Unlearning Colonialism: An Aboriginal Experience in Education as the Practice of Freedom

By

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ABSTRACT

This study is an Aboriginal account of the experience of a remote First Nation community in post – secondary education. The education program was delivered in the community as a result of a partnership that was formed between the community and the First Nations Partnership Program in the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care. A prominent feature of the program studied involves the manner in which the community's unique culture formed a major part of the curriculum, and the cultural competence of the program that obtained in the final delivery of the program according to the accounts of the interview participants. The study links responses from the community members, and utilizes grounded theory to generate theoretical propositions that depict an educational experience as the practice of freedom.

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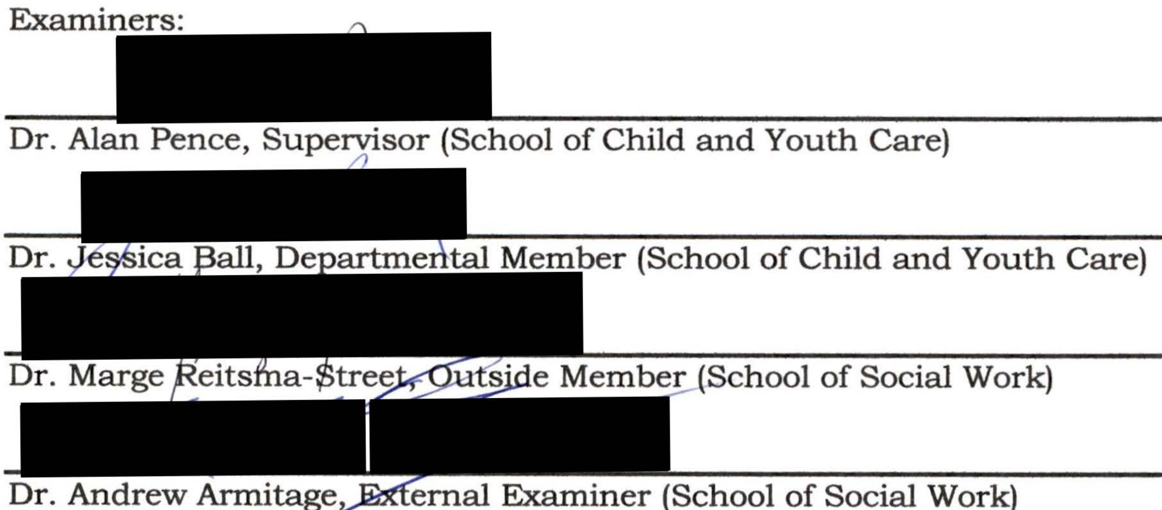

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

If tragic knowledge is the understanding that one can never be certain of what life's fates may hold in store, regardless of how diligently honour and justice are pursued to create one's future, then Canada's First Peoples have such knowledge. But, the fickle fates that have prescribed Aboriginal destinies in Canada for centuries have actually been controlled by others: missionaries, priests and nuns, social workers, politicians, and bureaucrats. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of education.

This is a study that examines one First Nation's use of an educational model which constitutes a somewhat radical departure from education in Western traditions whereby education has been used to enforce power structures of the Canadian state over the lives and fates of Aboriginal peoples. It is an account of how a small First Nation community entered into a partnership with a major B.C. university in order to provide post-secondary education in the area of child and youth care to a number of its community members.

The post-secondary education project, including the community-university partnership arrangement, is one that was chosen by this particular First Nation in preparation for increasing community control and capacity to meet the needs (and the special needs) of the children in the community. They also sought to increase their effectiveness in dealing with interventions into child and family life by social workers and other public officials. The experiences reported by

the respondents in this study clearly describe the partnership for post-secondary education project as a progressive step toward facing the future on their own terms.

As the community participants' experiences unfolded throughout the research, there was also clear recognition of the vital role of the university partner. The university actors were not only a source of support, but as we shall see, they became partners in solidarity with the aspirations this community has for developing its capacity to be not just self-governing, but self-determining in the area of providing care for the children of their community.

PERSONAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

My interest in pursuing this particular study stems largely from the fact that I am a woman of Peneteka Comanche and Scottish descent. I lived in the village on our reservation with my grandmother until the age of ten. I have experienced the public school system from elementary through to post-graduate levels. Moreover, I have been actively involved with Aboriginal communities in B.C. for 25 years, working with them toward eventual self-government and sharing my own healing in the process.

The fact that federal and provincial governments' definitions of self-government and ours are vastly different motivates my work in contributing in whatever small way I can to the development of Aboriginal communities' capacity to be self-determining. Concurrently, there are immense administrative responsibilities as Canadian governments continue with their fast-paced devolution process, none of which even approximates adequate funding levels for the purposes governments continue to prescribe.

My disappointments and frustrations regarding government-to-community devolution processes notwithstanding, I have worked extensively in this area. My purpose in doing so is defined by a personal vision consistent with Aboriginal contentions that self-government be more a function of self-determination than of mere program self-management. To these ends, I have been working for the past two years as an analyst-technician for the Aboriginal Peoples' Council, a provincial organization of urban and rural off-Reserve community representatives.

The Aboriginal Peoples' Council is one stakeholder in a nationally piloted tripartite policy agenda process. There are three additional Aboriginal stakeholders involved in the Joint Policy Tables. These are the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, the Assembly of First Nations – B.C. Summit, and the Metis` Provincial Council of B.C. Members of the tripartite policy process include the federal and B.C. provincial governments together with respective Aboriginal stakeholders. The focus of this work is to engage federal and provincial governments in the development of policies and practices in child, family and community services, Aboriginal health, and Aboriginal justice. Activities to bring the off-Reserve contingent into alliance with the two territory-based provincial Chief's' organizations are in progress.

These, then, are factors framing my personal background as researcher in this study. It is important to the integrity of the study to engage a process of continual revelation of personal contexts that may give rise to researcher bias, prejudice or other interpretive elements of the study so that the findings produced are accountable to research ethics. More importantly, the study necessitates accountability to the members of the First Nation community - to their interpretations and voiced experiences as actual participants in the educational program, as well as to the data

produced through their interviews. Consistent with the foregoing, John H. Stanfield states in his article, "Ethnic Modeling in Qualitative Research":

> What is at least implicit in the insider/ outsider debate is that the autobiographies, cultures, and historical contexts of researchers matter; these determine what researchers see and do not see, as well as their ability to analyze data and disseminate knowledge adequately (Stanfield, J. H., 1994, p. 179).

In the chapter on methodology, the issue of researcher accountability and steps taken to address my experience and position vis-à-vis the context and material aspects of the study will be examined in greater detail. I will also discuss in greater detail the manner in which I established accountability to the First Nation community through attending to the respondents' voiced experiences.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Since colonial contact, education has been used as a vehicle in an attempt to assimilate indigenous peoples into Canadian society. This strategy was, at times, pursued more aggressively as in the case of residential schools. Thus, Aboriginal leaders of the past and present have continually sought to improve the quality of life for their people and have made repeated submissions to various levels of government institutions expressing concern and demanding change. Despite several studies and reports calling for changes to existing educational institutions to improve the quality of education *for* Aboriginal students, very little positive change has actually taken place. This would require massive systemic changes which, considering the bureaucratically rigid

nature of educational institutions, is not likely to be overhauled to meet the needs of what is considered by the Canadian state and its public to be a minority interest.

In keeping with the pervasive goal of assimilating Aboriginal interests into the Canadian body politic, the political climate in British Columbia appears to be changing as many Aboriginal peoples seek to define a new relationship with British Columbia and Canada through the treaty process. Many Aboriginal peoples in B.C., whether engaged in a treaty process or not, have placed a high priority on education. Aboriginal parents and communities have expressed a desire for an education that will enable them to work and contribute to their own quality of life, as well as to that of their communities.

The fact that funding for education initiatives put forward by Aboriginal peoples is so difficult to access from governments is, I would argue, an assimilationist practice in and of itself. Whether or not such access is construed as a form of assimilation, Canadian dominion over Aboriginal potential through control of resources in the field of education is indisputable. I assert that meaningful change – change that embodies the lived experience of individuals and collectives - is most effective at the level of community, from the bottom up, rather than systemically or structurally, from the top down.

The foregoing notwithstanding, past policies aimed at Aboriginal assimilation are frequently acknowledged by Canadian governments, and rhetorically at least, regretted. Historic attitudes and directives merit attention here because the community-university partnership for post-secondary education, by virtue of its bi-cultural, community-based model, is one alternative to education as it has been utilized in the past.

Aboriginal concern over program devolution strategies framed by Canadian governments finds its anchor in a desire to realize self-determination, in the ability to assume responsibilities accruing to communities as a result of devolution, while at the same time being able to retain unique indigenous cultures, traditions, and mores. If formal education can engage communities and cultures in developing and delivering curriculum, then chances for cultural survival and revival can be vastly improved.

In this case, the community's university partner is among those institutions of dominant Canadian society that have been viewed historically by Aboriginal peoples as a source of authority, control, and even domination. For instance, given the past Aboriginal experience with Euro-Canadian education such as the residential schools, what is there to be discovered about this partnership for post-secondary education? What might be learned about new innovations toward democratized partnership between power-based and community-based entities? Moreover, does this community's experience in this context obtain to emancipatory education, or education as the practice of freedom?

This study's findings, described in a later chapter, are based on the community participants' statements about their experiences in the program that evolved from the partnership. However, it is also instructive to discuss the basic model already in place when the community initiated contact with the university.

THE GENERATIVE CURRICULUM MODEL

In the 1990s and early 21st century, assimilationist government policies toward Aboriginal peoples are increasingly acknowledged and regretted. Historic attitudes and directives are mentioned because the community – university partnership for post – secondary education, including the fact that it is community – based and the curriculum is generated through bi-cultural applications, is such a departure from the history of education in Canada where Aboriginal peoples are concerned.

During the last 25 years, there has been increasing concern among Aboriginal peoples regarding the devolution process, especially as it pertains to services for children and their families and caregiver training. It also relates to Aboriginal readiness to assume increasing responsibilities and still be able to retain unique indigenous cultures and traditions. The Generative Curriculum Model engages communities in developing and delivering curriculum specific to their cultures. It is a process that involves building empathy and trust, as well as each partner's recognition of the competence and expertise in their respective domains (Pence *et al*, 1993, p. 343).

In this study, the community's partner is the First Nations Partnership Program, a program situated in the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care (SCYC), First Nations Partnership Program. Given the past Aboriginal experience with Euro-Canadian education - the stereotyping of Aboriginal peoples as non-achievers on the one hand and objects of assimilation into Canada's majority society on the other - the Generative Curriculum Model (GCM) becomes all the more striking in its departure. It is a means through which the bi-cultural education is implemented, representing the combined efforts of the SCYC, First

Nations Partnership Program Early Childhood Care and Education and Child and Youth Care (ECCE-CYC) curriculum writers and the community to develop the community-specific curriculum.

The First Nations Partnership Program (FNPP) at the University of Victoria constitutes departures from rigid, institutionalized curriculum development procedures and content, including curriculum delivery and location. The First Nations Partnership Program incorporates Aboriginal innovation and cultural specificity into curriculum development and delivery in early childhood and child and youth care. It is a two-year diploma program which can be transferred as university credits leading to the 3rd and 4th years of a bachelor or arts degree in Child and Youth Care. The 3rd and 4th years can be completed through distance education or in a campus – based setting. Until recently, it was the only program in Canada with this feature.

The partnership is not marketed to communities as potential partners, but is set in motion only in response to community initiative. It can thus be said that each community has its own set of values, reasons, and requirements upon initiating contact with the First Nations Partnership Program. At a time when Aboriginal peoples are seeking opportunities for post-secondary education, many First Nation overtures to post-secondary institutions are made with a clear intent by First Nations to have curriculum which reflects their own cultures, traditions, and mores. There is an additional emphasis on children and youth as the future generations of Aboriginal peoples. Hence, many of these overtures are in the area of post-secondary education in the area of child and youth care. This emphasis is consistent with the rapid development of provincially delegated First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies.

For its part, the First Nations Partnership Program's child and youth care curriculum is bi-cultural in that it is collaboratively planned by both partners and delivered by the community, and in the community as well. In this instance, the instructors were members of the community. The university retains responsibility for meeting academic standards. The community is responsible for the cultural components as they affect curriculum content, process, and evaluation. For example, community Elders frequently contribute to developing curriculum, and to evaluating the program's success. The program is generative in the sense that experiences and recommendations from the students and community are incorporated into the courses at various stages in development and delivery.

The actual start – up of the education program is preceded by a developmental phase that lasts at least one year. In fact, the decision to finalize the partnership arrangement occurs only after several meetings are held between FNPP representatives from the University of Victoria and representatives from the community. These initial meetings almost always occur on-site in the community, and the community representatives are usually either designated by the community's elected leadership, or they may hold other positions of authority or responsibility in the community such as school administrators, Band managers, and social development directors. Elders are usually included in all developmental phases as well. A working group comprised of these representatives is also established in order to specify, assign, and carry out concrete tasks related to the program, including curriculum development. In most respects, the tasks to be completed prior to program start–up are defined by the community. These tasks include:

- establishing criteria for selecting students to participate in the program;

- posting the positions for and hiring instructors;

- developing job descriptions for the instructors;

- developing a strategy for including Elders as participant teachers in the program;

- choosing a site in the community as a location for the classes;

- making decisions regarding sites, time frames, and assessments for the program's practicum component; and,

- designing a time frame and schedule of classroom and other activities for the students and other program participants.

These initial activities provide avenues for building trust between the partners so that the working relationship can be a harmonious one. It is the community that makes the final decision, usually in consultation with community Elders, to enter the partnership. Elders are involved throughout the development of the program, but they may not be present at every meeting that is called. Elders are typically consulted in the course of daily life in the community on a range of topics, especially if there are important decisions affecting the community to be made.

Another important task that is done collaboratively is the curriculum development. The bi-cultural curriculum development activities were more intense with the first community to form a partnership with what has come to be known as the First Nations Partnership Program simply because this kind of partnership was such an exception to the so-called normal practices in post-secondary education.

The FNPP has evolved by forming partnerships with a total of eight First Nation communities. In the process, the university professors and staff involved in the FNPP learned a good deal about how to make the process work. They also had learned a lot about what to do (and not do) in order to avoid problems that might unnecessarily interfere with the community's vision as to what their post-secondary education program could be like, and how it would work best for them.

To facilitate collaborative curriculum development between the partners, materials acquired through FNPP's experience with other First Nation communities were submitted to the community. Meanwhile, the community formed an Aboriginal child and youth committee as a steering body to assess the curriculum and other materials provided by the university, and to oversee all other aspects of the program. The FNPP representatives advised the community on the academic requirements so that the community could meet its goal of providing an education accredited at a post–secondary, or university level, as well as an education that would equip its students to function in any environment with confidence.

Flexibility was key to developing a curriculum capable of meeting academic standards while at the same time incorporating the community's culture in the final version. The courses required, or prescribed by the university were the courses in English, introductory

psychology, and material relating to the generally accepted standards of early childhood care and child and youth care in the latter part of the twentieth century.

An example of the manner in which the "purely academic" courses were tailored to the community's vision focused on such activities as the exercises, class lecture topics, and homework for the psychology course. The course was studied within the context of Aboriginal development and mental health, topics to which the Elders also spoke when they came for their weekly sessions with the students and instructors. There were also a number of other ways the community helped to define what the curriculum would be.

The fact that the program was delivered in the community was invaluable in terms of securing the program's cultural focus. Instructors worked first with community leaders and Elders to determine what culturally specific activities would be included. They considered factors such as the time required for different activities, and how these might most effectively be worked into the curriculum schedule. Cultural inclusion was secured through intensive involvement on the part of the Elders. Then, after classes started, some changes were made in terms of the Elders' schedules, frequency of having the Sharing Circle be part of the class work, and working out practicum sites and activities in collaboration with the students. In general, the instructors were provided curriculum frameworks, frameworks that left considerable room for innovation as regards cultural inclusion.

To further clarify the collaborative approach to creating curriculum reflective of the community's vision, the development of generative curriculum for the program was an iterative process culminating in materials produced for specific courses as well as for general community

purposes. Students, instructors, administrators, and particularly Elders participated fully in building the community-specific curriculum content. The university partner, the First Nations Partnership Program, drew the community partner's attention to the fact that, for its part, the academic curriculum does not represent "universal truths". Instead, ideas brought to the curriculum development by the university "reflect the assumptions that underlie child care practices in majority Canadian culture in the late twentieth century" (Pence *et al*, 1993, p. 345).

As mentioned, the generative curriculum approach is an iterative, not a static process. A basic assumption is that each course will be different every time it is taught (Pence *et al*, 1993, p. 345) as are the communities that sponsor the program. In sharing program and curriculum development roles and responsibilities, each partner's contributions are valued and incorporated into the curriculum through methods and activities outlined above. Such collaborative planning infuses the partnership with empathy, trust, respect and caring (Pence and McCallum, 1994, p. 112).

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature was conducted in order to sensitize the conceptual underpinnings, as well as the understandings arising from analysis of the data comprised of questionnaire responses by community participants in the bi-cultural, community-based, post-secondary education program upon which this study's findings are based. To move forward without such a review would infuse this research project with epistemological and ontological gaps. Incorporation of the literature review elucidates notions pertaining to this community's experience of post-secondary education as being emancipatory from a variety of perspectives – perspectives to be detailed in the chapter that discusses the study's findings.

At issue in terms of the literature is the need to explore several ideas related to such topics as Aboriginal solidarity in the face of what many Aboriginal peoples view as a continuation of assimilation practices by the Canadian state. In this instance, we turn our attention to Canada's socio-political culture in a discussion of the basic dilemma surrounding the notion of First Nation self-determination and Canadian political and social ideological precepts.

Included in this discussion is a review of the federal government's 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy – a policy written by Jean Chretien, then federal Minister of Justice. This move on the part of the federal government in 1969, did much to rid the Aboriginal political landscape of its factions. This unexpected outcome provided a base for unified Aboriginal resistance to Canada's attempts to do away with (or, at least minimize) its fiduciary obligations to First Peoples. Such obligations are

entrenched in the canons of British as well as Canadian jurisprudence, including examples such as the *Royal Proclamation* noted earlier, and Canada's *Constitution Act, 1982.*

Section 35 of the *Constitution Act* reads, "The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed" (Frideres, 1993, p. 460). Material recognition, or implementation of these rights remains outstanding due primarily to the administrative complexities and costs involved, and to the vastly divergent positions between the federal and provincial governments regarding jurisdiction, hence ultimate responsibility. These then become juxtaposed to those rights flowing from jurisdictions claimed by First Nations and their peoples.

It is important to realize that since Europeans set foot onto Canadian soil, there has been a lack of understanding between the "newcomers" and Canada's First Peoples. Euro-Canadians have persisted in promoting a work ethic rooted in individual self-interest. Moreover, they have evaluated other cultures from this relatively narrow perspective. Assessments of cultures, including their own, have been ethnocentric and based not only on individualism, but on material progress and technological development as well (Frideres. 1993. p. 349).

On the other hand, Aboriginal peoples tend to view Euro-Canadian culture as being materially obsessed with industrial and technological progress and attempts to control nature. Documents sent out periodically by the Assembly of First Nations reflect this perspective (Assembly of First Nations B.C. Summit, 2000, June). A failure to resolve the hegemonic position of the Canadian body politic over

the cultural, economic, social, and, indeed, the fates of Aboriginal peoples is unacceptable to governments and First Nations, but government is slow to change its actions.

There does appear to be some agreement on the part of First Nations about what is embodied in the concept of self-government. In general terms, First Nations agree that the concept of autonomous self-government implies that for important national issues they will remain within the territorial jurisdiction of the federal government, but that they will enjoy the freedom to regulate certain of their own affairs without interference from outside. While no list of self-government issues has been specified, it would seem that principles including democracy, justice and equality would be supported. Other rights such as freedom of speech, the right to be judged by one's peers, and equal access to educational and economic institutions would also be supported (Frideres, 1993, p. 169; Asch, 1988, p. 60; Engelstad and Bird, 1992, pp. 24-27).

By granting autonomous self-government to First Nations, the government would acknowledge that certain rights are to be given to a specific part of the population. Such a move would afford protection to First Nations in view of the way many of their characteristics differ from those of not only the majority, but also those of minority groups in Canada (Frideres, 1993, p. 173). Such autonomy would allow First Nation people inhabiting a certain area to exercise direct control over important affairs of special concern to them. For example, in order to preserve their distinct cultures, languages and traditions, First Nation peoples seek control over their own schools while excluding the federal and provincial governments from interfering with their traditional ways of life (Frideres, 1993, p. 175).

In addition to the foregoing, a review of contemporary pedagogical theories and practices articulated in writings by leading critical social and educational theorists of our time precipitates an informed discussion of education practiced as freedom. These writings are instructive to a critique of rigid, hierarchical and institutionalized educational environments and systems. Further, they bring to the fore critiques of pedagogical practices, practices that sustain sets of competing hierarchies, and that re-inscribe patterns of domination in campus-based classrooms.

Paulo Freire and bell hooks are major contributors to contemporary critical thought about pedagogy and its practice that is radically different from mechanistic, reductionist orientations to education. In essence, these works pertain to building education systems capable of bringing about preferred futures, futures that result from the practice of education as freedom. Here, we turn our attention to education both as a function of political and social hegemony, and to pedagogical practices that can bring about democratized, liberatory education.

Within the educational genre, Aboriginal peoples have been cast as chronic non-achievers who do not value education, and are, in any event, inherently too lazy for academic attainment (Frideres, p. 171; Assembly of First Nations B.C. Summit, 2000, June). Residential schools had all been closed by 1995 in Canada, but these schools and some institutionalized practices within today's public education systems, in Aboriginal terms at least, are among Canada's more oppressive practices. It is my contention that many of today's educational practices continue to marginalize Aboriginal peoples precisely because Aboriginal values are noticeably lacking in Euro-Western curriculum content. When such values are included in curricula, too often Aboriginal worldviews are universalized, completely ignoring the rich, diverse indigenous ways of

life abiding in the cultures of various First Nations. Education lacking substance that connects to students' lived experience can hardly be expected to motivate learning, or to empower students to decipher meaning from it.

Political Culture and Aboriginal Self-Determination

If newly arrived Europeans had recognized the right of the First Nations to live according to a different set of beliefs, contact between indigenous nations and European newcomers might have had a different outcome. Here is one possible scenario presented by Diane Englestad and John Bird (p. 29). They depict a rather interesting scenario:

> "Aboriginal peoples retain their land, way of life and political standing as nations. Europeans gain access to land through treaties, and purchase some land outright (a European notion), where the idea of "purchase" is agreeable to the first peoples who call it their home. As time passes, the newcomers and the indigenous peoples influence one another's cultures. There are significant disagreements about borders and other matters where the different cultures clash, just as there were differences and negotiations among the First Nations themselves, and among European nations. The British, French and First Nations coalitions that form have to work out how to live together in conditions of mutual support and respect."

This outcome is based on the recognition of nations as sovereign and on the political integrity of those nations to uphold treaties. The Royal Proclamation of 1763, indeed acknowledged such sovereignty, establishing a process to protect "Indian" lands and to legally transfer lands with consent from First Nations. The fact that this process was not upheld, even though the Proclamation was never revoked, has to do with the predominance of European culture in Canada (Asch, p.41; Frideres, p. 116; Engelstad and Bird, p. 18). The assimilation policies that came

to define the relationship between Native and non-Native peoples reflected cultural attitudes still perpetuated by Canada's current political system.

Canada's early politics and social practices gave rise to the fallacy, unfettered by the facts about the civilizations they encountered, that Canada's indigenous peoples were mere savages. Accordingly, the indigenous peoples encountered at first contact were not deemed to merit treatment other than the "civilizing" assimilation practices directed at them. Early settlers believed that they were at a more advanced phase of development as a society than the peoples they encountered in North America. It obviously did not occur to them, given the history of the situation, that societies could be advanced or complex in different ways. This, despite the fact that settlers not only learned survival skills from the indigenous peoples, but also borrowed complex political ideas from them (Frideres, p. 89; Engelstad and Bird, p. 38).

Early colonial views held that the "New World" was destined to embody European values and constructs and that clearing the land for farming was a vast improvement over pre-existing land usage which did not exploit nature. Such moves were also informed and sustained by colonial fears of the "immoral" deeds the native peoples might inflict on the White settlers and was interwoven with the belief that people unacquainted with the Christian gospel must be godless and, therefore, evil (Engelstad and Bird, p. 43; Asch, p. 413; Frideres, p. 22).

It takes no leap of the imagination to recognize the dynamics already at work. Believing themselves to be culturally and morally superior, the colonists justified individual and corporate actions to "improve" the land and enlighten the native peoples. The ability of Canadians to justify the innumerable documented acts of injustice against Aboriginal peoples, on

the grounds that European culture was superior is still a major stumbling block in Native – non-Native relations today.

The cultural baggage the Europeans brought with them, and one that differs radically from that of Aboriginal worldviews, is the idea of primacy of the individual in society. In Canada, individualism as a way of life is articulated and practiced in the context of liberal democracy, or liberalism. Liberalism is the ideology that dominates political theory and practice in Canada. It is rooted in the notion that the individual constitutes the basic starting point in society. The core attribute of the individual, then, is the ability to think and act rationally. Rational action in this context is action that fulfills only self-interested goals (Carnoy,1984).

The notion that personal goals are, by definition, expressions of self-interest with no connection to the "common good" arises from early political theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and John Stuart Mill. These thinkers were most active and influential during liberalism's formative stages. Their works, perhaps more than any others, were embedded early on in Canadian (indeed, North American) political culture. Thomas Hobbes depicted the "state of nature" as a negative human force bent on the destruction of obstacles to self-interest and the accumulation of wealth. Consequently, authoritative governments are necessary to secure the individual's life, liberty, and pursuit happiness without infringing upon the rights of others. This is a foundational tenet of liberal democracy. It is important to consider this about liberal democracy because it is the formative locale, the formative rationale, and is the cornerstone upon which legitimate, peace - keeping liberal government is founded. Simplistic though this may appear to be, liberal politics and the political system today still retains some of its legitimacy due to fear-based assumptions about anarchy and chaos as the sure alternative.

As an undergraduate in political science, I studied the works of these theorists. I came to perceive the ontology and epistemology of democratic liberalism as being rooted in negative assertions about humanity and human beings. Liberalism so defined flies in the face of the fact that most indigenous societies around the world have communal origins. Traditionally in indigenous communities, the survival of one depended heavily upon the survival of the whole – the survival of the community, or tribe. Such traditional practices, based on collective consciousness, are the bases for consensus decision-making in most Aboriginal societies today.

In contemporary society, Aboriginal community survival is still paramount. However, it is not so much an issue of immediate physical concern as it is a persistent spirit to ensure cultural survival. There is no gap between Aboriginal identity and culture. Rather, they are bonded in an ultimately reciprocal process whereby one enables and is a function of the other, for both individuals and collectives, or tribal groups.

In liberal society, people may identify with a certain group, but they are not identified *by* it. Some people join groups to exercise agency, voluntarism being the most extreme form of agency (Engelstad and Bird, 1992, p. 21). Liberal tenets regarding collectives holds that individuals form groups to assist their individual pursuits, but that groups, per se, have no independent existence or rights of their own. Not surprisingly, the groups given most attention within liberalism are voluntary associations that function as a coalition of individual interests (Carnoy, p.72; Engelstad and Bird, p.21; Frideres, p.81). An example of these is the non-profit society.

Steeped in liberal ideology, most non-Native Canadians must find it difficult to recognize these principles of individualism as anything but universal. Who could, for example, disagree that individual persons have intrinsic worth and that their freedom should be protected? It then follows that it would be difficult, from an individualistic point of view, to ascribe rights to groups, especially as regards legal protection of group rights. The protection of groups would jeopardize the primacy of the individual. Diane Engelstad and John Bird describe some of the difficulties in attaining group rights:

> "It is especially difficult according to the individualistic worldview to obtain legal protection of group rights because they compromise the freedom of the individual in society. To allow the collective rights of a group of individuals to supercede the rights of the individuals themselves is unthinkable" (1992, p. 23).

To reiterate, the basic starting point in Canada's social and political culture is the rational, self-interested individual. Liberalism is universal in its Canadian application through which individuals form groups around their personal pursuits. However, individuals possess no rights in terms of the groups to which they subscribe, or to which they belong, regardless of whether membership is by choice or by destiny (Carnoy, 1984; Engelstad and Bird, 1992; Frideres, 1993; Mill, 1960; Means, 1992).

Of course, these issues beg a question as to whether the liberal view is correct in assuming individual rights as superceding those of groups. Affiliation, or membership in groups is not always freely chosen in the way the liberal worldview presumes. For instance, even though voluntary groups are construed as normative according to liberalism, they do not

often match many of the groups that people care most about, and that are most salient in their lives. When it comes to families, religious communities, ethnic communities and tribes, for example, group situations are determined *for* people. People are born into families, states, tribes, and even religious groups through no choice of their own. James Frideres (pp. 112-114) argues that these are the contexts through which the most important human endeavours take place. Russel Means, spiritual leader among the Lakota Sioux and a long time political activist furthers this notion by saying that among indigenous peoples in North America, the smaller issues pertaining to daily life differ from community, and sometimes even from family to family. Means further argues that the larger considerations having to do with the cultural, political, and material survival of First Nations are the same (Means, 1992).

Typically, the argument for protection of group rights assumes that, although composed of individuals, many groups also possess an "irreducible core" that, in effect, defines a given group's collective experience. This core experience is essential to various groups' communal experience (Engelstad and Bird, p. 23). It then follows that the rights of groups to maintain their structure is distinct from, and therefore not based upon individual rights such as freedom of association. Liberalism assumes that group membership is based solely upon freedom of association even though membership in some groups is actually a birthright. Self-determination as far as groups are concerned is not supported by Canada's political culture. Frideres argues that group rights are qualitatively different by virtue of the manner in which group membership is determined. Considering the difference between group membership as a function of free association and as a corollary of one's heritage, heritage-based groups emphasize exactly those things that liberalism takes to be secondary interests: culture, religion, and language. Such interests, it seems to me, are the very essence of that

"irreducible core" for which groups seek legal protection, but for which protection of rights is uniformly denied, save some legal protections for religion and religious practice.

Colonization in Canada has effectively given rise to a denial of cultural rights to First Peoples. Colonization was also behind the mass destruction of the buffalo during the 1800s which was the economic base (shelter, food, clothing, and trade) of many First Nations. Liberal colonialism was also behind the outlawing of traditional ceremonies and the creation of "Indian Reserves" toward the promotion of permanent communities, both Native and non-Native (Frideres, pp. 8-10). Arguably, it is liberal ideology, with its focus on individualism that perpetuates today's structural and systemic bias inherent in Canadian bureaucracies. Welfare payments to Aboriginal peoples have been a preferred alternative to supporting, either financially or politically, First Nation self-sufficiency (Frideres, p.9).

The Aboriginal refusal to assimilate according to Canada's publicly stated goal of creating greater "equality" between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples has cost Aboriginal people dearly. But, one must realize that to do so would jeopardize their distinctiveness. This distinctiveness, then, is the very source of what is left of individual and collective Aboriginal survival and influence over their lives.

It was also colonial liberal rationality that lead to the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their families and home communities for placement in Residential schools. It must have made complete sense, from a liberal-colonial point of view, for the state and the church to collaboratively remove these children. They would be exposed to a new way of life and then be "free" to choose their own way of life. They would be provided with education just like other Canadian children, thereby

creating "equal opportunity". Furthermore, there was an assumption that, given the opportunity to make a "rational" choice, individuals moved away from the pressures of daily home life would naturally choose the Euro-Canadian way of life with its "unlimited opportunities" (Engelstad and Bird, p. 29; Frideres, p. 175; Asch, p.33).

This policy of assimilation, that is, using Residential schools for bringing Aboriginal peoples into the mainstream of Canadian life (liberal individualism)is considered among Aboriginal peoples to be one of the worst offences perpetrated against them over the generations since the schools first began in the early 20th century. The trauma in terms of the sexual, physical and emotional abuses endured by Aboriginal children as students in these schools has never been resolved, resulting in a phenomena known widely among Aboriginal peoples as the legacy and intergenerational impacts of Residential schools (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1999, February).

A discussion of specific abuses is not within the parameters of this research project. There are, in fact, other Aboriginal peoples already involved in studies and other activities related to specific Residential school issues. I merely make mention of them here because the students in the program I studied did engage a healing process to make meaning, sometimes new meaning, from their past histories. Further, this community's educational undertaking in terms of its partnership with a major university, its process of community involvement, and the cultural competence described in the participants' accounts was, in fact, a reversal of the Residential school experience.

The 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy

Core differences between the native stance and government policy were clearly exposed in 1969 when Canada's government, headed by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, revamped Indian policy, proposing its White Paper as an alternative to its previous, admittedly flawed government policies concerning Canada's "Indians". In the government's view, paternalistic administration and distinct legal status had created a dependency on government assistance. In this instance, the government accused itself of driving artificial wedges between natives and the majority society, thereby causing unnecessary conditions of poverty and apathy among Aboriginal peoples (Asch, p.60).

The government, given its enthusiasm for realizing the directives contained in its White Paper policy, could not have been prepared for the resistance – a unified Aboriginal resistance – to what it considered a thoroughly rational, reasonable, and, perhaps, even self-evident approach to solving the "Indian problem". Prior divisions in the Aboriginal political landscape were replaced by Aboriginal solidarity in opposition to the White Paper. The official Aboriginal response was presented before a full Cabinet a year later in the form of a document entitled Citizens Plus (Engelstad and Bird, p. 22).

Citizens Plus reported that central to the Aboriginal position was the assertion that "Indianness" is unalterable, and "can only be expressed within a communally shared horizon of meaning" (Engelstad and Bird, p. 23). Further, the First Peoples united behind the idea that isolation and discrimination against Aboriginal rights were the cause of poverty and despair in Aboriginal communities. The document presented to Cabinet charged that the paternalistic and improper manner in which government historically administered Aboriginal rights had done the most damage

(Engelstad and Bird, p. 24). Conversely, conscientious commitment by government to live up to its treaty obligations would have assisted in maintaining healthy, vibrant communities. As it was, they argued, the federal government had neglected its duties and had thus created conditions of poverty in Aboriginal communities (Engelstad and Bird, p.24). James Frideres (pp. 116-118) describes this dynamic as one that submerges Aboriginal peoples into a culture of poverty reinforced by racism, and from which it becomes increasingly difficult to escape over time.

Today, the government emphasizes multiculturalism and the concept of the Canadian "mosaic". However, First Nation peoples do not consider themselves to be a Canadian minority, but sovereign peoples encountered by the colonists upon arrival here. Still, the multicultural rhetoric, and some of the policy arising from it, supports Canadian minorities in maintaining and appreciating their cultural heritage. Again, steeped in liberalism, the prevailing tendency is to view being "Indian" as primarily a *personal* affair, and similar to the experience of Canadians from any cultural minority (Frideres, p. 227).

This stance introduces a distinction between "public" and "private" choice, none of which has any relation to Aboriginal worldviews. Given that First Nation cultures are unique and distinctive, one consistency among various Aboriginal worldviews is the inter-relatedness of all things. Accordingly, there is no distinction to be drawn between "public" and "private", especially as regards concepts about "fee simple" ownership of land, and First Nation cultural identity.

We have seen how liberalism, with its focus on individual rights, effectively circumscribes protection of the rights of First Nations. While I agree with the arguments advanced by all the authors cited thus far, I

believe they are missing a singularly important development. As Canadian institutions of society and government have evolved over time, there have occurred some interesting developments. For example, Aboriginal rights as indigenous groups continue to be defined at Canadian law with the result that Canadian governments have been forced to sanction many Aboriginal rights. One example crucial to recognition of Aboriginal rights was the Delgamuukw Supreme Court decision in December, 1998. This decision overturned the prior decision of the B.C. Court of Appeals, and effectively established that the established oral traditions of Aboriginal peoples must be considered in deciding court cases involving the adjudication of Aboriginal rights. Such court decisions become popular topics of daily conversation in Aboriginal communities as we continue to monitor Canadian jurisprudence.

Another area, and one that is more germane to this particular study, is the heightened emphasis Aboriginal peoples are placing on the importance of education in today's contemporary society. Coincidentally, education appears to be experiencing some fundamental shifts in terms of pedagogical practices on the part of university instructors. There are some authors who have made significant contributions to the evolution of how post-secondary education is practiced in North America. Moreover, these authors suggest changes that are particularly relevant to accommodating Aboriginal interests in procuring education at the post-secondary level.

Critical Pedagogy

When high school graduates enter university classrooms, there seems to be an expectation that professors will do all the teaching. Students are merely receptacles of the pristine knowledge of the learned professor. This traditional model of post-secondary education places students on the receiving end of educational deposits. Such transmissions from professorial minds are what bell hooks (1994) refers to as the "mind/body split" characteristic of professors who enter the classroom denying the body has a presence:

> "The person who is most powerful has the privilege of denying their body. I remember as an undergraduate I had white male professors who wore the same tweed jacket and rumpled shirt or something, but we all knew that we had to pretend. You would never comment on his dress, because to do so would be a sign of your own intellectual lack. The point was we should all respect that he's there to be a mind and not a body" (p. 137).

I would add that when teachers find satisfaction in the classroom, they often report how much they have learned from their students. This is no more surprising than hearing parents describe how much they "learn" from their young children. This kind of learning is typically placed in quotation marks because, although teachers and parents may learn from them, students and children are hardly understood to be "teaching". Thus, education is thought to emanate from authority figures who learn only from their own observations and reflections. It is as if the responsibility to "enlighten" students is intrinsic to the social relations of teaching, or of parenting for that matter.

When the direction of teaching is unilateral, there appears to be a tendency not to question it, or not to think of it as a category for which there may be alternatives. Once the same level or degree of teaching is understood to move in other directions, many new categories for teaching and learning can emerge. In the process of conducting this research project, attuning myself especially to the voices in the community, I learned that the number of directions can become indefinite and open-ended, yet contingent upon how fully social relations, hence cultural specificity, are invited to contribute to the curriculum.

In the case of the Generative Curriculum Model, curriculum is generated using bi-cultural energies such that a learning of culture, and a culture of learning are integral to both the partnership and to the program. In practice, this goes well beyond *inviting* cultural discourse into classroom discussion. Rather, it is a *merging* of various ways of knowing and interpreting, of learning and teaching, and of making sure the community does see its own vision reflected in the program. When culture determines curriculum, as opposed to the other way around, we have new, profound possibilities. These possibilities include situations in which culturally unique Aboriginal communities are in a position to determine the cultural competence of the curriculum for a given educational endeavour.

Even though hooks does not address locations for post-secondary education outside of university, or campus-based settings in, say, culturally unique communities, she does give a poignant description in the introduction to *Teaching to Transgress* about her utter dismay at finding herself uprooted from the influence of Black teachers. These teachers were, by way of culturally shared experience and meaning, personally invested in her as a student.

Due to public school desegregation, hooks was forced to attend White public schools. There, her inspiration and motivation was denuded by teachers to whom she could not relate – and who did not relate to her, or her lived experience in the world. One might infer from hooks's experience that teachers and students from the same culture, and in a culturally competent setting, are more likely to embrace education as a liberating experience. The de-personalized interrelationships characteristic of old style classrooms in such instances yield to ones that are flexible and dynamic. They can move back and forth, up and down, converting rigid teaching and learning styles to ones that honour student contributions.

One of hooks's most important contributions, in my opinion, and certainly in the context of this study, is that she debunks the myth of theory and practice as being separate, mutually exclusive entities or processes. For hooks, theorizing is simply a process of making meaning out of not only what *is* happening, but also of what *has* happened. Living in childhood without a sense of home, hooks says she found a place of sanctuary in theorizing, a place where she could imagine a life that could be lived differently. This lived experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, "became a place where I worked at explaining the hurt and making it go away" (hooks. p.61).

Somehow, when we say the word "theory", or "praxis", or any of the other terms that become familiar vernacular in the graduate school milleu, we find ourselves confronted with terminology that does, in fact, have practical, every day applications. Cloaked in mystery and mythologizing, knowledge becomes a monolith, inaccessible to those who do not have the vocabulary to communicate expressions of thought and action in these terms. Yet, when terminology is stripped of its mystery, we find that many "average" people do engage in these processes regularly in the

course of their daily lives. As hooks points out in Teaching to Transgress (p. 61-62.), writing about theory as a healing place:

> "When I was a child, I certainly did not describe the processes of thought and critique I engaged in as 'theorizing.' Yet, as I suggested in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, the possession of a term does not bring a process or practice into being; concurrently one may practice theorizing without ever knowing/possessing the term…"

Considering that the students, instructors, administrators and others in the community regularly engaged in these activities, and considering the oral traditions of most Aboriginal cultures, it is interesting to note hooks's affirmation that:

> "There are so many settings in this country where the written word has only slight visual meaning, where individuals who cannot read or write can find no use for published theory however lucid or opaque. Hence, any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public" (p. 64).

While illiteracy is not at issue in the community within the context of this study, it is relevant to note hooks's underscoring of the practical dimensions of theory as practice. Theory *in* practice constitutes praxis – a dynamic process of reflection/action/ reflection in order to transform social relations. Illiteracy *per se* isn't the point in this particular instance. This point draws attention to the parallels between these statements hooks makes and the oral traditions in First Nation communities. Theorizing is rather common in Aboriginal communities as people make sense of their world in everyday terms, and in their everyday views of the world.

hooks further describes theory (and theorizing) as a healing, liberatory practice when it is directed toward these ends. For instance, a Sharing Circle was a regular part of the curriculum in the education program carried out in the community. Many of the respondents discussed their education as a healing experience. hooks links theory, practice and freedom, saying:

> "When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two – that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other" (p.61).

Teaching to Transgress is about college classrooms where, suggests hooks, it is not enough to simply add readings authored by persons of colour (hooks refers only to Black authors) to the canon. If one is to practice education as freedom, liberatory knowledge must be merged with liberatory practice. For her, it is an issue of pedagogy– a pedagogy that emphasizes the union of mind, body, and spirit, not separation of them. Moreover, it is pedagogy for self-actualization and participatory energies in the classroom. This means not only teaching different material, but transforming the practice of teaching as well.

Discussing an alternative to what Paulo Freire calls the "banking system" of education whereby students are regarded as passive, obedient (hence, powerless) consumers of information, hooks calls for "engaged pedagogy". Engaged pedagogy, then, transforms teacher-dominated classrooms, changing them into spaces where students are encouraged to critique, to question, and to use personal experience to create an environment where everyone, including the teacher, can learn. Without denying that the teacher has more power, without suggesting that all contributions are

equal, in the "engaged" classroom, everyone is equal to the degree that they are all committed to creating a learning environment (p. 18).

Ultimately, hooks is talking about education as a *political* enterprise whether it re-inscribes forces of domination or fosters freedom. She drives the point home that critical thinking – thinking that empowers people to transgress boundaries of race, gender, and class – is the primary element for feminist change. The fact that she is obviously a radical Black woman - that her intellectual insurgence on issues about transforming pedagogy in feminist terms - in no way obscures parallels between what hooks is saying and the struggle to de-colonize so characteristic of First Nations. Indeed, she often refers throughout the text to people of colour, people who live in society's margins, colonized peoples:

> "My pedagogical practices have emerged from the mutually illuminating interplay of anti-colonial, critical, and feminist pedagogies. This complex and unique blending of multiple perspectives has been an engaging and powerful standpoint from which to work" (p.12).

Teaching to Transgress is about the university classroom, but there appears to be a fixation on university classroom settings as the sole *targets of* and *instruments for* transforming education. She does not, for example, call into question the academy's credibility and status as the primary site of knowledge production and the final arbiter of what is valuable, or of what is valid. While the need for a strong academy can hardly be denied, there is a strong need to re-think the late Victorian assumptions upon which the academy appears to be founded.

hooks's main concern is about having a new kind of education, education as the practice of freedom. Teaching students to think - and to act -

critically, to transgress against race, gender, and class boundaries in order to achieve freedom is the teacher's most important goal. Paulo Freire calls this *conscientization.*

Paulo Freire is another widely acclaimed "educator for freedom", and was a source of inspiration and mentorship for bell hooks in the earlier years of her profession. Beginning in the 1960s when he was in exile because of his radical views on education as a path to freedom from oppressive democracies, Freire has become an icon among social theorists in the field of education. Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed is among the earliest of his works, but is probably also among the more popular and enduring in North America.

Freire says that in a "banking model" of education, the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the students are Objects, or containers to be filled by depositing units of information. The more full the container, the better the teacher. Those students easiest to fill are deemed to be the better students. Those who resist, those who question critically are seen as "problem" students. Accordingly,
a banking system of education, by definition, resists dialogue, making students into objects of assistance by inhibiting creativity. Reality is thus mythologized as "something to which people, as mere spectators, must adapt" (Freire, p. 135).

In opposition to banking education, Freire endorses a "problem-posing" education, an education designed to help people:

> ". . .come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. Because this view of education starts with the conviction that the

> oppressor cannot present its own program, but must search for this program dialogically with the people, it serves to introduce the pedagogy of the oppressed, the elaboration of which the oppressed must participate" (p.110).

Freire believes that teachers need to approach a community from the standpoint of first learning about the important themes governing the peoples' lives, themes that speak to the ecology of community life. The concrete representation of many of the ideas, values, concepts, hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede people's full humanization constitute the themes of a given community (p. 91). Here, Freire depicts a process remarkably similar to experiences in the First Nations Partnership Program.

Friere's work suggests that critical education is best performed through special projects because the oppressed are too easily subsumed by the institutionalized power of academic bureaucracies. Such projects, he says, are more successful when carried out within existentially similar cultures. In this way, people of similar background can more readily define the starting point at which to engage "the revolution of their reality" (p.88). Such projects consist of activities that are more "sympathetic" in what he calls the "investigation" phase (p. 89). Pence and MCCallum (1994) describe a process that is empathetic from its inception, and from initial contact with the community, through the developmental and operations phase of the post-secondary education program.

It is the community actors who determine the point of entry for UVIC from a cultural and community existential perspective. The community has invited the university to participate in a partnership process. Thematic investigation on the part of both partners becomes a common striving "towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which

makes the investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character" (p.88). Such an educational process cannot be seen as focalized points of view of only one partner, but as a totality in which both partners participate. It is a process through which the community becomes empowered to intervene in their temporal and spatial reality not as it is, but as it can become (p. 90). Finally, the partnership program is one in which both partners become educated. For the partnership to work, the university actors, in their relatively powerful positions, must be cognizant of the paucity of their knowledge of the community's culture, and of the ways in which the culture is expressed. The university actors also learn about the history and geography of the community, which is also described by Friere as fundamentally necessary to education as freedom. In other words, the shared need and desire for learning on the part of everyone involved that the project becomes a success because the partnership as well as the education is democratized.

I took *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to be a post-colonial text published at a relatively early stage of Third World development. Freire's work here is still relevant. Social relations are still frequently contextualized and prescribed by liberal ideology's bureaucratic determinism. There is a need to engage a radical form of cultural, textual, and locational border crossing if we are to de-construct the specificity of how a politics of location accrues exclusively to the interests of privilege and power, crossing cultural, textual, and locational borders. The effect is to deny the voice of the "other", thereby re-inscribing liberal hegemony into the discourse and praxis of cultural and sociological thought.

CHAPTER 3
METHOD

Qualitative research can be understood as a blending of artful imagination and scientific questioning (Sandelowski, 1986). Similarly, this qualitative study uses an emergent, exploratory, inductive approach to support a method of interpretive analysis using hermeneutics. In addition to the study's hermeneutic interpretations, grounded theory is used to explain key social processes emerging from, or grounded in the data. These methods were chosen on the strength of their capacity to facilitate "telling the story" from the participants' viewpoint while providing descriptive detail to set the research in its human context.

Concerning methodology and epistemology related to the study's integrity, I found support for my chosen methods in some of the literature on qualitative research. Although I referred to a number of works on qualitative research methods, there are three that were most helpful, including Lincoln and Denzin's *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1994); Riskock and Pennell's *Community Research as Empowerment* (1996); and Sally Hutchinson's article "Grounded Theory: The Method" (1993). The Hutchinson article I received from a colleague. It does not provide any reference to the larger text, the publisher, or any other citation save the date of publication.

This study is characteristic of challenges to Euro-Centric, mechanistic, positivistic epistemologies, relying instead on post-modern, or post-structural avenues of inquiry. The criteria for establishing my methods turn, then, on moral, practical, personal and political issues, all of which bring to the forefront of the study an often cited supposition that "the

personal is political", especially as regards the interpretation and generation of knowledge.

This study consists of three levels.

Level 1: First, I discuss my life experiences in order to locate myself as researcher. As discussed in Chapter 1, I am a woman of Aboriginal descent who has gone through Western education systems from primary through graduate school. I have experienced post-secondary education in campus-based classrooms, followed by reintegration back into my community. This can be a difficult and alienating experience as many Aboriginal students who leave their community to pursue education will attest. In addition, my bias or prejudice I bring to the study must be exposed and accounted for.

Level 2: The second level is the text itself. The text I examined derives from data gathered through the First Nations Partnership Program's evaluation and documentation research process in one community. That community is one of seven that co-sponsored are omnibus evaluation of the on-Reserve Early Childhood Care and Education diploma level training program. Each of the seven communities utilized the innovative generative curriculum model (GCM) in mounting the FNPP Partnership Program. Before the data was collected, each interviewee was fully informed regarding the purpose of the evaluation, what documents and materials might be created from the evaluation and documentation process, and each interviewee provided informed consent. The text consists of audio and video-taped interviews which have been transcribed for the research purposes. The data includes: fifteen student interviews, three instructor interviews (all three are members of the community); four interviews with participating community Elders, and interviews with three community leaders who served on the administrative committee for the program. The data set also includes recordings from special Elders'

gatherings and writings from university representatives in the partnership. Accountability to the study participants is established by using only direct quotes from the interview responses.

The community examined for this study is a relatively remote First Nation community with approximately 1600 community members. A total of five communities are represented by the Chief and Council. Considerable development has occurred within the community designed to preserve its culture and language. The community is in the process of developing its own child welfare system, and a multiplex centre has been built to house the community's social programs, including a new day care facility. The community also has its own K-12 school, and there are a number of community members who have had experience in campus–based academic settings.

Participants in the study include, as mentioned, three instructors. One of the instructors holds a master's degree in education. The other two have some post-secondary education and training and were employed in the community's school prior to the partnership program. All of the instructors, as well as the students and administrators were women from the community. The three project administrators also fill administrative roles in the community more generally.

The students interviewed were the fifteen students who completed the program, with the exception of an assignment still due from one of the students. Although there is an outstanding assignment, this student still participated in the community's graduation ceremony (held in 1999) after contracting with the Band and the university to complete the assignment after the community's graduation ceremonial gathering. From the interviews, it would appear that as many as nine of the students still had young children at home. Two of the women were a bit older in that their

children were older youth. Another had daughters that were grown, had finished high school, with one daughter having had children of her own. Still another grandmother had her grown daughters and their children living at home with her. Some of the women had husbands at home, but not all of them were active in caring for children while the mothers attended school. There is a sense in the data that these women sacrificed considerably in order to participate in this program with varying degrees of support from their families. However, the women identified improved family relations as the second most significant beneficial impact of the project. Their self-image as leaders in the community was first.

In addition to interviews with administrators, instructors, and students, there were three separate interviews with Elders, as well as recordings from a gathering of Elders hosted by the community while the project was in progress. One was an Elderly man who, unfortunately, passed away before the project was completed. The Elders played a vital role in this project. In fact, the role of Elders appears to have been revitalized as a result of their participation in this project. For instance, the Elders also began to visit the elementary school regularly as they had once done. The Elders' participation was integrated into the curriculum as a regular class activity. In addition, some of the students began to visit the Elders in their homes to ask questions and to learn from them.

Level 3: The third level of study involves the use of sensitizing concepts. While the central focus of the study involves an investigation of a First Nation's experience in terms of the partnership and the post-secondary education program arising from it, certain questions about Aboriginal peoples and education inform its conceptual framework. The third level uses two basic sensitizing concepts as avenues of inquiry. The first concept has to do with levels of community involvement. Community involvement is indicative of that process through which cultural

competence, a second sensitizing concept, can be seen as having been realized by the community as regards curriculum development, as well as in the overall educational experience. All of the study respondents spoke of these factors in their responses. Cultural competence in the education program can be interpreted as an outcome, or product of community involvement. At issue is how, and to what extent community-based, bi-cultural education – delivered through an Aboriginal community partnership with a large academic institution – affects and is affected by community involvement, and the degree of cultural competency attained in the final delivery of the curriculum.

Cultural competence as the second sensitizing concept is important since it pertains to both the essence and presence of the "emancipatory factor" in the post-secondary education program implemented through the community-university partnership. Cultural competence is a factor that is best determined by the community within its sphere of influence.

Though there is considerable information available about Aboriginal peoples pursuing education in institutional settings outside their respective communities, accounts depicting Aboriginal educational experiences in terms of their educational needs, interests and preferences expressed in their own terms is conspicuously absent (Frideres, pp. 179 – 181). Absent, too, are descriptions of educational models attuned to the inner lives of Aboriginal students. What appears to be missing in education provided on behalf of Aboriginal peoples is inclusion of the day-to-day realities in Aboriginal communities. Also missing is a recognition of the ways in which Aboriginal peoples themselves might move toward community-institutional partnerships in order to facilitate the developmental and teaching aspects of education, particularly post-secondary education (Frideres, pp. 171 – 173).

Cultural competence is a conceptual lens through which one may examine the issue of power and partnerships in a bi-cultural context. The issue of power finds expression in the dynamic interplay between community involvement and bi-cultural education toward an experience of education as freedom on the part of the community. An understanding of cultural competence, and the ways in which institution-based instructors can learn to work within environments where substantial control over the educational program at issue is influenced by Aboriginal communities, might enhance their teaching abilities by sensitizing them to community-based, bi-cultural environments geared to post-secondary education.

Community involvement and cultural competence were the two sensitizing concepts used to operationalize hermeneutic interpretation and generation of grounded theory in the study. In addition, a literature review was conducted to bridge gaps in knowledge about the difference between Aboriginal education and education *for* Aboriginal peoples, the latter being the prevailing practice in Canada since the inception of Residential schools.

Hermeneutics, as I understood it for use in this study, is a method of textual analysis. Hermeneutics pertains to the process of exposing hidden meanings. It is an artful form of understanding used to "set the text and the interpreter in their socio-cultural traditions" (Kiseil. 1985. P. 230). Hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework for bringing my experience as an Aboriginal woman and as an academic to an interpretation of the data text in this study.

Hermeneutics as applied within the context of this study is an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and experiences of the researcher shape the interpretive process. Given my

Aboriginal ancestry and background, I believe I bring an interpretive perspective to the text that a researcher with no Aboriginal background could not offer. I share some of the same life experiences as the respondents, but there are also major differences. For instance, I lived in the city between the ages of 11 and 18. Other than that, I have always lived and worked in either Reserve-based or urban Aboriginal communities, and most of my values are shaped by this experience. One difference is that I attended public education institutions from primary grade 6 through graduate school. Considering the similarities and differences, it has been necessary to keep moral, personal and political integrity at the forefront of my method and analysis, being constantly aware of my bias and keeping it front and centre through reflective journal entries. Moreover, I am not indigenous to British Columbia, and, so, would never pretend to speak "for" any of the peoples who are.

To begin the analysis, I employed a simple process for reflective interpretation. Pages of writing were divided vertically into two columns. The left-hand column is a record of what I could "see" in the quotes from respondents. The right-hand column I used for reflecting and explaining my interpretation of the responses. Reflections on the data are anchored by four key principled approaches in addition to the two main sensitizing concepts, community involvement and cultural inclusion. These are:

1. the co-construction of the data itself between interviewer and respondents by respondent category;

2. bi-cultural curriculum as an emancipatory phenomenon that facilitates cultural inclusion in the curriculum;

3. the ongoing debate about the utility of community-based education that is bi-cultural;

4. those factors relevant to partnerships between powerful and not-so-powerful partners (e.g., major university and Aboriginal communities).

In this initial interpretive phase, all quotes from every respondent were used to ensure full coverage and density before moving to application of the grounded theory method. This first phase assisted in acquiring a sense of what was "going on" in the data. However, it was very intuitive in the very beginning. It felt very "messy" because I found myself interjecting my own opinions and frustrations from years of surviving "banking system" education.

To resolve this, I wrote incessantly and dialogued with Aboriginal colleagues and my professors about my feelings. My confidence was eventually restored. I simply pretended to be a respondent reading my research notes as well as the final product, this paper. This proved to be a cognitive exercise that served me well throughout all the phases of this research project. Had I no Aboriginal background, "changing places" as a technique toward integrity and accountability to the respondents may not have been as feasible.

I was more than a little surprised whenever I was confronted by my own negative attitude. At the same time, I realized the importance of exposing any and all attitudes or bias I might bring to the study, intent as I was on understanding how the respondents defined *their* social reality, *their* reality. Only through self- awareness, regardless of how petty it may appear, could I begin to search out and understand the respondents' views and experience. As Berger and Kellner (1981, in Hutchinson, p. 187) reminded me:

> "If such bracketing (of values) is not done, the scientific enterprise collapses, and what the [researcher] then believes to perceive is nothing but a mirror image of his own hopes and fears, wishes, resentments or other psychic needs; what he will then not perceive is anything that can reasonably be called social reality."

While these statements in the literature on method did not validate my negative feelings *per se*, I now recognized them as a phenomenon shared by researchers. Moreover, the importance of exposing these feelings, and the vulnerability I experienced as a result, took on new meaning, a new sense of importance. With renewed understanding of qualitative research applications, I was ready to move on.

After completing each respondent segment, a short, reflective summary was written for responses from student, instructors, Elders, and program administrators. Then, a memo containing comparisons both within and between respondent categories was completed. It was at this point that I began to get a sense of what was going on in the data, but no analytical procedures had been carried out. I then turned to grounded theory as a method for establishing a systematic approach to the procedures of analysis. Grounded theory and the constant comparative method are research strategies that helped construct a comprehensive articulation of interpretive findings, while situating the analysis in more localized frameworks as a means to ensure accountability to the respondents, to the participants' accounts as "voice".

From the start, I was committed to a research project that would evolve from the participants' accounts in order to build a theory relevant to their experience. I felt that to choose an existing theoretical, or methodological approach that moved from the top down (from theory to practice) would not serve my purposes in as much as such an approach involves

formation of a hypothesis, tests it, then interprets the results. To form any hypothesis about this community's experience would be tantamount to imposing my own views about those aspects of their experience that would be important to study. Research using such existing theory approaches research problems from the top down, from theory to practice, and has varying relevance to the world from which it emerges (Hutchinson; Munball and Boyd, 1993). In essence, these are factors leading to my decision to use grounded theory in combination with the hermeneutic interpretation of the data set.

There were three levels in my use of grounded theory as a research method. First, I returned to the data and wrote a simple summary of what was said within each respondent category. This process involved coding responses and establishing emergent themes. The codes established were relatively short extracts from the data . Coding involves a systematic collection of shorter quotes that are arranged, or classified, so as to avoid interpretive inconsistency or duplication. Examples of codes at this early stage were "child-focused", "teacher learning", "Elder involvement", and "cultural relevance".

Themes are strands of concepts and ideas that have been extracted from the data once it has been coded. Themes are actually compositions consisting of data codified from the various categories, or respondent segments. Themes may consist of similar concepts articulated within a given respondent category. This was the first exercise is building generative themes. Next, similar codes were combined from across several respondent categories. Once the main themes emerged and were identified, propositions about what the respondents were saying could be articulated. Some of the emergent themes were "supportive events",

"traditional child care teachings", "flexibility", "partnership", "community leadership", "holistic learning", "community involvement", "commitment", and "community control".

The discovery of a core process is an essential requirement for a quality grounded theory. It involves continuous reference to the data. The point is to illuminate the main theme of the respondents in explaining "what is going on in the data" (Hutchinson; Munball and Boyd, 1993). The core variable is the basis for the generation of theory grounded in the responses of the study participants. The core variable is inextricably linked to the categories, properties, phases, and dimensions of the theory (Hutchinson). Basic social psychological processes (BSPs) are core variables that illustrate social processes as they continue over time, "regardless of varying conditions" (Glaser, 1978, p. 100). Identification of a BSP is essential to establishing the core variable at work in the participants' responses.

After completing the initial process of identifying emerging themes, all respondent quotations were categorized. In this first level of analysis, each quote was used to form as many codes as possible to ensure full theoretical coverage. For example, one incident may be classified as both "being flexible" and "including family". The emerging categories were then compared with each other using the constant comparative method to cover all the variations in the data. This second level of analysis was one in which mutually exclusive codes were subsumed in larger categories such as "partnership", "program flexibility", "child and family", and "cultural competence". At this point, there were two major themes that emerged. The first theme reflected the participants' frustration with having to leave their families and their cultural supports behind in order to access post-secondary education. In the words of one of the students:

> "I would have stayed. I wasn't doing bad as far as my grades were. The people there were so clinical. When you talk to them, you sit on a chair, and you are sitting there, and it isn't your world. Whereas up here, when you have a little problem, you can talk to your teacher or you can talk to your best friend, and they'll understand. We are all supporting each other" (ID#7107, pg. 2).

A second prominent theme early in the process referred to the importance the participants attached to education that was relevant to their own lived experiences as opposed to the alienation experiences by those who had attempted to attend university away from the community. The following quote from one of the instructors was cited by most of the respondents in one way or another:

> "I wanted to see university courses happening in our community. . .with my experience of going to university out in the city, there was a demand and a concern about First Nations education, and a lot of times the understanding is not there, except for some of the instructors who have studied the history of Native people. The nature of First Nation issues, because we live in it as instructors, we understand where the students are coming from"
> (ID#7201, p.1).

In the following, we witness a dedication in this community to realizing education that embodies their own culture, their own vision of what is important, their own vision of what is culturally relevant so as to develop a curriculum that is competent to their own purposes:

> "The Native people are reclaiming our heritage, our cultural traditions and rituals and ceremonies. The students that we have today in this generation are wanting that experience so that, as caregivers, they will be more balanced in their lives, in their own self-

> concepts and identity. The Generative Curriculum lends to that. Taking the information from the Elders gives them a sense of pride and identity"
> (ID#7201, p. 3).

The third level of analysis involved developing theoretical constructs, or propositions about theories generated from the responses in the interviews. This process focused on the development of theoretical propositions, and was based on all prior procedures of analysis. The theoretical propositions were grounded in the categorical codes already developed in order to preclude the possibility of forming unfounded theorizing that would be irrelevant to the data. The fundamental aim in this process was to generate the basic social psychological process, and its conditions, phases, and consequences. Questions to aid in this process included (Hutchinson, p. 200):

1. What is going on in the data?
2. What are these data a study of?
3. What is the basic social psychological problem with which these respondents must deal?
4. What basic psychological process helps them cope with the problem?

To aid in the process of building theories from the data, I compared incident to incident, response with response, and category with category, and, finally, construct with construct. This comparative analysis allowed me to identify boundaries between incidents. It was a process through which relationships were gradually clarified. As Sally Hutchinson notes (p. 201), it was a process that allowed me to "tease out" the emerging

themes by searching for relevant contexts, dimensions, causes, structures, consequences, and relationships between categories.

For each theoretical proposition, a minimum of three quotations was chosen directly from the data set. I used index cards to write short, action-based quotes such as "coming down to their level", "always holding Elders in a place of honour", and the like. I then "shuffled" the index cards, and then proceeded to make two stacks – one for community involvement, the other representing cultural competence through cultural inclusion in the curriculum. Most of the quotes fit into either one or the other of these two themes. Very few quotations were discarded because most were associated with one or both of these themes. A general problem on the part of almost all respondents related to their individual and collective experience of public education as being so far removed from their world that no value was attached to it.

Structurally, these participants expressed their sense of being marginalized by educational processes that treated them as if they were invisible. I began to get a new perspective on the continued oppressive qualities of education through the experiences of these participants. Confronted by such an educational system, participants turned to their own culture as a way to make sense of their world by remaining *in* their world where feelings of security and belonging prevailed.

The procedures I had followed assisted in the development of a basic social psychological process that identified this "problem" as being common to the participants in terms of education, as well as to the strategies employed in order to cope with it. From this, the core variable was specified together with a constellation of sub-theories emerging from the responses of the participants. Throughout the research work, it was

crucial to adhere to direct quotes to determine what the respondents were actually saying, thereby avoiding any interjections I might make into the process or its content.

At the end of these analytical and interpretive exercises, I approached an articulation of research findings with some confidence. Even so, I continued to refer back to the data and the stacks of memos I had written during the procedures of analysis.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants in this study define Aboriginal education not simply according to its contribution to educational equity, but also by how well it contributes to overcoming disadvantage on a whole range of fronts such as child care, employment, infrastructure provision and so on. These are issues about outcomes and aspirations, about what students expect to get from their education, and about what communities require in order to be able to exercise greater control over their affairs.

It seems clear that simple statistical equality on measures such as skills gain, competencies achieved, modules completed or qualifications received do not begin to capture the range of aspirations and expectations that Aboriginal students, let alone their families and communities, bring to their education. What I am suggesting is that Aboriginal students make different choices and pursue different outcomes than non-Aboriginal students, and that one of their most preferred paths is to get an education so they can work in their own communities in areas like teaching, child care, and other service provider positions.

This research project is about an Aboriginal post-secondary education program in which students were able to make different choices and realize different outcomes. The student-centered aspect of the program is based upon a First Nation community partnership with the University of Victoria-based First Nations Partnership Program (FNPP). The program participants – instructors, students, Elders, and program administrators - are a group of community members who share common circumstances

and have shared meanings by virtue of their culture, as well as by virtue of their common experiences having to do with the partnership for post-secondary education.

Grounded theory research is based on the assumption that groups share a specific social psychological problem that is not necessarily articulated. This "problem" is then resolved through what grounded theorists term a "basic social psychological" process. It is through systematic comparison between participant responses that the basic social psychological problem and its resolution, or basic social psychological process (BSP) emerges.

The basic, unarticulated social psychological problem articulated through responses in the data is portrayed as people coping with oppression that persists in the form of educational practices that reinforce hegemony of Canadian society and its governments. Instead of pursuing education that is at once only remotely accessible and holds fundamentally no intrinsic value and meaning for them, Aboriginal peoples turn to their culture to make sense of their reality. It is a process that involves making sense of the past and the present, and provides a sense of hope for the future. This retreat into culture also has the unfortunate side effect of submerging, or re-submerging, people in a culture of poverty and silence. At the same time, culture can be used to their advantage when opportunities to change these circumstances are engaged.

Infusing the curriculum with knowledge based on the indigenous technologies of the community resulted in a bi-cultural, community-based post-secondary program. The program in this community's experience was a departure from culturally devoid, linear pedagogical practices characteristic of institution-based classrooms where students are passive learners, memorizing the "knowledge" passed onto them by

instructors not invested in them as human beings. This was an experience of education that made cultural sense to the participants, and, so, did hold intrinsic value and heightened meaning for participants. This aspect of the educational program gave rise to the students having the freedom to not just access post-secondary education, but to be engaged in an educational process that valued them as contributors to the entire learning process. Such practices are integral to the function of the Generative Curriculum Model, creating opportunities for learning on the part of both partners. As one student noted:

> "I guess it's like the beginning...like seeing that we have our culture and then there's the university adding their own stuff and they're going to be combined. Well, that's just going to make it that much more stronger. It's like having the best of both worlds...I think that's going to open the eyes of the community...once they see us out there [they'll think] 'Yeah. They know what they're doing'...we're the 'new wave' since we're combining both of them" (ID#7101, p.1).

Culture was most often cited in terms of the community exerting control over the program. The prevalence of the cultural dimensions of the program encouraged community participation in education. The shared learning engaged by both partners during the developmental phase initiated a process through which culture came to mediate the educational experience in this community. The fact that the program was initiated by community members was the first evidence of community involvement in the program. The ability to have the courses taught by their own community members combined with the involvement of Elders in all phases of the program as further expressions of community involvement. Consequently, it was an education that was seen as "real" by the community members. The effect of the partnership was to value

the community as a valuable source of knowledge for developing the curriculum as well as the program activities in general.

This model of post-secondary education demonstrated by this community's experience exhibits an excellent grasp of the complex connections between education and learning on the one hand, and the maintenance and strengthening of Aboriginal identities and cultures on the other. In essence, this program opened up new space in the educational landscape, one in which Aboriginal participants were free to learn and be educated without first having to give up the very things which make them Aboriginal in the first place. If this is true, and it clearly is according to the respondents in this study, then the result is a new and exciting benchmark of "best practice" in post-secondary education. The restorative aspect of the program in terms of identity was articulated by one of the instructors in the program:

> "The Native people are reclaiming our heritage, our cultural traditions and rituals and ceremonies. The students that we have today in this generation are wanting that experience so that, as caregivers, they will be more balanced in their lives, in their own self-concepts and identity. The Generative Curriculum lends to that. Taking the information from the Elders gives them a sense of pride and identity" (ID#7201, p.1).

As part of their educational process, many Aboriginal students struggle to regain their Aboriginal identity because of past assimilation practices as documented in the federal government's Gathering Strength policy. "We can only learn from within our own identity", was the way one student respondent put it, while another said that she was learning from the Elders about her identity, which had been taken from her. One of the students who had studied briefly in a campus-based setting spoke of

always being expected to put the Aboriginal view on the back burner – as if there were one Aboriginal view, and as if she had the authority to communicate it. These were culturally inappropriate expectations that made it harder for her to simply be a student, and to take on the identity of being a "student". Expressing her sentiments about this dynamic in relation to her experience in the program, this student said:

> "I just feel positive, too, that they're [UVIC – FNPP partner] working with the teachers all the time and they're acknowledging the students...because a lot of people need that acknowledgement, especially here because First Nations people have never been acknowledged in education, they've been put on the back burner. Like, there's so many other issues that need to be worked out, their education comes last and now that's coming to the forefront. I think that's good" (ID#7115, pg. 2).

The emancipatory effects of the program were not limited to the fact that it was based in the community. Frequently, the respondents referred to the fact that having their own community members as instructors in the program was instrumental to the individual successes of the students as well as to the overall success of the program. Having instructors as members of the same community practicing the same culture and traditions means that instructors are capable of supporting students in ways that are not possible in other academic settings. As one student explained:

> "I think if it [instructors] were non-Native, I think a lot of the students in the classroom would feel threatened, or wouldn't perform to their level. They [instructors] know them and they can relate to them...Some other teachers just demand 'I need this, I need that', but do not consider the culture and the way they were raised and taught" (ID#7115, pg.2).

In her autobiographical sketch in the introduction to Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks speaks to this issue of having instructors and students from the same ethnic group. She describes it as being an educational process whereby nurturing the minds as well as the spirits of students is a reflection of the personal investment possessed by instructors in such environments. As hooks says, teachers in such educational environments have a mission to contribute to the self-actualization of students.

Quoting hooks, we learn that when public schools were segregated, her teachers were, "committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers – Black folks who used our minds...My teachers were on a mission." To further inform the parallels between her experience and that of the students in the First Nation program, it is instructive to note how hooks describes the social and cultural homogeneity characteristic of the relationships between students and teachers:

> "To fulfill their mission, my teachers made sure they 'knew' us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshipped, what our homes were like, and how we were treated in the family. I went to school at a historical moment where I was being taught by the same teachers who had taught my mother, her sisters, and brothers. My effort and ability to learn was always contextualized within the framework of generational family experience. Certain behaviours, gestures, habits of being were traced back" (p. 3).

In this Aboriginal classroom, or learning space, respondents indicated that students had the right, the power, and the freedom to negotiate their learning among themselves and with their teachers. These were done on

the basis of their different affiliations to land, their different networks of kin and family, their different ages, and their different personal and family histories. They were also able to manage these differences and any possible contradictions in ways that were consistent with their culture, with their own lived experience. So many of the responses to the interviews repeated these themes, and spoke of their program's classroom as being "our place", a "safe" place, where they felt proud, not shamed, because:

> "I'm in my own environment here, whereas before, I was in the school's environment, a city environment, separated from my family and from everybody who understood how I was raised and taught" (ID#7114, p.2).

Education as the practice of freedom, by definition, provides a space in which the identities of Aboriginal students are acknowledged, affirmed and strengthened. Their lived experiences, mediated by their culture and the social relations occurring within it, are treated as the essential building blocks from which their education proceeds. Such recognition and affirmation are instrumental to students completing their program of study because, in reality, they are holding on to their Aboriginality. Their identity, their values, their philosophies were integral to the educational process. This, in essence, is Aboriginal education as opposed to education *for* Aboriginal people. A logical conclusion seems to be that education *for* Aboriginal people is the same as education *without* Aboriginal people. I would argue that bi-cultural education, the inclusion of unique Aboriginal community cultures in the development of education programs, makes room for the community members as participants in the program to assess whether or not the curriculum is culturally competent.

A condition for determining cultural inclusion has to do with the level of relevance to the lived experiences of the students. Aboriginal students involved in education that has no relevance to their own lived experience in effect silences them, pushing them further into the margins of society. In a situation like this, Aboriginal students are silenced due to a lack of relevance or active frame of reference through which to participate in the class. Non-Aboriginal students are relatively successful in these classrooms, but the force and effect of their success only serves to re-inscribe patterns of social hegemony and patterns of dominance. These patterns, in turn, tend to perpetuate the systemic oppression of Aboriginal peoples.

A proposition directly related to the cultural competence that obtained in the final delivery of the program is the degree to which it is experienced throughout the community. In this study, I found that because of the program's capacity to be sensitive to the aspirations and needs of the students that this experience of Aboriginal community control of education was able to meet the needs of the students and the community alike. Perhaps the most challenging issue of all is to ensure education that is available to all Aboriginal peoples in a manner that reinforces rather than suppresses their unique cultural identity. The imposition on Aboriginal peoples of an education system developed to meet the needs of the majority cultural group in Canadian society clearly does not achieve this. When viewed from this perspective, the classroom activities at issue here took on a political dimension.

According to liberal tenets, the exercise of individual rights is essentially political. Groups may exercise political acts, but groups formed for the purpose of the expression of group rights, do not have legal protection in Canada. Still, there is a good deal of political resistance that can occur within the context of learning, of becoming educated. The politics of

education suggests that individual or community performance can be legitimately assessed against a set of particular educational outcomes defined by culturally unique communities. This process generates a contextual basis for the political expression of group rights without those rights being necessarily afforded to groups based purely on political dynamics.

Community input into assessing and determining different outcomes is not only appropriate, but crucial if Aboriginal communities are to have a meaningful role in education as a political process. However, education as a political act is not limited to student, or to program evaluations. Classroom activities in culturally specific settings established by oppressed peoples can also be construed as political acts. The instructors, the students, and the Elders were all members of the same culturally unique community. By working together to keep the program curriculum flexible and culturally rich, they instilled a politically empowering experience through the exercise of carrying out the program.

The Generative Curriculum model for post-secondary education is premised on including student experiences in the education program to generate curriculum such that, over time, the curriculum becomes increasingly relevant to the lived experiences of the students. The students in the program at issue in this study helped to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for sharing experiences, experiences that shaped –and, were shaped by – their educational process. Students were clearly excited by, as well as devoted to, the educational process as they experienced it through bi-cultural education. bell hooks describes this form of education as the practice of freedom, as a practice of resistance to political and social dominance through rigid, prescriptive ways of providing for education. As hooks says in describing her experience in segregated Black school rooms:

> "We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of White racist colonization. . .Within these segregated schools the practices were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anti-colonial. Teachers worked with and for us to ensure that we would fulfill our intellectual destiny, and, by so doing, uplift the race" (p. 2).

Education as a cultural experience is an expression of a growing awareness in the Canadian body politic regarding education as being fundamentally a cultural process. Among practitioners and education policy makers, there is a focus on content and objectives to make distinctions as regards Aboriginal peoples and "Aboriginal Studies" in post-secondary education. I should think that most Aboriginal peoples would actively resist "Aboriginal Studies" courses delivered in institutional settings purporting to accredit cultural studies because the actors in the academic institutions have no experience, and consequently no right to commodify and exploit Aboriginal cultures in such a manner. In any event, such a practice does not fit with the actual practice of involving communities and community control of education. Moreover, the issue of community involvement as a condition for establishing cultural competence, or cultural inclusion would, by definition, be lacking. Hence, community-specific involvement would appear to be a condition through which cultural relevance of post-secondary education can become legitimized. Community-based post-secondary education combined with bi-cultural curriculum is a holistic, not a rigid institutionalized endeavour in that it incorporates, acknowledges and affirms the mental, emotional, spiritual, and social realities as embodying control of education through culture defined and expressed in the context of culturally unique communities, or environments.

This growing awareness of education as a cultural process in Canadian society is consistent with Aboriginal assertions relating to their inherent right to an education that is useful to and supportive of their own existence, their own world views, and the daily lives as expressions of their cultural realities. Furthermore, this suggests that education practitioners and policy makers run the risk of being both ineffective and also unjust if they fail to take account of the complex inter-relationships between education, learning, identity, and the maintenance and reproduction of cultures in culturally appropriate, community-based settings.

This notion was certainly supported in the literature reviewed during the research phase of this project. While Paulo Freire and bell hooks were not the only social theorists who propose viewing education in terms of cultural attributes, they are probably among the more widely read by the public. Indeed, grounded theory as a research method draws on symbolic interactionism as its philosophical base, asserting that reality is a social construct (Hutchinson, p. 184). People do, in these terms, order and make sense of their environment even though their depiction may not "make sense" to others. In my view, Aboriginal culture is not actually a social construct, although some social constructs in Aboriginal societies may, and probably do, derive from their own cultures.

For members of Aboriginal societies, culture is the source of subjectively meaningful life circumstances and experiences. It is important to realize, too, that culture is the source of creating meaning for members of Aboriginal societies as well. Indeed, culture is the primary source of meaning in terms of "making sense" of their lives as Aboriginal peoples, as oppressed peoples. When the only education available is founded upon institutionally prescribed practices, the choice to immerse oneself in the culture of origin as a way to make sense of one's world can have

the force and effect of reinforcing the social and political domination of the majority society. Thus it is that while Aboriginal people can and do make sense of their world through culture, when it is done to the exclusion of all else, the choice is akin to capitulating to the oppressive force of oppressive dominion. Within this process, there also appears to be a choice, whether conscious or unconscious, to return to conditions of poverty and silence. Poverty and silence, then, have also become cultural expressions. As one Elder put it:

> "We are always trying to guilt the White man into giving us a chance" ID # 7401, p.1).

The situation in this remote First Nation community is indicative of the Aboriginal struggle to become free Subjects in Canadian society, free to participate in the transformation of their community on their own terms, and using their own indigenous technologies. Their "struggle" is similar in many ways to Paulo Fieire's depiction of the struggles involving what he calls the "disinherited, dispossessed masses" in Latin America. As a result of his work in Latin America in the field of education, Freire argues that oppressed peoples are submerged in a "culture of silence". This "culture of silence" is characterized by social and political lethargy which, according to Freire, is a direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination – and of the paternalism – of which the oppressed are victims.

Freire's argument is that rather than encouraging and equipping people to know and to respond to the concrete realities of their world, the oppressed are kept submerged in a situation in which this level of critical awareness and response are, for all intents and purposes, impossible. Moreover, it is the whole education system as the major instrument for the maintenance of this "culture of silence" that he holds responsible for

lethargy among the oppressed. It then follows, that an education that is liberatory, that is the practice of freedom, is one that authentically seeks to prepare students to respond to, and transform their own societies – or, in this case, the concrete realities in the community.

Another proposition is founded upon involvement of the students and other community members as a causal factor toward unlearning colonialism through an experience of education as the practice of freedom. It is tantamount to choosing action in the form of education over continued dependence on government or other factors external to the community to bring about desired changes. As active participants, community members, including instructors, students, administrators, Elders, and their families are engaged in what I consider to be fundamentally a political process, a political event. Rather than being passive to those forces that originate outside their community, there is a conscious choice to be active in generating the program rather than function as receptacles for any dictates from the university.

Consistent with the discussion in an earlier chapter about the "banking system" of education identified by Freire, the basic proposition is that the more adept students become at being receptacles for the pristine, absolute, and value-free knowledge of teachers, the more successful they are deemed to be. I would extend that to say that the more passive and receptacle-like students become, the more their creative powers to stimulate their own critical consciousness is annulled. This can only serve the interests of social domination through imposing hierarchies which reinforce Aboriginal dependence on government provisions, hence furthering the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples.

In the practice of education as freedom, students are not docile learners, they become critical co-investigators engaged in a discursive process with

their teachers. It is a process through which knowledge is considered and re-considered, producing evolutionary, transformative knowledge. This is not knowledge perceived as a concrete, static object, but as a dynamic process through which knowledge is shared and renewed, transforming it into a practice of freedom, and, ultimately, a freedom to practice. It is at the point of transformation that we truly see an emergence of consciousness, or, as Freire describes it, and emergence of "conscientization".

Another condition for experiencing education as the practice of freedom is the choice to risk divestiture of the negative self-images internalized over generations of social, cultural, and political oppression in favour of discovering their strengths and capabilities. In this study, students and even instructors evidenced a lack of consciousness as to their own ability to succeed at the task before them. It was in the context of making a contribution to their community and of becoming more proficient at child rearing that they decided to participate. As one of the students noted:

> "It made me look back and look more positively at myself. Looking ahead for my grandchildren or the kids, there's got to be something to make them feel that everything's going to be okay here. Whereas I didn't even think of that when I was growing my kids up. I was just surviving when I was bringing up my own kids. Now I am thinking of them having something" (ID#7107, p. 4).

Another student response underscored the goal of self-discovery and self-empowerment:

> "The program, I took it for me, so that's mainly where the changes were, in me. And, now that it's in me, it's starting to come out. Before, I felt like I was useless or good for nothing, I guess, because I was

> really hard on myself. Where, now, it's 'Hey, I can do anything, I can do this and I can go further and do what I want as long as my family is there with me, I think I can accomplish anything" (ID#7101, p.1).

The experiences of the instructors and the students that establishes them as co-learners in the educational process is another determining factor contributing to the interpretation of the program as an exercise involving education as the practice of freedom. This is one of the precepts articulated by bell hooks in her discussion of critical, engaged pedagogy. Identifying herself as someone who is learning just as the students are in many respects, one of the instructors said"

> "This generative stuff is excellent. For me, I am learning along the way, too. This is reminding me of the way of our people. So, I really like that part. Throughout the course material, it says 'generative', so you can do your own. I think that is really important" (ID#7203, p. 4).

These statements are reflective of the experiences of most of the program participants. Taken together, the participant experiences – and their reflections on those experiences – debunk the myth perpetuated through Canadian media and popular culture that Aboriginal people can not, and therefore, do not attain success in education. They are still perceived as people who, because of a failure to value education, have become disinherited prototypes of the Canadian social misfit. A point worth considering is that it may well undermine the hegemony of public education, and the power vested therein, to publicly pronounce that Aboriginal peoples are legitimate sources of authority over their own futures. Holding them out as chronic under-achievers who are maladapted to the "good life" is much easier because in this instance, majority Canada does not perceive a need for any fundamental reform or

restructuring of its educational provisions where Aboriginal peoples are concerned. The contribution of the partnership to this community, and to the liberatory education created in the classroom is that existentialist themes in the community were incorporated and relied upon as providing a valid and necessary educational avenue.

Active involvement of the Elders in the community is a condition for establishing the cultural relevance, or cultural competence in the curriculum and in the final delivery of the program. To a great extent, the Elders in the community are recognized and honoured as keepers of the community's unique cultural and traditional ways. Their direct involvement in developing the curriculum and in the classroom activities was a critical aspect of community involvement. The culturally rich curriculum that obtained in the program is attributable to the active involvement of the Elders. In fact, the role of Elders in the community became increasingly visible as the project was carried out. The presence of the Elders reinforced the positive self-images on the part of the students, and the knowledge they imparted carried with it a unique sense of meaning and of generating hope for the future. Thus, the Elders' involvement was proactive in generating not just the program curriculum, but also a sense of self-continuity and a future ripe with possibilities. Affirming the crucial role of Elders, one student noted:

> "It gives you energy to get the information from them [Elders], and I think that's something I'll probably treasure for years. I didn't know my grandparents, so I didn't get the stories. I always have this respect for Elders. It feels so good to have them sit there and tell us the stories" (ID#7114, p.3).

One of the instructors added:

> "The Elders have fully co-operated and full – heartedly supported the program. They are just so open about giving this information. *Elder X*, who has passed on, said 'We waited for so long for the young people to ask us about these things' " (ID#7202, pg.4).

The program administrators in the community were also fully cognizant of the contributions of the Elders. It is common in Aboriginal societies that Elders are the respected keepers of cultural wisdom. The wisdom of these Elders was lost on no one in this community's experience. As one of the program administrators stated in reference to the participation of the Elders in the program:

> "The way the program was designed to bring in the Elders was just wonderful. That's a great strength, and it's brought in a lot of communication with the Elders and instructors, and the students that simply would not have happened without it being so integrated into the program. I'm really looking at it as a model for getting more Elder involvement in our school. What I plan to do is keep that going, and not drop it when the ECE program is over. We will keep that happening for the whole school, and probably continue their input in the daycare after it is running" (ID#7401, p.4).

These statements are examples of the conditions through which the community participants valued the role of the Elders in terms of the success of their ECCE program. Just as importantly, the Elders' role in the community was revitalized and conceptualized as providing a model for ongoing community activities focused on the children so as to ensure that the culture and language would be sustained by imparting it to the community's youngest members. From this perspective, one begins to

perceive the ripple effects of the community involvement factor and the manner in which the transformative elements of the program activities took shape, impacting the community as a whole.

The characteristics of Aboriginal communities is yet another causal factor underscoring the variety of ways the community involvement was effected in this project. Due to the nature of First Nation communities, it can be said that nothing of import happens in them without a considerable degree of community involvement. The members of First Nation communities share a collective knowledge of the histories of families that goes back across the generations. These communities are homogenous and insular. Culture and community involvement are actually functions of the context of daily life experienced by community members. Involvement of community members in a given area of activity is culturally and experientially defined, and is to be distinguished from what is construed as involvement in majority Canada.

In Canada's majority society, community involvement is something different entirely. For instance, a community in majority society would need to have a highly visible organization with complex guidelines to steer its operations. The numbers of community members who regularly attend community meetings is a standard against which levels of community involvement is usually measured. In addition, various enterprises or organizations would have representation on committees or boards to oversee community activities. In First Nations, community involvement happens as a more natural matter of course. Finally, community involvement in this particular project was what one might call a "two-way street" in that not only was there a ripple effect from what students were doing and learning, but families were involved as well. One student described this phenomenon by saying:

> "My husband is catching on. He's slowly coming around to changes within himself. When we first got together, he was still drinking and all that. And sometimes it's very hard for me, to make him understand that this is what's important now, and this is our life and working towards that goal. With me being in school, we can talk, and I can educate him, and it's changed him for the better. . .and he's shared some of his knowledge with me because his mother took care of a lot of kids, too, so he's really experienced with kids. Me, I'm a first-time Mom, and I've worked with kids, but I really don't have that experience where he probably saw it through his mother" (ID#7115, p.3).

Thus, one of the program impacts was to bring about healing and growth not just for individual students themselves, but also in the context of their significant relationships with adults as well as children. It is an impact that also had a ripple effect throughout the community.

In Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks speaks to this notion of healing and self-actualization as being integral to education as the practice of freedom. In the first place, hooks is calling on members of the academy to become self-actualized themselves as a means to transform the restrictive teaching practices she says permeate the academy. It is a highly problematic issue, according to hooks, primarily because of the power and status that resides in the academy, power and status that professors and bureaucrats within the academy alike are rather loathe to abandon. According to hooks (p.17):

> "Part of the luxury and privilege of the role of teacher/professor today is the absence of any requirement that we be self-actualized. Not surprisingly, professors who are not concerned with inner well-being are the most threatened by the demand on the part of students for liberatory

> education, for pedagogical processes that will aid them in their own struggle for self-actualization."

Any result from this study having to do with education as the practice of freedom begs a discussion about connections between education and healing as internal to the process of self-actualization. As survivors of generation upon generation of assimilationist practices, self-actualization is by definition a healing process. Not surprisingly, it is also inextricably linked to the transformative energies at work in the community brought on by those who participated directly in the program. The healing aspects of the program were described by one of the students:

> "It's a self-healing program...a lot of looking back. From my point of view, we have had to put a lot of things on the shelf in our personal life. We didn't get to deal with them. Now, with this program, we have to look at ourselves. And it's pretty upsetting, when you think back, and you say 'Hey, I had to grow through that, too'. That is positive because we all have to deal with our lives sooner or later, and this is a kind of a way of healing ourselves" (ID#7107, p.2).

Education as freedom is predicated upon the notion of education experienced as a shared healing experience by the learning community established through the program. The Sharing Circle was a classroom activity generated through community involvement. It provided a forum within which the students and instructors could share their hopes, their challenges, and, yes, their pain. It was a difficult, but essential part of the program that prepared the students to be effective in their work with children and families It should be noted that the administrators in the community had planned to incorporate learning as healing into the program as a condition for developing emotionally healthy care-givers to work with the children in the community. The healing that students

experienced inspired them to approach the healing of their families, as another student describes this process:

> "Then late in my first term I decided to talk to them [grown daughters], and let them know about all the things I put them through. . .so I explained to them. . .they were blaming me for the things that happened, so I felt I needed to talk to them and now we're really close. I told them that when they were little I didn't know how to deal with the sort of stuff I went through. . I didn't know how to deal with them. I didn't have a Mom. . .so I went back to them and said I was sorry for the stuff I put them through. I felt like I needed to talk with them because I started to deal with my own experiences and background, and I needed to get it out, too. We were always close, but now, it seems like we understand each other better. We have an understanding now why things happened" (ID#7112, p.2).

This is a rather typical example of the manner in which healing within families was brought on by participation in the program. Concerning students as parents of younger children, there were many reports that described being more comfortable caring for children, being more comfortable and skilled at parenting. It also proved to be yet another way in which community involvement was evidenced in the analysis.

There is a rather widely accepted contention that traditional parenting skills were seriously eroded as a result of the assimilationist practices of the Canadian government and its more destructive *modus operandi* – Residential schools and child welfare practices. As a result of the policies that secured these practices, Aboriginal children were removed in staggering numbers from their families and communities of origin. Placements in either Residential schools, or, later, in White foster homes

followed. Child welfare practices slowly replaced Residential schools as the primary exercise of child apprehensions for the purpose of assimilation.

During the 1960s, a period popularly cited by Aboriginal peoples as "the scoop", children were no longer kept together in large groups situated in settings where there was at least some capacity for the children to support each other. In the post – World War II era, institutionalized settings intended to hold Aboriginal children became less and less popular as a means to assimilate Aboriginal children. Andrew Armitage, former Superintendent of Child Protection in British Columbia, and presently a professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria, is widely recognized for his expertise in the history of Aboriginal child welfare practices in Canada.

Professor Armitage draws attention to the fact that the child welfare system rendered the Aboriginal children more vulnerable to the pressure to assimilate than had been the case with Residential schools. In addition to companionship of their peers, there was an annual return home and an awareness that the Residential school was something their parents had been through. Also, the children knew they were there because they were "Indians", and from a specific First Nation. According to Professor Armitage (1993):

> "None of these sources of support was available in the child welfare system. The children were isolated from each other, usually losing contact even with their immediate brothers and sisters. They were there not because they were Indian, but because their parents were judged by social workers and a court to have treated them in an abusive or negligent manner. There was no promise of return to their home community and people" (pp. 151 – 152).

By the time the child welfare system replaced Residential schools, Aboriginal people had been subjected to two, often three generations of attempts to "civilize" them and assimilate them into Canada's "mainstream" society. I have dealt with social workers and other professionals who subscribe to the idea that Aboriginal parenting skills were completely destroyed by these practices. It is my view that this is merely a collectively held opinion that accrues to the purposes for which the original practices were contrived – a continuation of domination over the lives and futures of Aboriginal peoples through the bureaucratic apparatus of the Canadian state.

As one of the program administrators pointed out, the community's plan was to ensure education for their own community members. The main focus was to impart a highly credible education according to majority standards such that graduates of the program would be able to deal effectively with social workers and other public authorities. Social workers are essentially the public officials who might seek to intervene into the lives of the children in the community through child welfare, or child protection practices. These practices have, in the past, brought on mass removals of children from the community with little or no attention afforded the community's workers or to their assessments of risk to children. The community deemed it equally important to have culturally competent child care targeted to children as well as to their parents. Elder participation in the programs involving children would ensure cultural and linguistic survival, and child care practices consistent with the traditions and mores woven into the fabric of the community.

It seems clear that the community's plan was indeed intended to transform the present circumstance by enhancing their capacity to provide quality care for their children as well as for the children's families. In the participant responses, there is a hint of surprise over the

extent to which the program had an immediate, and very positive impact toward these ends. In the words of one of the program administrators:

> ". . .It's kind of a real liberating experience which is why we were so excited about getting the early childhood program here. There is a lot of value as far as role models, as far as the community recognizing what they themselves can do. . .which is a difficult thing for First Nation communities, as you probably know. With the kinds of oppressions they've suffered, it's quite a thing to hurtle, the basic belief in what they can achieve for themselves. . .and you see that effect their families and the community. With the school, a lot of the teachers who are parents, you can see how it affects their parenting and their interest in the children's schooling. So, it's got a lot of snowball effect of positive things that just keep rolling" (ID#7401, pg.6).

Preferences on the part of administrators for educational outcomes that would positively impact families articulated a condition established by the community in assessing the success of the program. The students in the program reported that their parenting skills were vastly improved as a result of their education. The wisdom of the Elders regarding child - rearing practices, was particularly emphasized. Elders encouraged the students to be firm, lovingly firm, with their children. One student response regarding parenting was typical of many of the others:

> "[I am] disciplining my kids more in a positive way that I used to. Now I go down and talk with them eye-to-eye. I have this chart when they do a chore or their spelling or math. When it fills up at the end, they get a big prize. I never did any of that before. But, now that I do that, I see they're interested in these things. It's not really a big, expensive toy, it's something little. But, they appreciate it. . .Now we [with husband] do more positive punishing than negative. Before, we used to yell at them. Now, we can be calm with them. That's a big step" (ID#7109, p. 2).

My review of the literature affirmed my belief that action without reflection is moot. Without praxis, I would argue, education can in no way be construed as an exercise in freedom. True, pedagogical practices are important, but without action combined with inspired reflection on the part of students and other program participants, meaningful change is unlikely at best. Therefore, inspired praxis becomes still another condition for viewing this program as an exercise in freedom. For instance, the Elders encouraged the students to *think* – to reflect on their histories as members of their First Nation, on the circumstances in which they find themselves today as parents and members of extended families, and on a future that relies on the health and well-being of the children today as a beacon for bringing light to the future.

In order to view the partnership for bi-cultural education as an exercise in solidarity with the community, the university partner must have an active role in working alongside the community participants to achieve and realize community definitions of proactive, culturally competent education. Supported by methods imparted through the university partnership, the students learned techniques like charting children's progress so they could see it for themselves. In addition, they learned to keep journals of their experiences, using the pages to record their reflections and the experiences they shared as co-creators of knowledge. In their journals, students recorded their feelings, their perceptions about the program, their ideas about their work in the future, and other reflections arising from their never before experienced sense of the purpose and content of education. One instructor discusses this process as she states:

> "They relate in their journals [about] their communications with children, their inter- personal communications, their personal lives, their relationships. They think about the learning that they

> have done, and what the Elders have said to them about respect for the children. So, I think there is a lot of change in the students" (ID#7203, p.4).

It was clear throughout the course of the research phases of this project that the community claimed ownership of the program in the context of its relationship to the university, a partnership established through the First Nations Partnership Program. Reference to ways in which the Generative Curriculum Model was used to involve the community to generate curriculum for the program and to develop a product that was bi-cultural in the sense that the community's own unique vision was evident were frequently cited by the respondents in this study.

This discussion chapter is replete with quotes found in the data set. Generating a theory based on what the program participants actually said about this educational project – as opposed to what I might infer about it – required that I rely exclusively on respondent quotations. The process has been one of conceptualizing propositions from these quotations. It has been a highly analytical process rather than one based on measuring discrete variables.

At one point in my conduct of the research, I believed I had a core concept to inform a substantive theory based on the data. However, I had only completed the interpretive phase and two levels of coding. What I had not done was to categorize, or codify the theoretical propositions I had conceptualized. I believe the reason for this was due mostly to the fact that regardless of the categorizing and codifying exercises, or the source and content of the quotations, culture was common in over ninety percent of the responses. In the end, my concepts, including the priorities that were assigned, remained very much the same with only minor changes. However, it was in this third

level of analysis that I realized the various dimensions of culture as a source of meaning and of making sense of the world in this Aboriginal community.

Central to this study is the concept of culture not only as a way of life, but as a source of life in this community. It is the power of their culture that has sustained this community through generations of attempts by the dominant society to denude it of its viability and its vitality. In the final analysis, it is this same vitality that reflects positive images back to the community, even in the face of dominant Canada's oppressive social and political practices.

Theoretically, when an educational program does not actively incorporate the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples, relying on their indigenous technologies for the program's integrity, then there can be, effectively speaking, no claim to providing a humane education program that has integrity and purpose built in. Furthermore, it does not serve the purposes of Aboriginal peoples or their communities for them to be forced to leave their homes, their families and their communities to seek out an education. Family is the very fabric through which Aboriginal culture is woven. I witnessed evidence of this in almost every response. The fact that these students and their instructors were "free" to pursue an education that held intrinsic meaning for them proved to be only the beginning of a series in which I would discover an Aboriginal experience in education as the practice of freedom.

This discussion has referenced location and bi-cultural curriculum development as a venue for community involvement as examples of education as the practice of freedom. Certainly, this is an educational circumstance attributable to this community's experience. However,

there developed throughout the course of my interpretive and conceptualizing processes a sense, no, an awareness that there were many more instances that spoke to the issue of emancipatory education, of liberatory pedagogy.

The thread that runs through this chapter regarding the practice of education as the practice of freedom is underscored by the experiences of the students, and highlighted in citations from literary works on the subject. This document seeks first and foremost to express concepts residing in the data. To that end, the literature review was conducted after many of the concepts emerged. It was at this point that I became confident that the program I had been studying was indeed an Aboriginal experience in education as the practice of freedom.

As mentioned, education as the practice of freedom is a concept generated from other aspects, activities, and outcomes of the program than its community-based delivery locale and its bi-cultural curriculum development legitimized via community involvement. The fact that the instructors were community members was instrumental to the pedagogy that gave rise to liberating, transformative educational experiences. The ensuing discussion highlighted the participatory influences of student contributions to generating curriculum, and to the "spread" of the program throughout the community culminating in richly diverse ways in which the community members participated in the program.

Participatory processes gave rise to student excitement about the program. In addition, the students and instructors alike shared a renewed sense of love for learning. Working together with the Elders and administrators, they reflected upon ways in which their families and community could benefit from the program, and upon ways to make the curriculum more relevant in the current moment. Student participation

in all levels of the program resolved the inevitable conundrum that arises when teachers "perform" as all-knowing benefactors, bestowing "their" knowledge upon students who, by this definition, are completely ignorant.

Education that restores, education that heals and helps people make sense of their past and build theories about a viable future ripe with possibilities was a commonly shared experience both directly and indirectly in the program. The Sharing Circle was a format for classroom activity. The healing experienced there was shared within the families. The format was used as a model for involving Elders on a continual basis, and for providing young children with a way to experience expressing their feelings. The far-reaching effects of the program reverberated through the community, presently as well as toward their future. The impact of student praxis will, in all likelihood, continue to be a resource for community development initiatives even as it preserves the memories of those who participated in the program directly.

I can only imagine the extent to which the participants in this program became excited about the learning opportunity they had. Even with all the sacrifices made in terms of their domestic duties, their training allowances, and time away from their families, participants reported positive experiences. What I saw in this community was a group of people that sought out and established a partnership conducive to their own purposes.

Coming to recognize and respect each other's respective expertise, generating the bi-cultural curriculum became a community-driven process resulting in an educational program content and process that was culturally competent. I would add, by way of observation, that this community was able to reverse oppressive educational technologies of the

past to invent what was ultimately an Aboriginal experience in education as the practice of freedom. In the final analysis, what we see in this particular Aboriginal experience in education as the practice of freedom is a process that is (as bell hooks would say) "profoundly radical". In the expansive history of this community, education had been used to dominate and to assimilate them into colonial ways of life. What this experience in education as the practice of freedom helped them to have was an opportunity to begin to "unlearn" that process, to begin to unlearn colonialism.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

In closing, there are a few general comments to be made. These are peripheral to the data, and have more to do with my own interpretations resulting from the conduct of this study. It seems appropriate that, after spending considerable time focused on this community's experience, I would be remiss not to offer some final thoughts on the matter.

From my earliest days as a novice graduate student, I decided that I would build my thesis project around the Generative Curriculum Model and the First Nations Partnership Program. It was then that I first learned about it, and I was convinced from the start that it was true benchmark of best practice where Aboriginal education is concerned. I thrived on my fantasies about all the different academic endeavours that could be carried out through generative curriculum processes that were bi-cultural and community based.

One of my observations relates to the developmental aspects of the program. Some of the respondents reported problems with the practicum sites. Such problems are usually due to the fact that First Nation communities lack the infrastructure through which to carry out the programs and services resulting from government downsizing – a process described as "devolution" in government rhetoric. I did not see a planning document that could have alerted the community earlier in the developmental stages to issues related to practicum placements. Such a document, if not yet developed, could prove useful to other communities wishing to pursue a partnership such as this one.

The same goes for the books and other materials. These proved difficult for the community to obtain until FNPP stepped in to ensure availability through the university bookstore. On the one hand, this was a difficulty for the program participants. On the other, it proved to be another way in which the university partner could provide assistance to the community.

It makes sense that in the quest for self-determination, and in particular the push for increased local control of Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal peoples are more interested in their own people providing education than in participating in courses controlled by non-Aboriginal providers. The spectrum of educational preferences and needs of Aboriginal peoples requires educators with a particular knowledge of unique Aboriginal community history and culture, community development, and local exigencies. The extent to which non-Aboriginal providers or institutions can meet these criteria is problematic.

Instead of the majority educational sector seeing itself primarily as providing education for Aboriginal people, and seeing Aboriginal participation as an issue defined by access and equity, this sector needs to recast itself in a supporting role. Majority Canadian educational institutions can thus work with Aboriginal communities and organizations as they assume control of the development, delivery, management, and evaluation of suitable programs. The evidence in this study points to the success of the FNPP and the Generative Curriculum Model as providing at least one avenue toward these ends.

In terms of the role of the university partner as a whole, it does seem logical that First Nation communities will need strong university partners committed to education as the practice of freedom for initiatives such as the one described in this study to be successful. Universities must

surrender their "ivory tower" façade if they are to accede to a future that is meaningful, and that keeps pace with changes in the global society in which we all live today. Establishing modes of education as "special projects" in which providers work *with* Aboriginal peoples, and not *for* them will doubtless prove to be wise, indeed, as universities strive to maintain prominence in the fields of knowledge.

Insofar as universities have a vested interest in retaining power, it is a power that must be shared. "Special projects" such as the one described in this study can provide avenues through which communities and community members attain and retain power by virtue of their culture, and within the context of their involvement in the "project". In the process, the community begins to engage in a process of not mere power, but power transformed. Its essence is to be found in the ways in which each community begins to unlearn a process that has silenced them in ways that their new learning exposes.

Finally, my analysis in this study leads me to conclude that in an educational program in which Aboriginals exert control, people are *empowered*, not because they have been *given* power, but because they *exercise* it. As mentioned, this project came into being as a result of the community having the will to mount it. From that point forward, the cultural context of the program together with the strong individuals within the community helped to secure community control over those parts of the program deemed by the community to be most important. Thus, power in this context is exercised according to the norms and rules with which the community members have grown up, and according to their own networks of kith and kin. It is not something that can be "benchmarked" by a simple statistical measure, nor is it something that

can be fully assessed by someone from outside the culture. It is happening when people in the community say it is happening. That is the beginning, and that is the end of the evidence.

I would offer for consideration that Aboriginal education and Aboriginal self-determination can not be separated. Genuine Aboriginal education happens only when Aboriginal people are able to express real power throughout the educational process. Aboriginal communities have real power in their institutions, whether or not those institutions are housed in concrete edifices, or whether they are comprised of centuries–old practices. Aboriginal people are part of their communities, not separate from them. Thus, the power that resides in their communities is expressed and realized in ways that are not present in so-called mainstream education. Moreover, such power is expressed in uniquely Aboriginal ways. It is a phenomenon that is illusive, subtle, and almost impossible to describe in English.

In this instance, cultural inclusion in the curriculum allowed the students to discover their strengths and become empowered by participating in education which drew on and emphasized the worth of those strengths. The proximity and closeness of families is a strong factor in that the role of families and kinship networks form the very fabric of Aboriginal cultures. Another factor upon which the cultural competence of the program can be recognized by the community was articulated in terms of the perceptions of community members. Keeping families intact during education processes is critical to student successes.

There are two additional perceptions found in the data having to do with the relationship of the program's location and cultural competence. The first is the ability to access education in a setting that was familiar to

students and instructors. By having a community-based delivery, students were not thrust into a public environment typically described by respondents as "foreign". Secondly, all participants in the program had ready access to cultural exchanges and symbols that carry intrinsic meaning for students and other community members.

Elders are commonly viewed and highly respected as conduits of Aboriginal culture, traditions, and language. According to the student responses, considerable knowledge of child rearing practices was passed on to students as a result of the Elders' teachings being included in the curriculum. Responses from all categories of participants highlighted the fact that taking information from the Elders gave students a sense of pride and positive self-identity.

I would venture that the Elders are holders of symbolic meaning. People in the community as reported by the participants saw their community as alive and dynamic through the very presence of Elders. As knowledge of the culture, traditions, and language was passed from the Elders to the students and instructors, a renewed sense of belief in what they could accomplish took hold. Through the community's communication network, including role modeling, this knowledge and empowerment had a ripple effect throughout the community.

Control of educational projects would be difficult to exercise by communities if those projects are not delivered within, or at least adjacent to communities. For this program to apply with any validity across a spectrum of Aboriginal communities, then everything about the program must be open to control by the community. Communities must have the freedom and the resources to develop culturally relevant curriculum, and not be forced to accept curriculum developed in a non-Aboriginal context .

Aboriginal people must be able to organize their learning in Aboriginal ways whereby community members are able to make decisions about how the program will be managed in accordance with their own values. In essence, culture must form a central part of the curriculum. This involves room to explore unique community history from the community members' point of view, not the history that has been imposed by colonial powers. Knowledge and skills from non-Aboriginal sources have to be adapted to fit community exigencies. The Generative Curriculum Model did facilitate these developments in this case according to the respondents.

In Canada, the history of government dealings with Aboriginal communities in terms of educational provisions has had the effect of alienating people from their values and ways of life. Many Aboriginal people who do complete post-secondary degrees return to their communities only to find that the skills they acquired either have no relevance to the community or to its development; or, these same skills must now be adapted to fit the community and its priorities. What seems evident to me in the course of my own practice is that governments prefer to spend their Aboriginal education dollars on their own education systems, on attempts to fix the enormous disaster those same systems created and imposed on Aboriginal peoples in the first place. Governments have been, in my opinion, misguided in that attempts to educate Aboriginal peoples.

There is a lot of money spent on Aboriginal education in Canada, especially when the amount spent is measured by Third World standards. However, very little of this money provides direct benefits to Aboriginal communities or their members. Aboriginal education as it is presently constituted in majority Canada has the effect of forcing people to leave

their communities. When their education is completed, if indeed that is the case, then these same people are frequently required to leave their home communities in search of work because community development is not configured into the education scenario when it comes to education provisions of the government of Canada.

Education in majority Canada was designed to facilitate a particular kind of economic and social development. More recently, resources for education have been confronted by Canada's need to configure resource allocations consistent with the globalization of market economies. Today, we are all living with the fruit of that kind of development, including rising unemployment, environmental destruction heretofore never witnessed by humanity, and a widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Projects such as the First Nations Partnership Program should be given the opportunity to further develop and pilot different kinds of educational pathways, including the resources required to establish programs that suit this kind of development. In the final analysis, it is possible that these can be attuned not just to the good of Aboriginal communities. Indeed, it could very well be that such a development strategy may also help show the way forward to improved educational technologies that would apply across a broadened spectrum of community-based settings.

Before one can seriously entertain use of the Generative Curriculum Model across this broadened spectrum, it is perhaps more pertinent to the purposes of this study to consider whether this program could be used constructively in other Aboriginal communities, particularly with reference to this study's findings. When factors such as community-based delivery of the program and the value placed on the inclusion of the community's culture into the curriculum in ways defined by the

community itself, it would have to say that it is at least possible. At the same time, this community did exhibit characteristics that point directly to its readiness to take on the partnership, and its collective strength that enabled the community to exercise power that only the community members can give themselves permission to do.

If there is a solid commitment on the part of the community, then there is every chance for success. But the thing that sets the First Nations Partnership Program and the Generative Curriculum Model apart is that it is different each and every time it is implemented. It is unique to each and every given situation, in other words. The only ones who can determine the readiness factor are the community members. Having said that, though, I would have to say that it is wise to consult with the university-based FNPP primarily because of the variety of experiences that are there.

Outsiders may seek elaboration, and more complete description about this community's experience. However, no outsider will ever be in a position to say, "No, that's not what is happening", or that is not relevant. This is because there is no universal culture from which standards or values of individual cultures can be assessed. Cultures create their own standards and values. Their validity, and all that evolves from it, is internal. Behaving differently, as if this were not the case, is really just imposing one culture's standards on another. It has been of utmost importance that this study be one that embodies these beliefs and principles. In the process, this community's experience emerges conceptually as a set of clear examples that point to at least one way the right to self-determination and the right to an Aboriginal education can be seen as really just two sides of the same coin.

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