaged only in anti-oppressive education and who were critics of School<sup>PLUS</sup>, felt they were unheard, lone voices amid those who were affirming School<sup>PLUS</sup> and the revitalization of cultures. So I saw this as a real rift in the faculty, yet I see both points of view as a type of imperialism."

"Right. Who decides, who decides?" adds Ted. "I think there is probably a middle ground somewhere between those views."

“*Moi aussi*,” I say in my best impression of Miss Piggy in an attempt to lighten the conversation as I reach for another donut hole. “Many of the indigenous scholars whose works I read seem to take the middle road by providing a critique of colonialism yet advocating a revitalization of cultural identities and languages. They don’t see it as a return to the past but rather as incorporating the past into an unfolding future.”

Ted nods in agreement. “That’s how I have always viewed identities. Everything—cultures, people— are constantly changing, yet there is something that is still the same. Everything is self-referencing. Even though our cells are constantly being replaced by new ones, are we not still the same people we were ten years ago?” Ted asks rhetorically.

“I’m much more than I was ten years ago. I’ve somehow created quite a few more new cells,” I laugh and put down the donut hole. *But that sounds very much like complexity thinking to me. I read that somewhere—Davis, et al., (2000) or Wheatley (1994 perhaps). I’ll have to ask him later if he knows anything about complexity science. He must. He’s a mathematician.*

I continue with my summary of my findings. “So there were those who thought we should be dismantling large oppressive social structures, others who thought we should be working more closely with parents, communities and with service providers, and still others who thought that teaching students to relate well to individuals was most important. I had the impression that *each person thought their particular point of view was the correct one*, which I see as another subtext.”

“Of course. So what do you make of that?”

“Well, I’m starting to wonder whether these really are opposing points of view or whether people are paying attention to different aspects of complex systems. If I could use a giant lens to look at the world from afar, it might just take an adjustment of the focal point to see another person’s perspective. Perhaps it might mean moving the lens a little to the left or right or zooming in to see a microcosm or out to see the macrocosm. Do the points of view have to be either/or, or can they be like the multiple layers of an onion? If I could use the lens to look more deeply into something I might become an expert at one particular aspect of a system but that might not allow me to see other things. Therefore, I think my view of the world is the right one because that’s all I see.”

“And you could also adjust the lens so that everything is fuzzier and there is no clear view of anything, but it provides more possibilities for places to look—especially along the blurred edges,” offers Ted.

“I like that,” I say. “I really don’t like binaries—this either/or thinking,” I add.

“You are either with us or with the terrorists,” Ted says in a voice we both know and love. I laugh. “I agree with you,” he continues. “In many indigenous languages there are no words to describe opposites. The languages describe interrelationships instead (Little Bear, 2000).”

I shake my head enthusiastically. “Have you heard of the term, ‘liminal space’?” I ask.

Ted nods. “The space ‘betwixt and between’?” (Turner, 1967).

“Yes. I came across the term when I first started doing graduate work and I have seen it is used in a number of areas including psychology, the arts, religion and in the works of post-colonial authors such as Edward Said (1978) and Homi Bhabha (1994). It



is often described as that space where transformation happens. I like to think of it as that place where we come to shared understandings, our place of mutual existence as humans,” I say.” I watch as Ted draws a venn diagram on the table with his finger and points to the space where the circles overlap. I nod affirmatively.

“I wish things were as easy as they were when I taught Kindergarten where I could teach the students to play nicely together—take turns, share, listen to each other, don’t hurt each other,” I sigh, “or when I used to tell them the story of the blind men who were all touching a different part of an elephant. Each person had a different description of it. I would ask the students ‘who is right?’ and sometimes they would say the person touching the trunk or the body was right; sometimes they would say nobody was right, but most often they would say everybody was right. Children are so insightful. Why can’t it be that simple for adults to understand that each of our perspectives is only partial (Kumashiro, 2002) and that through respectful dialogue and willingness to be open to each other we learn more about the whole (Wheatley, 2002)? Why do we have to criticize each other all the time?”

Ted shakes his head to indicate he doesn’t know and stifles a yawn.

“It’s getting late,” I say. “Thanks for listening to me. Talking with someone helps me to clarify my thinking.”

“No problem,” Ted assures me. “I found it quite interesting and I could recognize some similar issues I’ve seen in other departments.”

As we walk to our cars, I say to Ted, “When I was doing my research into indigenous ways of knowing, I became quite intrigued with a holistic way of viewing the

world and started to see how everything is interconnected. It seems very similar to complexity theory or chaos theory” I say. “Do you know anything about that?”

“A little. Complexity sciences do have many things in common with indigenous knowledge systems and Buddhism” says Ted. “They are all *process* oriented. They see everything as dynamic, in flux, and interconnected, whereas Western sciences see things as fixed and separate.”

“I’d love to talk with you about that sometime. I’m just starting to learn about it, but I’d like to relate my research to the idea of complexity.”

“Sure. I don’t know if I can be of much help, but I’d be happy to talk with you about it,” he says.

“Great. See you next week,” I say and make my way home, wondering whether I should have told him all the things I was thinking. I start to feel the knot of guilt forming again. *Did that sound like I was being critical of my colleagues? It was meant to be a critique of myself, yet ironically, I hear myself criticizing people for criticizing people.* The image of the ouroboros, the serpent devouring its own tail, suddenly pops into my consciousness and leaves me wondering about its meaning as I listen to the news on the radio.

## CHAPTER XI

### Emerging Stories

The mirror world of order and disorder challenges us to look, once again at the whole of the system. Only when we step back to observe the shape of things, can we see the patterns of movement from chaos to order and from order to chaos. (Wheatley, 1994, p. 125)

#### *Comparing Complexities*

The following week after dance class I come prepared with some notes hoping that Ted can help me situate the findings of my study within the framework of complexity science. I also want to describe to him the similarities I see between indigenous knowledge and complexity science to see if he agrees. I open my notebook to a blank page and draw a line down the centre. On one half of the page I write *Indigenous Knowledge* and on the other half I write *Complexity Science*.

“It’s interesting that chaos and complexity theories are often called the ‘new sciences’ as if Western civilization discovered or invented them. Ancient societies have known some of these things all along,” Ted observes as he watches me set up the page.

“Yes. We’re so far behind we think we’re first,” I say. “Typical of us White guys. Now, you said you know something about indigenous knowledge systems and complex systems, right?” Ted nods affirmatively. “So do you think I should create a chart in my thesis to show the similarities? Could you help me with this?” I ask.

Ted leans back in the chair and chuckles a little.

“What?” I ask a little defensively. Then I remember Verna St. Denis telling the audience during an address how she would look at the charts comparing an indigenous

world view with the Western world view and feel quite proud about being an Indian. The audience had laughed.

“Never mind,” I say. “But I was thinking I would also like to compare complexity science to social justice. Some of my colleagues don’t see how it has anything to do with social justice, but I do—although not in the postmodern sense that just critiques systems of power and privilege.”

Ted chuckles again and shakes his head. “This whole idea of social justice is such a *whitey thing*,” he says uncharacteristically.

“That’s not a very PC thing to say!” I start to laugh, and perhaps because I am tired, I can’t stop for a few minutes. When I can finally catch my breath, I ask him to explain what he means as I wipe tears from my eyes.

“Complexity just explains how systems behave in relation to other systems. For example, complex systems have recurrency or feedback loops. The effect of any activity can feed back onto itself, sometimes directly, sometimes after a number of intervening steps and the effect can be positive—enhancing or stimulating, or negative—detracting or inhibiting (Cilliers, 1998). But there is no judgment about good or bad in complexity theory, only an explanation of how things work.” I nod to indicate I understand.

“That’s similar to indigenous knowledge,” Ted continues. “As children our father didn’t tell us something was right or wrong; something just *is*. But we were taught that every action has a consequence. The consequences can be harmful or helpful; an action may not have much effect at all or it could have huge ramifications. So we were taught to be very careful about what we do or say, for we can’t always know what the consequences might be.”

“Oh.” I pause for a few moments letting his words sink in. *Maybe this ‘whitey thing’ is similar to complexity theorists’ critique of the prevalence in the academy of modernism and postmodernism. According to complexity theorists, these two ideologies see the world in terms of linear cause and effect, of binaries and fixed political, economic or social structures that are seemingly independent of other systems (Bowers, 1995; Davis et al., 2000; Grande, 2004; Price, 1997). Similarly some views of social justice seem to see inequities only in terms of power relationships rather than considering other influences.*

“So would you say that some other similarities between indigenous world views and complexity include the notions of nestedness, dynamism, recurring cyclical patterns, interconnectedness, and the emphasis on knowledge as process rather than product?”

“Yes, those are some of the main ideas.” Ted agrees. “Why do you want to do a comparison?”

“I think because I was introduced to both views of the world at the same time when I started my graduate work. I was taking a course on First Nations and Educational Change and I saw that some of the concepts discussed by many indigenous scholars such as Cajete (1994), Battiste and Henderson (2000), Kawagley, 2001; Little Bear (2000), and Deloria, Jr. (1999) were very similar to authors whose works I was reading for my other graduate courses (Bateson, 1991; Bateson, 1994; Davis et al., 2000; Maturana & Varela, 1992). Having a new conceptual context helped me to make sense of what I was seeing in the world. I had been using critical theory as a way to explain inequities but I was often left feeling helpless and overwhelmed. It never provided any answers, only critique. Complexity and indigenous knowledge don’t provide any answers either, but

they seem much more hopeful because they open up infinite possibilities for change. There is also a sense of personal agency—that one's actions, no matter how seemingly insignificant, can bring about changes in other systems. I think for example, of Gandhi and Mandela and of the people who helped to bring down the Berlin Wall or those who took a stand over the land disputes at Oka, Ipperwash, and Caledonia here in Canada. Complexity can incorporate critical theory, and it seems to me that many postcolonial writers incorporate both by embracing their indigenous roots *and* critiquing colonialism. It's not an either/or."

"Yes," agrees Ted. "I know some people who claim to be critical theorists and poststructuralists who make fun of those of us who think the world would be better if we were just nicer to each other. But to me, that's one way to influence change in a positive way."

"I agree wholeheartedly. Maybe it's the kindergarten teacher in me," I say. "And I also see that human spirituality—our sense of connectedness to something greater than ourselves—is also embedded in indigenous knowledge and complex views of the world, as is our interconnectedness with the non-human world. Modernism and even postmodernism are based on anthropocentrism (Bowers, 1995; Davis et. al, 2000; Grande, 2004, LaDuke, 2005) but indigenous Elders and ecologists have been telling us for years that this way of thinking is destroying the planet"(Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992).

"Yes," Ted agrees. "When we put humans at the centre of importance, or our ethnicities, or money or power, we have problems. In indigenous knowledge and complexity theories there is no centre, only a web of nested interrelationships."

“The concepts of spirituality, interconnectedness, and community are not currently part of our education curricula either,” I continue, “and I think they have to be if humans are to survive. But I am encouraged to see that our Department of Learning is moving in that direction. A friend of mine is updating the background papers for two of what the Department calls the Common Essential Learnings (CELs) and is incorporating these notions into the curriculum (Finney, n.d.). This will represent a huge paradigm shift in education if the concepts actually become embraced by educators. So I want to do my part in the education of teachers related to these concepts, but it is really difficult when our students have been immersed in modernity for so long. Many students see these concepts as a lot of ‘new-age hooey’, particularly if they come from fundamentalist Christian backgrounds. Maybe I can help bridge the gap by having students read articles by eco-Christian scholars or Christian feminists<sup>22</sup>. I haven’t read much in either of these areas but apparently people writing in these areas recognize the principles of interconnectedness and are helping Christians rethink some of the tenants of monotheistic religions that see everything in hierarchical power relationships.”

Ted nods in agreement and doesn’t stop me because he can see I am on a roll.

“Now the short answer to your question about why I want to compare indigenous knowledge and complexity science is because I am enamoured with both and I thought it would be appropriate given my research topic. I also thought it might be a way to reconcile differences between indigenous knowledge and Western science that have created what Little Bear calls a ‘jagged world view’ (2000).”

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<sup>22</sup> A Google search for the terms, “Green Christians” and “Christian Feminists” provides numerous sites that may offer a starting point for exploration into these concepts. Student might also begin by exploring the web site of the World Council of Churches at <http://www.wcc-coe.org/>.

“So how are you writing your dissertation to show non-linear dynamics?” Ted asks. “That can’t be easy. I’d find it much easier in math to work out an equation with a number of variables and a few simple rules,” Ted observes.

### ***Linking Narratives***

Ted’s question provides me with the opportunity to articulate the links I see between narrative, complexity and indigenous knowledge. “You’re right. It’s not easy and I really had a difficult task before me. Some my friends in the Education faculty suggested deconstructing the text or using a discourse analysis, but that didn’t seem appropriate,” I explain. “I wanted something that could *reconstruct* what I was seeing, a method that was more holistic and in keeping with my theoretical orientation. I began to see that narrative research is more holistic and has similarities to indigenous knowledge and complexity. So I decided to create a narrative, which I am calling an autoethnography because I am in some ways performing the work of an ethnographer by describing life inside my institution. Narrative, I believe, is appropriate, not only because storytelling is the traditional way to learn in indigenous cultures, but because the way we construct our identities is through narrative. I also wanted to see who I was becoming as a result of this research process.”

Ted looks questioningly at me, so I elaborate. “Our stories emerge from our interactions with the world and when we retell our stories, we are making connections and seeing patterns. As well, our stories are fluid; that is, they can have multiple meanings which surface with each new telling, or they can change over time depending on the context or the audience (Bateson, 1994; Fuller, 2001; Gover, 1996). As Mary



Catherine Bateson (1994, p. 11) states, ‘Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories.’ Stories may hold different meanings for different readers too. One of my fellow graduate students who is a Gitsan woman from BC, demonstrated this well. She told our seminar group a story about a bear, and everyone had a different interpretation of the story depending on what lesson each person needed to learn,” I explain. “Narrative can also show multiple meanings and different voices. It reminds me of all the elements that are interacting within a system. People’s stories become intertwined and connected to other’s stories and to larger stories such as the history of colonialism. So from my perspective, narrative is the best way to show non-linear dynamics and complexity.”

Ted nods in agreement. “I can see how it fits. The language is very similar.

“Perhaps you could explain something to me,” I say. “I hear people talking about chaos theory, complexity theory, and complexity science. I understand that complexity science is the study of complex adaptive systems and that a number of different sciences are beginning to study complexity in their particular disciplines. But what is the difference between chaos theory and complexity theory?” I ask.

“They are somewhat similar in that they are both trying to describe what happens when a number of agents are interacting,” Ted says. “Axelrod and Cohen (1999) suggest that chaos deals with situations such as turbulence (citing Gleick, 1987), which rapidly become highly disordered and unmanageable whereas complexity deals with systems composed of many interacting agents (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999, p. xv). Chaos theory refers to the study of non-linear dynamical systems that are sensitive-dependent on initial conditions—like the butterfly flapping its wings—where small changes can create huge changes in other systems. Using mathematics, scientists look for the patterns that emerge

from the interaction of a number of non-linear variables, or the order that comes out of chaos (Wheatley, 1994). Complexity theory studies the nature of the complex, self-adapting systems—learning systems—that arise through the dynamic, non-linear interaction of their numerous component parts (Complexity and Education, Glossary). Cells, ant hills, classrooms, organizations and so on, are examples of self-adapting complex systems. Complexity scientists realize it is difficult to predict and control complex systems because of the numerous variables; however, complexity research provides a “framework that suggests new kinds of questions and possible actions” (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999, p. 19).

Ted then shifts into a mathematical language I can’t quite decipher and starts drawing some random lines on the table with his fingers, then some elliptical paths, then another line that disrupts the ellipses and finally something that looks like a butterfly, which moves all over the table. I bob my head up and down as if I understand what he is talking about. Occasionally a few bubbles of meaning surface in my consciousness but they burst before I can grasp them. Finally I admit defeat.

“Whoa. Hold on. You lost me after the butterfly effect.”

“Sorry,” he says.

I lean back in my chair feeling somewhat deflated. “I checked out a book by the prize winning physicist, Ilya Prigogine, (1980) but it was full of mathematical equations as are many of the books on chaos and complexity. Unfortunately math is not my forte. I don’t see how I’m going to compare my work to complexity science if I have to do a mathematical analysis of it.”

“Maybe you don’t. Margaret Wheatley’s (1994) work on organizations, for example, is more metaphorical than analytical” (Stroup, 1997, p. 139).

“Of course!” I say as I start to rise above the trees to see the forest again. “And so is the work of most education complexity theorists. I can do this!”

“You’re welcome. So how are you going to do it?” Ted asks.

“I’ll choose only a few characteristics of complex systems that seem most relevant to the study and then suggest ways in which teacher education might be informed by complexity science,” I say happily as I start listing some characteristics of complex systems on the paper.

### ***Drawing Analogies***

“What if I worked with five or six characteristics of complex systems to describe what I found in the study,” I state rather than ask. “I know there are many other characteristics, but for this study I’ll limit them to the ones that seem most relevant:

- Complex systems have a history and are therefore self-referencing;
- Complex systems are nested within other systems;
- Each element of the system is ignorant of the behaviour of the system as whole. It responds only to the information that is available to it locally. It is not possible to do otherwise;
- Complex systems have feed-back loops that can be enhancing or inhibiting;
- Complex systems are open systems and benefit from the interaction of elements;

- New patterns of interactions and new structures emerge from the interaction of elements when drawn together by a strange attractor.

“Sounds like a plan,” says Ted and motions for me to proceed.

*“1. Complex systems have a history and are therefore self-referencing. They are drawn toward stability and order. They not only evolve over time, their past is co-responsible for their present behaviour. Cilliers (1998, p. 4) states that ‘Any analysis of a complex system that ignores the dimension of time is incomplete or at least a synchronic snapshot of a diachronic process.’* When I did this study I had to consider the long history the faculty has of seeing itself as an exemplary teacher education institution. Perhaps many of us have rested on those laurels and have resisted attempts to change what we have been doing. Changes to programs often make many of us feel uneasy. Newer faculty members however, see nothing particularly special in what we do and thus set about making some changes. The result is sometimes a rift between the long-term and newer faculty members, which was evident in the controversy over OCRE. The resulting perturbation however, transformed the off-campus experiences for students to ones where students help take some responsibility in deciding where to go, how to get there, and what to do once they arrive. So when we graduate teachers who feel a sense of responsibility and personal agency, we will continue to see ourselves as an exemplary teacher education institution.

In other words, we are self-referencing to create that sense of stability and order again. This is our *identity*. Identities can become rigid and closed or they can go out in the world and explore new ways of being (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996). We talk a lot in faculty about having students interrogate their White identities, so we might

consider helping the students explore other ‘ways of being White’ (Howard, 1999) such as through narratives, autobiography, the arts or through community experiences. We could also *model* other ways of being White, which might mean a willingness to give up some control,” I suggest. Ted laughs as if to say ‘ya, right’. Unfazed I go on.

“Another important element of the faculty’s past that is co-responsible for its current behaviour,” I continue, “is the vision of teaching for social justice, particularly in the area of Aboriginal Education. This orientation was influenced by Dr. Mary Cronin, Ellie, and a number of long-term faculty members including senior faculty administrators who are still in the faculty or who have recently retired. Because this shared vision is now articulated in our faculty documents, people who have a similar vision are recruited and offered positions on faculty. Because we want to maintain our identity as an institution that works for social justice, the faculty takes actions to keep that identity intact even when the people within the institution change.”

Ted nods in understanding. “Like our bodies replacing all of our cells yet we continue to be the same person.”

“Right.” I say. “Then if I extend this characteristic of complex systems to myself, I can see that my interest in social justice and Aboriginal education comes from my past experiences. I am adapting and changing some of my points of view however, as I respond to new information, but I still see myself as working to help create a more just and equitable world. That’s part of my identity—my self-reference, but hopefully it has shifted slightly to an identity that is less paternalistic. As Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) state, ‘It is essential to remember that all change originates when we change our awareness of who we are’” (p. 100).

Ted looks thoughtful for a moment and then adds, “Maybe the reason people keep doing things that reinscribe the particular view they have of themselves even though it may seem harmful to them is because they haven’t had enough freedom or opportunity to explore who they are or what talents or interests they might have. Or perhaps they keep meeting the expectations that others have of them.”

“I agree. That’s why people in the study kept saying that teachers must have high expectations of students, as well as use a variety of teaching strategies and resources to help students develop skills, interests and talents in a variety of ways.” I say. “On to the next point,” I say.

*“2. Complex systems are nested within and connected to other systems. Systems have self-similarity. Changes in one system can affect other systems. This became apparent when I tried to define the limits or boundaries of my study. It was very difficult because I could see the interrelationships among myself, the individuals with whom I work (inclusive of students and faculty members), our teacher education institution, our Aboriginal and other educational partners, our University, our schools and communities, our province, and so on.*

If I could use a giant lens with adjustable focal points and could focus in on different systems, I would see that the interactions in one system would be similar to the interactions in other systems. In other words, systems have a self similarity much like a fern leaf or a fractal (Davis et al., 2000). It is impossible to describe all the interactions among various systems; therefore I decided to put the ‘frame’ around myself, a few faculty members, our Faculty of Education, and teachers in two schools. Even in limiting the discussion to these systems, the discussion can only be partial, for each system is

connected to other systems and there are subsystems within all of these. The interactions are infinite” (Cilliers, 1998; Clarke & Collins, (n.d.); Davis, et al., 2000; Doll, Jr., 1993; 2005, Gilstrap, 2005; O’Day 2002; Wheatley, 1994).

“Could you draw a visual representation of the nestedness and the interconnections?” Ted asks. “It might help me to see the connections better.”

“Sure,” I say and start to draw a series of circles. The task isn’t quite as easy as I had anticipated, however. There are so many elements and I’m not sure how to show them in relationship to each other.

“Take a look at this,” I turn the paper around for him to see. “Does this help explain things? These circles that are nested within this larger circle, which is the Faculty of Education, represent me, my colleagues, the students and the programs. I could add all the support staff too. The faculty is nested within the university. The other two circles within the university circle that overlap slightly with the Faculty of Education represent the indigenous governed Teacher Education Programs. Situated outside the university but overlapping slightly with it and with the Faculty of Education, is the Department of Learning, which includes the Board of Teacher Education Certification (BTEC) that is responsible for licensing teachers. The faculty has to be sure that our programs meet the Board’s requirements. Close to the university but not directly connected are schools, with staff and students, which overlap the Department of Learning. All of these elements are then situated within the province, the nation and so on. You can see that we are all connected in someway, either directly or indirectly because we are all part of larger systems. Changes in one system can have huge effects in another, or it can have hardly any effect.

For example, changes in teacher certification requirements a few years ago reduced the number of social science courses students could take that would count toward their degrees. Students taking our new program that is oriented towards social justice however, could benefit greatly from more social science courses to help them understand systemic oppression. As a result of the changes in requirements, some of my colleagues have had to work very hard to negotiate the requirements for the new program. I can think of numerous examples where changes in one system have had considerable impact in other systems.”

Ted studies the diagram for a moment.

“What are all those circles that look like donut holes?” he asks.

“Those represent people’s or programs’ histories,” I explain. “I could be here all night drawing circles within circles to show how other systems such as political, economic, physiological, or psychological systems are nested within and overlap each of these systems, but do you see the point I am trying to make?”

Ted nods and says, “Yes, definitely. I can think of some examples from my own experience such as having to schedule the courses for our department. If we had to hire a sessional lecturer at the last moment, I often had to change the time of the class and then inform the students, who weren’t very happy because they had jobs or other commitments.”

“Right. And because we are so interconnected, that’s an example of a small change that can have far-reaching effects in other systems—like the butterfly effect. Another example was when instructors in the Aboriginal teacher education programs talked about how programmatic changes in the larger teacher education program affects



them. Similarly, a request by a faculty member from our program for a faculty member from one of their programs to give a guest lecture or to participate in a research project in order to access research funds, may not seem like a big request. When several people do this, it puts tremendous strains on the people in the Aboriginal teacher education programs.”

Ted nods. “Yes, I know. I’ve heard all about it.”

“And when a teacher at Can Do High thought it might be worthwhile to apply for the McLean’s Magazine award and the school won the award, it changed the way students, the community and even politicians saw the students and their school. It may have changed how some students see themselves as well, which may influence their futures. Again, this is an example of small changes having far-reaching effects.”

“That’s why it’s important to be nice to one another,” Ted says.

“Exactly!” I exclaim. “And that was one of the key themes that kept coming up over and over—the importance of positive relationships—whether it’s with other faculty members, students, or people in the community. Our relationships have implications elsewhere. Research on resilience among youth for example, points to the importance of a positive relationship with a key adult (Williams, 2000). Look what happens when children don’t have positive relationships. There are numerous societal implications. That’s why several of the participants in the study stressed the importance of prospective teachers developing strong, positive relationships with students.”

“Okay, so what is the next characteristic,” asks Ted.

*“3. Each element of a system is ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole. It responds only to the information that is available to it locally. It is not possible*

*to do otherwise.* Cilliers (1998) reminds us that complexity is the result of the rich interaction of simple elements that respond only to the limited information available to each element. We might be able to adjust the lens and look at larger aspects of a complex system, but we can only respond to the systems that are available to us locally. For example, I am not able to dismantle large systems of oppression, but I can try to see how power relationships are played out in my life and my classes. I can't take on large corporations that pay unfair wages to the people working in sweat shops, but I can choose not to shop in their stores. I can't eliminate poverty and racism in my province, country or the world, but I can become aware of how I might be implicated and try not to contribute to someone else's oppression. I can't stop global warming by myself but I can walk or ride my bike."

"True," says Ted. "Think globally, act locally."

"Yes," I say. "And rather than overwhelming our students by giving them the impression that we/they have to do something about these larger systems, which effectively leaves them feeling paralyzed, I can remind them that we can each do our part within our own spheres of influence because our actions have far reaching effects. As Sonia told them, they have their zones of control where they have so many choices in how and what they will teach. They may never know the influence they may have, but if they use integrity and caring, it's most likely the influences will be positive. Similarly, if I can then model respect, caring, collaboration, professionalism, flexibility, openness to change and new ideas, perhaps my students will adopt these patterns of teaching with their own students. Who knows, maybe these small actions on my part could have huge implications in the larger society."

“You’re starting to sound a bit like a megalomaniac,” Ted teases. “What is the next point?”

“4. *Complex systems have feedback loops*, ” I say after making a face at him. “The Complexity and Education web site defines feedback as ‘Any influence on a system that results from its own activity. Feedback is both an effect of a system’s past activity and an influence on its future activity—an output and an input.’ The effect of any activity can feed back onto itself, sometimes directly or sometimes after a number of intervening steps (Cilliers, 1998). For example, if an instructor gives the students what they want—clear expectations for assignments, prescriptions for ‘how to’ create lessons and units and so on—they will do exactly as requested, they will feel secure and they will give the instructor good teaching evaluations. To keep receiving good evaluations, the instructor keeps giving students what they want. This is one kind of feedback loop.

An example of a different kind of feed-back loop, however, is when an instructor helps students identify a problem relevant to their teaching, and within certain parameters, provides opportunities for them to come up with a variety of solutions, and test some of the solutions. The instructor takes some risk in that she or he may not receive positive teaching evaluations from those who dislike the ambiguity, but the instructor may be rewarded in other ways when seeing students imagining many possibilities, taking responsibility for their learning and contributing to the learning of others. The student teachers, in turn, use this way of teaching their own students who also gain a sense of agency and responsibility. It’s like a fractal or looking at yourself in a mirror with another mirror. You can see yourself repeated many times.”

“Yes, I suppose, but each of the images wouldn’t be exactly the same because everyone is different and has different elements influencing them,” Ted reminds me.

“Oh, right. Maybe the mirror wasn’t such a good analogy; the fern leaf is better,” I say. “But an example of this type of feedback loop occurred in the new Middle Years program when the person teaching the Arts Education course asked the students how they might demonstrate teaching for social justice through the arts to the rest of the faculty. The students proposed having an exhibition. With only a little guidance and a few strategically posed questions from the instructor, it was obvious that the students had taken ownership of the project and learned far more than if they had simply listened to a lecture or conducted some research. They put their hearts and souls into the exhibition. Some of the students then took the ideas out to the schools, and it came back to the Arts Education instructor from one of the cooperating teachers of our students, that these student teachers had done a wonderful job of using the arts to help Grade 8 students understand the plight of refugees. As a result, the Grade 8s started writing letters for Amnesty International. Who knows? Maybe those students’ letters could put pressure on oppressive regimes to free political prisoners.”

“Could be,” Ted agrees. “Your two examples show how feedback loops can either enhance or inhibit learning. In the first example, a dampening effect was applied to the feedback loop which was inhibiting because it didn’t open up possibilities for change. In the second example, there is no dampening effect. Students had the freedom to make choices, thus the feedback loop was enhancing because it generated a number of different trajectories that can take the system or ideas in different directions” (Gilstrap, 2005).

“Precisely,” I agree, pleased that Ted is following what I am trying to say although I barely understood what he just said. Following his lead I add, “Another example of an inhibiting feedback loop was my initial resistance to the suggestion that we should *not* be teaching about cultural differences in order to build cross-cultural understanding. My thinking changed somewhat after talking with some colleagues about anti-oppressive education and attending a conference. I finally understood how the reification of the cultural differences concept can keep reinforcing the idea that ‘difference-equals-less-than’. Had I continued on that same feedback loop, my thinking would not have been open to other possibilities. By changing my response—the feedback loop—I was able to see the reasons for this perspective and incorporate that into my thinking about curriculum as it is related to Aboriginal education. Although I don’t necessarily agree with some faculty members’ understanding of culture, it led me to a new way of integrating a critique of colonialism with indigenous knowledge.”

“And the result is postcolonial theory?” asks Ted.

“Yes,” I guess so, or maybe a watered-down version of it,” I say. It seems there are so many differing points of view even among those who are considered postcolonial theorists, and I don’t have the background to be able to argue for or against the various positions. It seems to me that postcolonial theory provides more of a middle space for negotiating possibilities though.”

Ted nods in agreement as he pulls out his pocket computer and stylus and begins poking at the little screen. Suddenly the TV above our heads that had been blaring a song from the MTV channel in the restaurant goes off. “Nobody seems to be listening to it,” Ted observes and puts the pocket PC away.

“How did you do that?” I ask.

“I have my ways,” he says. “Continue.”

“Anyway, along the same vein,” I say, “if instructors continue to give the impression that students’ values and beliefs are wrong and that we have all the answers, we create a feedback loop that entrenches students in a particular way of responding to us. They never see other possibilities for ways of being a learner or a teacher. An example of this is the way Christian students’ values are often disregarded in academia. If however, I can create different kinds of feedback loops where students’ views are validated and they have opportunities to research other perspectives that are somewhat similar to, but slightly different from their own, they may be open to other possibilities.”

“Well you can always try,” observes Ted. “It could be that some students’ beliefs are so firmly entrenched, they will simply deny anything that doesn’t fit within their particular frames of reference. I might take much more than simply researching other views. But who knows. What is the next characteristic of complex systems you want to relate to your study?”

“5. *A complex system is an open system that benefits from the interactions of its elements.* An example of the difference between an open system and a closed system in education is described by Clarke & Collins (n.d.). They discuss two different classrooms where one teacher kept strict controls on the procedures of the classroom, the students’ behaviours and the outcomes of the learning. The result was a closed system where learning was tightly bounded and highly prescribed. In another classroom, the teacher was less rigid and provided a rich and stimulating environment where students could

explore and negotiate their learning. In that classroom, learning emerged in several different ways because it was an open system.

Similarly in her discussion of Boston schools, O'Day (2000) provides another example of open and closed systems. Schools that follow the "egg-crate" model where teachers work in isolation are less successful. She contends that such a model of isolation prevents teachers from taking advantage of the variation in their individual classroom strategies in order to learn from one another and select more successful ways of doing things.

I agree with her. If we can model in our courses how to build professional learning communities with each other, within schools and with community members, our students will benefit professionally through the sharing of knowledge."

"Yes," agrees Ted. "I see that happening now with the emphasis on forming partnerships with other faculties," adds Ted. "My working with some of your colleagues is a good example."

"Right," I nod. "In many respects our faculty seems to be an open system. There are numerous networks within the faculty with actors bringing in new ideas or contesting and resisting other ideas to create an abundance of energy paths that keep the faculty 'on the edge of chaos' (Waldrop, 1992) and from reaching a state of equilibrium. The complexity of this faculty emerges as a result of the *patterns of interactions* of the elements from within and outside the institution (Cilliers, 1998; Davis et al., 2000; Doll, 1993).

Wheatley (1994; 1996) reminds us that if 'an open system seeks to establish equilibrium and stability through constraints on creativity and local changes, it creates the

conditions that threaten its survival,” I add. “In other words, it is necessary to have different ideas and points of view otherwise we will never grow and change. Similarly if we constrain our students and not allow creativity or their own points of view to be heard, they will not grow and change either. It’s a paradox that freedom and order turn out to be partners in generating viable, well-ordered autonomous systems” (Wheatley, 1994, p. 95).

“And what keeps the faculty on the edge of chaos is that you are drawn together by a strange attractor,” offers Ted as he reads my last heading,

*“6. New patterns of interactions and new structures emerge from the interaction of elements drawn together by a strange attractor.”*

“Yes,” I say. Gilstrap (2005) discusses how the metaphor of attractors helps to explain the dynamics of complex systems. He says the attractors are like ‘magnetic forces that draw complex systems towards given trajectories’ and they are ‘found in both chaotic systems and those which are in a state of near equilibrium’ (Pascale, Millemann & Goja, 2000; Wheatly, 1994; cited by Gilstrap, p. 58). In most systems there are four types of attractors: point, periodic point, periodic and strange. Are you familiar with these? I need some help understanding them.” I say.

“Yes,” Ted replies. “*Periodic* attractors form a linear trajectory where something goes from point A to B. If I drop this spoon, the floor is a point attractor and the spoon comes to a rest. The *periodic point* attractor is where a process is repeated periodically to achieve an end goal. This type of trajectory is elliptical like a child dropping a spoon repeatedly and an adult picking it up.”



“Or like my giving the students what they want each year to keep receiving good teaching evaluations,” I add. “What is a *periodic attractor* then?” I ask Ted.

“It’s similar to the previous one in that it has an elliptical orbit; however, the trajectory of the element can change from iteration to iteration,” he explains. “Like me playing fetch with my dog. I toss him balls, sticks, a Frisbee to different places and he brings them back.

“Oh yes, an example related to this study is my returning to the questions posed in this dissertation. I think I posed them slightly differently depending on the person I interviewed and after each conversation I had a different understanding of the implications and complexity of the questions,” I say. “Now, what is a *strange attractor*? I often hear that term.”

“Let’s see. How I can explain this?” Ted pauses for a moment. “In the other examples the attractors produced near states of equilibrium. However, with a strange attractor the interactions are more chaotic and it is difficult to predict its movements. It’s as if a magnetic force continually draws the system near it during each iterative loop in the system cycle (Gilstrap, 2005; Stacey, 2003; Wheatley, 1994). You can’t predict where it is going as all elements do not arrive at the exact point of the strange attractor; rather the system’s trajectory folds towards the vicinity of where the strange attractor appears to reside at a given iteration (Gilstrap, p.60). The elements always stay within certain boundaries and even though a system may look chaotic or is in a state far from equilibrium, ‘it stays within a shape that we recognize as a strange attractor’ (Wheatley, 1994, p, 21). Have you seen those screen savers that have lines folding in toward one another and that move all over the screen?” I nod yes. “That’s an example of how

elements behave around a strange attractor. The Lorenz attractor is probably the most famous one.”

“Oh yes, I’ve seen it. It looks somewhat like a butterfly.” I say. “I think our faculty might be considered a chaotic or complex system and each person is an element within it that is drawn toward a strange attractor, which in our case might be a vision we have for teacher education. But what is a bifurcation point?” I ask.

“The bifurcation point is when a ‘system is at maximum instability (a crossroads between death and transformation)... and the future is wide open. No one can predict which path it will take but the system will seek out its own best solution to the current environment’ (Wheatley, 1994, pp. 96, 97). Small fluctuations as this point can result in massive changes in macro-systems. This is where the idea of emergence comes from. Something new is created from the disorder often caused by a few creative individuals or revolutionaries who bring new energy into the system.”

“Oh, like my colleague who had the idea for a new Middle Years program oriented to social justice and others, including myself, who are helping to establish it in the faculty. It is starting to cause some interest among the other programs too,” I say.

“Yes,” says Ted. “That’s a good example. You mentioned the faculty vision is your strange attractor. What *is* the vision the faculty has? Is everyone attracted to the vision of social justice for example?”

“That’s what I’m not sure about, but we are working on a shared vision, whether it is social justice or something else. I’m not sure it is the same vision that is articulated in our faculty documents concerning Aboriginal education and School<sup>PLUS</sup> anymore. I think many faculty members are starting to question whether focusing on Aboriginal education

is the right thing to do because it reinforces stereotypes and difference. Many people have moved toward the notion of anti-oppressive education instead where members of the dominant group are asked to consider how their positioning in society contributes to the oppression of others. And School<sup>PLUS</sup> seems to be losing momentum in the province because school divisions have just been reorganized. Through workshops the Department of Learning and the School Boards Association are trying to help schools adopt the principles of collaboration and shared leadership that are at the heart of School<sup>PLUS</sup>, but I have heard from friends who are teachers that the financial support and expertise to implement programs is not there. In many schools there is a feeling of chaos right now which I suspect will prevail until each school articulates its own vision.

Others faculty members however, have different focal points for their vision of teacher education as I mentioned earlier. At first I was very concerned about the differences in peoples' perspectives, but I am beginning to see that our differences are necessary for our survival as a strong institution. It keeps us on the edge of chaos or the point where change can occur rather than letting us become too comfortable or complacent about what we are doing. Although we may have different focal points, I do believe that we all see our teacher education institution as one that graduates highly skilled, knowledgeable and caring teachers who have their students' best interests at heart. One faculty member drew an analogy to a road map. 'We all know where we want to go, but there are many different ways to get there and we may not all arrive at the same time.'

We are starting to talk with each other over informal coffee gatherings. With no agenda and nobody directing us, we have begun to discuss a new vision for our programs.

I sense we are poised to reach a point where a transformation—a bifurcation—is about to occur, provided we can keep the respectful, open dialogue going and not have someone else's agenda imposed from the top. From what I understand about emergence, it can't be imposed on a system from the top. I could be wrong, but I feel an energy that hasn't been there for a while in the faculty."

"That's good to hear," replies Ted. "I had that sense as well from what I have been hearing from your colleagues who do the workshops with me. Did you say you have some suggestions for teacher education programs that are based on the principles of complexity?"

"Yes. Wheatley (1994) says that it is important for organizations to have some 'simple governing principles: guiding visions, strong values, organizational beliefs—the few rules individuals can use to shape their own behaviour' (p. 133). So these are some of the rules I think are important—although the word 'rules' doesn't make sense from a complexity science or indigenous way of thinking about the world. Nothing is that hard and fast. Indeed, both perspectives warn against inflexible structures and fixed positions," I add quickly because I see Ted's reaction when I say 'rules'.

"I'm glad you clarified that," replies Ted. "Mathematicians use rules with a number of variables to see which patterns emerge from chaos, but I don't think rules necessarily work in social and biological systems. Rather, we should be ever alert to change and variation, open to modification and embellishment of such systems as the need arises and the systems adapt to new circumstances and influences. But if you want to call them 'rules' for now, go ahead."

"Thanks," I say. "It makes it easier."

### ***Living Rules***

“Rule 1: *Love one another, including humans and non- humans as much as you love yourself.* This, of course is not my rule. It’s the rule of all the great religions of the world—the Golden Rule. At the heart of the rule is the recognition that we are all connected and no one or thing is greater than or less than anyone/thing else. Whatever we do to others, we are doing to ourselves.

Nearly everyone I spoke with commented on the importance of developing respectful relationships with students, colleagues, or community members, which I think will result from having this rule at the core of all we do. If White educators can overcome our feelings of superiority to students, to colleagues, to people and communities whom we perceive as different, we may make some progress. I think that societies that are based on hierarchies and power relationships have a little harder time grasping this concept though, so those of us who have been brought up in this paradigm will have to work a little harder at this rule,” I admit.

“No doubt,” observes Ted. “What is rule number 2?”

“Rule 2: *Allow a system (student, colleague or community) the right to self-determination; it’s right to create itself.* If we assume we have all the answers and impose our will on others, they will resist the process of imposition. All systems are drawn toward the process of creation or self-determination. For example, when my students asked an Elder what it is that indigenous people want, he replied, ‘Self-determination’. Systems (including people) ‘never accept imposed solutions, pre-determined designs, or well-articulated plans that have been generated somewhere else’ (Wheatley & Kellner-

Rogers, 1996). I suspect this is what some of the participants in the study were talking about, or a version of it, when they proposed having the students involved in community-based projects where the curriculum and the learning emerges from collaborative work and a shared goal/interest.

I am beginning to see that one of the reasons for much of my frustration as a teacher has come from my tacit belief that I can predict and control change. I have unconsciously assumed a cause and effect relationship between my actions and my intended effects. I see similar thinking in students ('Just tell me what to do and I'll be a good teacher'), in cooperating teachers ('These students are failing in school because their parents don't care'), in faculty members ('Johnny can't read because of poverty and racism') and even in our government ('Schools will be better if teachers are more accountable and we can measure their students' success through indicators').

The linear, cause-effect thinking has resulted in actions designed to control outcomes, which results in closed systems in many cases (Clarke & Collins, n.d; Doll, 1993; Gilstrap, 2005; O'Day, 2002). In closed systems, 'challenge and perturbation become disruptive, and inefficient, qualities to be removed, overcome, even stamped out as soon as possible' whereas in open systems 'challenge and perturbation become the *raison d'être* for organization and reorganization' (Doll, Jr., 1993, p. 159). In other words, the more we try to control and prescribe learning, the more we diminish the learning potential of the system. If on the other hand we are willing to live with the ambiguity and the fuzziness of open systems, the greater the possibilities for change (Wheatley, 1992). Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996, p. 101) also state:



This means supporting the system to explore new connections, new information, new ways of being. It means focusing on opening the system in all ways. And it means trusting that by doing so, the system will grow in health and capacity.

We might consider applying this principle to our curricula. William Doll, Jr.

suggests what a reconceptualized curriculum might look like:

A reconceptualized curriculum has no pre-set beginning, the beginning is in the existential moment and as the experience, with communal help, plunges into a situation, a matrix of connections (rich, recursive, relational, and rigorous) emerge. In this way, child and curriculum, learner and teacher, self and text, person and culture dance together to form a complex pattern—ever changing, ever stable, ever alive.” (2005, p.55)

“Well that sounds wonderful,” says Ted, “but I don’t think my Dean would be too happy if a bunch of students came in complaining to him that there was no course syllabus, no assignments and that they were to just make it up as they went along.”

“Well no, I guess we can’t expect students to be okay with that, because they are used to being told what to do. And there are certain things they are expected to know if they are going to be in any of the professions. But I think we can make our courses flexible enough so that students have some say in what they learn, how the course is to be conducted and how they will be evaluated. I tried that this past year, and I found it a much more satisfying way to conduct the class and I think the students learned more too.”

“The Japanese learned that as well and soon American companies were trying to learn the secret of their success (Gilstrap, 2005),” observes Ted. Do you have any other rules?”

“Rule 3: *Value diversity*. Although the notion of ‘celebrating diversity’ has been extensively critiqued, I think it has merit if we think of diversity as necessary for a healthy system. Capra (1996) reminds us that in ecosystems, a diverse community is a



resilient community and the same may hold true for human communities [such as our faculty]:

However, diversity is a strategic advantage only if there is a truly vibrant community, sustained by a web of relationships. If the community is fragmented into isolated groups and individuals, diversity can easily become a source of prejudice and friction but if the community is aware of the interdependence of all its members, diversity will enrich all the relationships and thus enrich the community as a whole, as well as each individual member. In such a community information and ideas flow freely through the entire network and the diversity of interpretations and learning styles—even the diversity of mistakes—will enrich the entire community. (p.303-304)

“I believe we have to let go of the comfort of homogeneity when we are among others like ourselves. That leads to a closed system which is not a healthy system. It means we have to be open to other ideas, other people, other ways of being in the world.”

Ted nods in agreement and we sit quietly for a few moments as I think about whether I am putting this rule into practice. I suddenly have a confession to make.

“When we were interviewing students to come into our new Middle Years program, we were looking for students who have the same ideas about social justice as we have. It’s a lot easier to work with students who think like we do, primarily because we don’t have the luxury of time to ‘indoctrinate’ them, as some students accuse us of doing. I found that out the hard way. But now that I know that healthy systems are sustained by difference, by new information or new ways of being, I wonder if we have done the best thing for our program. It’s the energy that comes from exploring difference that that creates new solutions to problems. It’s hard not to be ‘right’ though, and I’m not sure how one gets over that. Even by making these ‘rules’ I am assuming I have the blueprint for solving the world’s problems.”

Ted smiles. I can guess what he is thinking. “And rule number Four?

“Rule 4: *Value cooperation and collaboration over competition.* Competition has lead to domination of others, wars, and numerous social problems. My ancestors thought they had to compete with your ancestors for this land. Rather than cooperate and share the resources as your ancestors might have done, mine assumed that to the victor go the spoils of war, although the war they waged was covert. I think many people in our faculty embrace the tenet of cooperation, for we often have students working cooperatively in our courses or we collaborate with others on research projects,” I observe. “Through the synergy of our working relationships, we achieve much more than when we work in isolation.”

“Yes,” says Ted. “Now if we could just convince universities to do away with grading systems that pit students against each other in competition for scholarship dollars, or as faculty members not have to compete for research dollars. Do you have another rule?”

“Rule 5: *Realize there is no ‘right way’ to do anything, but be guided by a vision of integrity.* One of the participants in my study stated, ‘I know that teaching is movement, it’s changing. What I believe today will likely be different tomorrow because of new stimulus. It doesn’t mean that what I know today is bad or wrong or whatever; it just fits perfectly now. It’s the dance of it.’ This person also told me that as educators we have ‘zones of control’. ‘I choose my instructional strategies. I choose my evaluation. I choose my expectations, and the way that I communicate with the students. I choose my expectations for behavior in the classroom, I choose the people that I bring in. I am making lots of different kinds of choices so those are my zones of control. I am guided by

a personal theory and I never lose sight the teaching is a theory within the theory. It's not only what I am teaching; it's who I am.

For teacher education programs Clarke & Collins (n.d.) suggest that rather than evaluating student teachers by means of a checklist of pre-determined skills, we might ask how the classroom changed because of their presence in it. By helping our students learn to be flexible, open, caring and ethical through thoughtful reflection—not only on their skill development but reflection on their relationships—I believe they will learn to ask how the classroom is better because of their presence. I think the same principle might apply to teacher educators in our reflexive assessments of our selves.

If I can use ethics and personal integrity as the compass or strange attractor in all I do; if I am aware of who I am becoming and who I am trying to be, perhaps then I can feel a sense of contributing to a better world. I have to keep asking myself, 'What is possible now? How can the world be different because of me?' As Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996 state:

We encourage others to change only if we honor who they are now. We ourselves engage in change only as we discover that we might be more of who we are by becoming something different." (p. 50)

Ted smiles. "That sounds like good advice. Carrying it out might be a little harder, though. One of the characteristics of complex systems is that they are drawn to a state of equilibrium and it is difficult to break out of familiar patterns (Gilstrap, 2005). Do you have any ideas how you might overcome the tendency to keep repeating what you have been doing?"

I shrug my shoulders. "I don't know. I guess I have to just keep talking with people like you."

## CHAPTER XII

### Closing Stories

The dance of this universe extends to all the relationships that we have. Knowing the steps ahead of time is not important; being willing to engage with the music and move freely onto the dance floor is the key. (Wheatley, 1994, p. 142)

#### *Mirror Dancing*

I lean forward and gaze at my reflection in the mirror as I trace my finger along the lines around my mouth. *Do I really look like a grandma? How did this happen? I guess I should be thankful for every wrinkle, for each represents a road on the map of my life. Oh brother. Who am I kidding?*

I hurriedly put on my lipstick and rush to catch the bus for my morning class wondering how the students will respond to the exercise I have planned for them today. *Dance, dance, wherever you may be. I am the Lord of the Dance said He*, I hum quietly as I wait for the bus.

Near the end of the class in which we have been discussing classroom management strategies, which I prefer to describe as building respectful learning communities, I pose the following question: “Does any one know what mirror dancing is?” A few people raise their hands. “Stacey and John, could you show us please?” Stacey and John come to the front, face each other and John looks at Stacey with raised eyebrows. Stacey nods and John begins to describe a large circle in the air with his left hand. Without touching him, Stacey follows suit with her right hand. Stacey mirrors John’s lead for a while then subtly introduces a movement of her own which John follows. After a minute or so, I thank the pair and invite the rest of the class—those who

wish to participate—to pair up with someone else and silently perform a mirror dance. Most of the students get up as I turn on some music.

One young woman sitting near me who has her arms crossed, looks at me and says quietly, “I don’t dance.” I nod to indicate that it’s all right.

I hear giggles and quiet laughter as people try to lead each other around the room or make each other perform unusual moves. A few minutes later, I ask the students to take their seats.

“Comments on this exercise?” I ask and wait for what seems to be an eternity while the students try to guess what I want them to say. *Wait time. Practice using wait time. Isn’t that what I always tell them?*

“It was a little scary,” says Beth. I nod and wait. Beth then elaborates on her statement. “I didn’t know where my partner was going to lead me. I guess I had to trust her.”

“My partner wouldn’t let me lead and was trying to make me look stupid,” says Mark as he moves his arms into contorted positions and makes a face.

People laugh as John says, “We won’t go there.”

“You didn’t have to follow though, Mark,” says Andrea. “You had a choice.”

“Yeah,” agrees Melanie, “If I didn’t like something, I didn’t follow. I changed the move and my partner could chose to follow me or not.”

“That’s what Antonio Bandaras’ character said in the movie about dancing I saw,” offers Andrea. “He said the person who follows has to trust the other person, but has to have confidence in her—or his—ability to follow and to also believe that one does have a choice to follow or not.” Heads nod in agreement.

“I thought it was fun,” bubbles Charity. “My partner and I created some really awesome moves and it was amazing how well we were able to switch back and forth between being a leader or follower just by paying attention to each other.” A few other people agree.

“Paying attention to one another was the key to creating something unique and satisfying. Is that what I hear you saying?” I ask the class in general. I hear several people respond in the affirmative.

“We talked earlier in the semester about synectics as an instructional strategy that helps students develop creativity and deeper understandings by comparing one thing to another. We have also been learning about teaching for social justice for the past year,” I remind the class. “Here is a synectic connection I’d like you to think about for next day:” *How is dancing like teaching, particularly when your students’ backgrounds and experiences are very different from your own, for example, if you are teaching in an inner city school or on a reserve?* I write the sentence on the board. Could you come prepared to discuss that?” Heads nod as they copy the statement and then leave.

### ***Co-creating Dances***

At the beginning of the class the next day I ask students to sit in groups in order to compare answers and generate new connections between the dance metaphor and their teaching. After a few minutes the large group reconvenes and I invite their suggestions. “And please describe teaching in terms of the dance metaphor,” I say.

Stacy begins. "Well, when we become teachers and enter a school or community, we may not be familiar with the dance that everyone else is doing, but if we are willing to learn, people will teach us what they know. In turn we can teach them what we know."

"As long as we don't go in and assume that our way of dancing is the only way and that students have to learn our dance if they want to be successful in the larger society," adds Ben.

"As teachers there may be times when we dance in groups following predetermined patterns that we learn at professional development days," offers Sean. "Sort of like line dancing." People laugh at his metaphor.

Melissa adds, "Sometimes people job share so you may have to dance with a partner where they lead and you follow, or you take turns."

"If you're working in a small, isolated community where there are few other teachers and little support, it may feel like you are dancing alone or that you and your students are making up the steps as you go along," suggests Angie.

Susan then adds, "You might notice that some students are sitting on the sidelines not participating. It may be that they don't know how to dance and it takes longer for them to learn and you will have to spend more time with them."

"Or some students may already know the dance that you are having everyone do and it is too easy for them, so they are bored and are sitting out," Mike says.

"Some students may not want to dance because they are shy or it's not their 'thing'. They might prefer to do other things," Mark suggests. "All you can do is invite and encourage students to dance but you can't make them."

“Maybe some students are being deliberately excluded from the dance, or maybe they are bullied when they come onto the dance floor. As a teacher you have to create a space where everyone can participate safely,” says John. “As teachers, our interactions with these students could determine whether they will learn to love the dance or not,” he adds.

The class is silent for a moment as they try to think of more analogies, so I add one. “At times the dance may seem chaotic in your classroom, or school, or community, but you will begin to notice patterns in the way people relate to each other. You will start to learn those patterns and you will also learn to create others patterns of relating as you build trust and respect with people in the community. Eventually, if you are open and willing, you will co-create patterns together to perform a mutually satisfying dance with increasingly complex patterns where all people in the community participate as they are able.” The students nod in agreement and the class goes silent again.

“Thank you for those thoughtful analogies,” I say to the class. As Mary Catherine Bateson reminds us, ‘We are called to join in a dance whose steps must be learned along the way, so it is important to attend and respond. Even in uncertainty we are responsible for our steps’ (1994, p. 10). And please remember, in this dance we call Life, the dance can become an act of great joy with infinite possibilities if we listen to and move to our inner music; if we attend to and respond to others respectfully and willingly; if we are willing to sometimes lead and sometimes follow; and if we practice our steps every day. As T. S. Elliot said, ‘There is only the dance’ (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers, 1996, p. 103), so do it well and with great love.”



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**APPENDIX A****Faculty Survey**

**Educating Preservice Teachers for Collaborative Work with Aboriginal  
Communities in a School<sup>PLUS</sup> Environment  
Faculty Survey**

**Part One**

Considering the teacher education programs in this faculty, please complete the survey by checking the numbers that most closely represent your views. Some space is provided under each question for you to expand upon your response if you choose.

**Key**

**1 - Strongly Disagree   2 - Disagree   3 – Not Sure   4 – Agree   5 – Strongly Agree**

<b>STATEMENT</b>	<b>1 SDA</b>	<b>2 DA</b>	<b>3 NS</b>	<b>4 A</b>	<b>5 SA</b>
1. There is general agreement among the faculty about the meaning of School <sup>PLUS</sup> .	1	2	3	4	5
2. There is general agreement among the faculty about the value of School <sup>PLUS</sup> .	1	2	3	4	5
3. I believe the faculty needs a shared understanding of its role in educating teachers for School <sup>PLUS</sup> .	1	2	3	4	5
4. I find it easy to include content related to working in a School <sup>PLUS</sup> setting in my courses.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I support the recommendation of the Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School that more emphasis be placed on cross-cultural/anti-racist education for prospective teachers, specifically with regards to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.	1	2	3	4	5

STATEMENT	1 SDA	2 DA	3 N	4 A	5 SA
6. School <sup>PLUS</sup> has the potential to further the goals of Aboriginal education.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel confident that I know what is meant by Aboriginal education.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel uncomfortable promoting Aboriginal education in my courses because I don't know enough about it.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel uncomfortable promoting Aboriginal education in my courses because I may be unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes and racism.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Racism among our pre-service teachers is a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
11. As individuals we must interrogate our own racism.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I believe we should promote anti-racist education in our courses.	1	2	3	4	5
<p align="center"><b>Page 4 of 9</b></p> <p><b>Faculty Survey: Version February 2, 2004</b></p>					

STATEMENT	1 SDA	2 DA	3 N	4 A	5 SA
13. In educating prospective teachers it is more important to emphasize working respectfully with children, communities and each other rather than focusing on who has power in society.	1	2	3	4	5
14. We can help our students be excellent teachers without dwelling on difference.	1	2	3	4	5
15. People teaching in the faculty have a shared understanding of the goals for teacher education with respect to diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
16. It is beneficial for our prospective teachers to hear a variety of viewpoints from their instructors regarding diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
17. There are opportunities to discuss among teaching staff on faculty questions or concerns that relate to School <sup>PLUS</sup> .	1	2	3	4	5
18. There should be more interdisciplinary courses that help prospective teachers learn to work with other human service professionals.	1	2	3	4	5



STATEMENT	1 SDA	2 DA	3 N	4 A	5 SA
19. It is important that future teachers understand how colonization and assimilation policies have had devastating effects on Aboriginal peoples.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Prospective teachers must learn how to work toward equal opportunity and social justice for all groups.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Our future teachers must learn to analyze how they have acquired their own beliefs, values and privileges and how these may be contributing to the oppression of others.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Rather than dwelling on injustices, a teacher's role is to help students develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to participate fully in society.	1	2	3	4	5
23. We need to find ways to attract more Aboriginal students and instructors to our programs.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Educating for social justice should be the primary goal of teacher education in this faculty.	1	2	3	4	5
25. There are other equally important goals for teacher education that are seldom discussed.					





### Confidential Interview Agreement

I would be willing to participate in a 30-45 minute confidential interview concerning the preparation of preservice teachers to work with Aboriginal communities in a School<sup>PLUS</sup> environment. I understand that I may withdraw from the interview at any time without jeopardy to my work or reputation.

I understand you will contact me to set up the interview time. You may reach me through my email address \_\_\_\_\_ or at the following phone number(s):

Work: \_\_\_\_\_ Home: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*If you have filled out this page, please detach it and place it in my mailbox separately from the questionnaire. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study.*

**APPENDIX B****Sample Interview Questions**

**Views From the Inside and Out:  
Educating Preservice Teachers for Collaborative Work With Indigenous Communities  
Faculty Interview and Focus Group Questions**

1. How do you address anti-racist education in your courses?
2. The curriculum guides state that teachers should include Aboriginal content in their lesson and unit plans. What does that mean to you?
3. How do you help them do that in your subject area?
4. What do you believe are the greatest challenges for teacher education programs with respect to providing more cross-cultural education, anti-racist or diversity education?
5. What recommendations do you have for improving the way this teacher education program prepares preservice teachers to work in a School<sup>Plus</sup> environment?
6. What other questions should I be asking?

Carol Fulton  
Faculty Focus Group Questions – Version February 12, 2004

**Views From the Inside and Out:  
Educating Preservice Teachers for Collaborative Work With Indigenous  
Communities**

**Interview Questions for People Connected with Aboriginal Communities or  
Community Schools**

During this interview I will focus primarily on how you believe the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina has prepared its future teachers to work with Aboriginal communities and in community schools. I will also invite your suggestions for ways to improve teacher education programs in this regard.

1. What do you believe are some of the challenges that teachers experience when working in a community school?
2. From your experience, how would you generally describe the ability of the graduates of the University of Regina teacher education program to work in and with First Nations and Métis communities(How prepared are they to meet some of the challenges?)
3. What special preparation (if any) do teachers need in order to work with other service providers who are involved with children and their families?
4. The Role of the School report also recommended that more emphasis be placed on cross-cultural and anti-racist education for teachers, specifically with regards to the Aboriginal people of Canada. How important do you think this is?
5. If you believe this important, what do you think should be the emphasis in cross-cultural and anti-racist education? (If you believe this is not important, what do you suggest instead?)
6. What evidence (if any) is there that graduates of the U of R teacher education programs have had cross-cultural or anti-racist education?
7. What do you think could be done to improve prospective teachers' understanding of the issues faced by Aboriginal peoples?
8. The curriculum guides state that teachers should include Aboriginal content in their lesson plans. What does this mean to you?
9. What initiatives do you know of that have contributed to the academic success of Aboriginal student?
10. What suggestions do you have for teacher education programs in terms of preparing future teachers to work with Aboriginal communities and in community schools?

**APPENDIX C****Reflections on the New Middle Years Program**



## **Reflections on the New Middle Years Program**

April 2006

Another year has passed. This year I have been helping to implement the new experimental Middle Years program that is oriented to teaching for social justice. It has been an exhilarating process for me because of the energy created when developing something new and seeing how a vision unfolds. The vision for the initiative came from Monica's belief that our programs needed to change in order to help prospective teachers recognize and address some of the inequities in our schools and society, particularly as they relate to First Nations and Métis students in this province. She proposed the idea of an experimental program to her colleagues and the proposal was met with an enthusiastic response.

This was the first year of implementation and we started with the students in the preinternship (3<sup>rd</sup>) year of the four-year program. Six students who already had degrees whom we refer to as B.E.A.D. students (Bachelor of Education After Degree) were interviewed and selected for the program on the basis of their previous activism and orientation towards social justice. Most of these students were a little older and had children, so they added a sense of maturity to the class discussions. They were quickly accepted by the undergraduate students who had been together the previous year.

One of the biggest changes in the program was in the way the field experience was conducted in the first semester. Rather than having students go one day per week into city schools that are primarily in White, middle-class neighbourhoods, we took the students out of the city to do a 2 week practicum with Grades 6-9 in rural schools where

there are high numbers of Aboriginal students. Because the Aboriginal teacher education programs have priority over city schools with high numbers of First Nations and Métis students, we had to go outside the city. During the second semester students had 3 weeks in middle-class, urban schools where the focus of their teaching was incorporate issues related to social justice into their lessons and unit plans.

In the first semester the students and we three instructors stayed in a retreat setting where the students' school experiences were debriefed in the evening and lessons were planned for the following day. We took boxes of curriculum guides, resource materials, and iBooks with us to facilitate the planning in the evening. Some evenings included guest speakers who talked about various programs to support students and keep them in school. Some of these programs included after school programs, lunch and snack programs, and an alternative storefront school.

Student evaluations of the practicum indicated they valued the experience immensely. They appreciated the bonding that took place, the access to instructors to help them plan for and practise their teaching in a supportive atmosphere, and the opportunity to work with First Nations and Métis students. Many of our students had never had any contact with Aboriginal people before then. As one young woman said in a debriefing session near the end of the second week, "I was a little bit afraid of the [Aboriginal] kids when I first went into the school, but now I just see them as normal kids." Her comment brought echoes of agreement from her peers. This is one of the reasons why Monica insisted that the students have opportunities to work with First Nations and Métis students.

Over the 2 weeks our preinterns developed an ability to see how students become marginalized. They began to see how the lunch program in one school segregated the students. All the students who needed lunch were put into one room. The snack program was different however. Each day someone came around and asked if anyone needed a snack. Anybody and everybody could have one if they wished. Our students also began to see the little cliques in the classrooms that seemed to be related to class and race.

One issue that arose during the 2 weeks related to student autonomy. Monica and I were concerned that the preinterns might see the retreat setting as an opportunity to 'party', so she skilfully posed the problem to the class and asked what they thought would be appropriate. The students decided as a group that there would be no alcohol or drugs while we were there. We didn't anticipate that they would want to go out at night and have visitors come by, however. Because we wanted their focus to be on planning and being well prepared and rested for the next day, we asked the students not to leave or have visitors. This was decided after the issue came up a week into the experience. A few people were upset by this and one person said in the evaluation, "This felt like a prison." In retrospect, I think this is something we might have negotiated with the students as well, so that they had some responsibility in the decision-making process. Perhaps they might have come to the same conclusions we did; perhaps not, but I have to keep reminding myself these are adults after all.

The rest of the year was focused on identifying issues related to social justice. We had weekly noon-hour seminars where we brought our lunch or had a pot-luck lunch and discussed social, political and environmental issues. We watched videos and occasionally got into some lively debates that left some people angry. In our courses we provided

numerous readings related to social justice including a few on White privilege. In one of their courses the students went into the community to interview people who worked in non-governmental organizations to find out some of the community issues and needs. They then created displays and presentations for the faculty on what they found.

In another class the students created an art exhibition with numerous pieces of performance and visual art that emerged from their understandings of social justice. Some of the pieces included a fashion show of clothes that were made in 'sweat shops' by people making subsistence wages; dance performances illustrating how people can work together; poetry readings that brought out issues for women; dramatizations showing aspects of power relationships; songs about peace that some people wrote and performed; sculptures and huge visual art displays showing silhouettes of people with narratives attached to the silhouettes, and so on.

We also required the students to plan units of study that incorporated issues related to social justice. Some of the topics students explored with middle years children included Immigrants and Refugees, Homelessness, Bullying, Science and Consumerism, Unheard Voices (poetry), TV and Me, Gender and the Media, Child Labour, Acting for Change (Forum Theatre), as well as other more typical topics where our students tried to work into the units a variety of perspectives to challenge what we consider normal ways of looking at topics. By the end of the second semester most of the students were staunch advocates of a social justice perspective. There were a few dissenting and a few silent voices however, especially among the students who had strong Christian backgrounds. The advocates of social justice also had some concerns which they raised in small group debriefing sessions.

One of their concerns related to principals or school boards who might not be aware of or who do not accept a social justice philosophy. The students wondered whether this would jeopardize their chances of being hired when they graduate. They were concerned that graduates of this new program might be considered a “bunch of left-wing loony tunes” as one of the B.E.A.D. students said. They also wondered how far from the curriculum guides they could stray. We responded that they needed to teach the foundational objectives, which were very general and tended to be process oriented, and that these objectives could be taught through a variety of topics.

Another concern was the feeling of being overwhelmed with having to focus on issues related to social justice when they hardly had any skills to teach or to manage a classroom. Some people also expressed concerns about being overwhelmed with the problems of society and didn’t want to address these in a classroom because they were too controversial. As a couple of teary-eyed students said in different small groups, “I just want to teach the curriculum!” Another expressed a concern that activism wasn’t modelled by the instructors, but the students were expected to become activists.

One of the concerns I have after looking at the students’ unit plans, is their lack of awareness or lack of mention of issues related to social justice in this province. They recognized some of the inequities in other parts of the world but failed to see those at home.

As well, one person created a whole unit plan on “Art in the Aboriginal Culture” that lumped together a number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit visual artists, musicians, and actors from across Canada. I realize now that in our efforts to avoid any talk of cultural differences in our courses and focus instead on anti-oppressive education,


students are stereotyping Aboriginal peoples to an even greater extent than they were in previous years when I had students researching the names and locations of the different First Nations and Métis groups within the province.

I feel I have learned something from my experiences this year and I am looking forward to next year's group of students. Hopefully I won't make the same mistakes again.

**APPENDIX D****Ethics Approval Forms**



## Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR <b>Clarke, A.</b>	DEPARTMENT <b>Curriculum Studies</b>	NUMBER <b>B04-0080</b>
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT <b>UBC Campus ,</b>		
CO-INVESTIGATORS: <b>Fulton, Carol, Curriculum Studies</b>		
SPONSORING AGENCIES		
TITLE : <b>Views from the Inside and Out: Educating Preservice Teachers for Collaborative Work with Indigenous Communities in a SchoolPLUS Environment</b>		
APPROVAL DATE <b>FEB 24 2004</b>	TERM (YEARS) <b>1</b>	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL: <b>Feb. 19, 2004, Contact letter / Advertisement / Consent letter / Contact letter</b>
CERTIFICATION:  <p>The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <hr/><i>Approval of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:</i> <b>Dr. James Frankish, Chair,</b> <b>Dr. Cay Holbrook, Associate Chair,</b> <b>Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair</b></div> <p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures</p>		





DATE: February 18, 2004

TO: Ms. C. Fulton

FROM: J. Roy  
A. Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: **Views from the Inside and Out: Educating Preservice Teachers for Collaborative Work with Indigenous Communities in a SchoolPLUS Environment.**

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

- ✓ 1. ACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* requires the researcher to send the Chair of the REB annual reports and notice of project conclusion for research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). **ETHICAL CLEARANCE MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS.** Clearance will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received.
2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and subsequently approved prior to beginning research. Please address the concerns raised by the reviewer(s) by means of a supplementary memo to the Chair of the REB. Do not submit a new application. Please provide the supplementary memorandum\*\*, or contact the REB concerning the progress of the project, before **May 18, 2004**, in order to keep your file active. Once changes are deemed acceptable, approval will be granted.
3. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. Joan Roy

c. A. Clarke, supervisor

JR/sm/ethics2.dot

\*\* supplementary memorandum should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (AH 505) or by e-mail to [research.ethics@uregina.ca](mailto:research.ethics@uregina.ca)



UNIVERSITY OF  
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### Permission to Conduct Research

To: Carol Fulton

From: Margaret McKinnon, Dean  
Faculty of Education

Re: Permission to Conduct Study

Date: September 24, 2003

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I have read your letter of request to conduct a study in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina on the beliefs, practices and hopes of those teaching in the Faculty concerning the preparation of pre-service teachers to work with Aboriginal communities and in a School<sup>plus</sup> environment. I am granting permission to conduct the study on the condition that you receive approval from the Ethics Boards of the University of Regina and the University of British Columbia.

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Margaret McKinnon, Dean  
Faculty of Education