COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED EDUCATION
PUTTING EDUCATION BACK INTO THE CULTURE

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an interpretive case study, drawing upon feminist and Aboriginal perspectives, about working in an educational environment described as a border world comprised of overlapping cultures. It is a chronological account of the delivery of a university programme in a First Nations community.

The study seeks to explore the reasons why Aboriginal women enter and successfully complete post-secondary study, and whether their roles in traditional Aboriginal culture facilitate this process. This first portion of the study involved semi-structured interviews with three female Aboriginal educators, focusing on the traditional roles of women within Cree culture, and the relationship of these traditional roles to their roles in contemporary Cree society.

The second portion of the study involves a series of group and personal interviews with female Aboriginal learners involved in a community-based programme in a Northern Cree community. The interviews, which encompassed a three-year period, sought to provide a chronological account of the learners' experiences in the programme. In addition, interviews were conducted with faculty members teaching within the programme. The interviews provided the data for an operation model entitled *Community-Controlled Education* that suggests criteria for the delivery of an inclusive learning experience for Aboriginal learners.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

To work in First Nations education is to work in a border world, in a meeting place between two cultures (Haig-Brown, 1994). Within a community-based programme, both the university and its students are a part of this border world – the world of the university and the world of the community in which the programme is to be delivered. To further complicate this picture, we can assume no simple homogeneity in either of the two cultures, for both may be comprised of micro-cultures and diverse voices.

This thesis is an exploratory study of a border world in which the prime investigator is a white, Anglo-Saxon, Canadian woman. The thesis constitutes an interpretive case study that examines three propositions about the relationship between two communities: a Canadian university and a Northern Cree community with very different world views. The analysis of the relationship between the two communities spanned three years, the period during which the university provided a community-based degree programme within the Northern community. Central to the thesis is the exploration of this evolving relationship between the two communities and the extent to which this relationship was satisfactory in meeting the needs of female, Aboriginal learners. The thesis examines the role of women as they adapt to a changing context and their role in exploiting opportunities in this border world. The goals of the study were to fill gaps in the literature, to listen, to engage, to explore the students' experiences as community-based, university learners in order to learn myself, and to apply knowledge and adapt policy to bring about changes.

In the early stages of the research, it appeared that Aboriginal women were more able to adapt to the transition and changes than were their male counterparts. As hunters and gatherers, First Nations men had more at stake in the older order that collapsed with the arrival of Europeans and the impact of colonialism, which cannot simply be replaced or replicated. This problem for men and masculinity has continued right into the twentieth century. As demonstrated

in studies of men and masculinity in First World European contexts (West, 1996), men's status and identities – what it meant to be a man – has tended to be constructed almost exclusively around particular public and formal roles that have disappeared or are no longer economically viable. Men are still struggling to invent themselves in new and more diverse ways and nowhere more dramatically than in First Nations communities.

First Nations women, on the other hand, have occupied more diverse identities historically, and have developed more "patchworked," feminized lifestyles by weaving life-worlds and styles from many different strands and responsibilities. And, unlike women in European contexts, First Nations women have also performed crucial functions for the maintenance and development of their culture as storytellers, teachers, and advisors to the clan leaders (Gillespie, 1994; Monture-Angus, 1996). These diverse roles occupied by First Nations women have enabled them to adapt better to change and to exploit the emergence of new educational opportunities, whereas many men have been left behind.

Despite the ability of First Nations women to enter and complete post-secondary study, I believed that I needed to explore the quality of the meeting point between the university and the women from First Nations communities to determine if, and how, this meeting point is unsatisfactory and in need of revision. In the exploration of this meeting point, I sought a methodology in which issues would emerge through dialogue rather than delineation. The exploration to develop and refine such a methodology became my research journey, a journey guided by my values and a commitment to make things better for this particular group of women learners. Working educationally with such women begs the most basic questions of the academy: what the academy is, for whom the academy is, what the academy provides, as well as why and how. These questions, I will suggest, present a major challenge for the academy as it struggles to evolve from a finishing school with a white, middle-class, Eurocentric perspective to more of a meeting point between diverse cultures and peoples with diverse needs.

"Case study" is an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus on inquiry around an instance (Adelman, Jenkins, and Kemmis, 1977). In this particular interpretive case study, the emotions, feelings, and values of the interviewees are critical to the research, which also involves the use of empathetic interviews and participation of interviewees, essentially as co-researchers. The participants in this study were not simply sources of data, but were actively involved in its interpretation (see Chapter II). This result was achieved by sharing all aspects of the study with the participants, from the transcripts to the eventual chapter drafts. Although this story is told by the researcher, it is a compilation of the stories of many people, especially of the students and of the university faculty teaching in the programme. The data have been collected through group and personal interviews, journal entries, and field notes.

The story is told chronologically, beginning with the commencement of the programme and concluding with the students completing two years of post-secondary study. The chronological format of the study enabled me to capture aspects of the research journey that evolved from initial, hesitant reflections to more critical and informed commentary, as the relationships between the interviewer and interviewees developed, and as I engaged more fully with an interdisciplinary literature. This growing relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is explained by a change in the quality, depth, and focus of the study, from issues dealing with administration to questions about the heart and nature of the curriculum. The study concludes with the presentation of an operational model described as Community-Controlled Education, which evolved from the negotiated interface between the two very different world views of a Canadian university and of the Northern Cree Nation.

Aboriginal Students and the Post-Secondary System

Despite the proliferation of well-intentioned support services in Canada over the last 20 years, few First Nations students have successfully completed post-secondary study or college-level study leading to a degree or a diploma. In 1986, only 1.3% of the First Nations populations

in the U.S. and Canada had completed a university degree, compared to 9.6% of the general population; members of the non-Aboriginal population were 7.4 times more likely to have completed a degree programme than were First Nations people (Armstrong, Kennedy, and Oberle, 1990). Monture-Angus (1996) reports similar findings with Aboriginal people under-represented as both students and faculty members in post-secondary institutions in Canada. The response by most institutions is to assist First Nations students in adapting and becoming more integrated into the culture and fabric of the institution, so that they can be retained until they graduate. This response often results in access programmes, special counselling, and support services to assist Aboriginal students in their transition to university education. Despite these programmes having increased the retention rates of Aboriginal students, their efforts alone do not create the desired results of full and equal participation of First Nations people in post-secondary education. The concept of full and equal participation is central to the study, as I seek to explore ways in which Aboriginal knowledge and voices may become an integral part of the learning experience.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) discuss the concept of "coming to the university" versus "going to the university" from the perspective of Aboriginal students. These researchers define "coming to the university" as the institutional perspective in which the students come to partake in what the university has to offer. In this sense, the university is envisioned as an established institution with its distinct policies, practices, programmes, and standards intended to serve the needs of the dominant society in which it exists. The notion of "going to the university" is further described by Tierney (1991), whose research indicated that First Nations students had reasons for attending university that were very different from those perceived by the university administration – reasons that did not include social integration into the culture of the university at the expense of their own culture.

In order to provide an appropriate learning experience for students, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) have argued that university study must be presented in ways that have

instrumental value to First Nations students. Universities must have programmes and services that "*connect with the students' own aspirations and cultural predisposition sufficiently to achieve a comfort level that will make the experience worth enduring*" (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991:4). In other words, until First Nations students feel comfortable within a university system, support and transition counselling will be little more than a Band-Aid solution for the retention and attrition problems.

Whether a Canadian university can provide this environment for Aboriginal students, and the extent of change this provision might require, are questions that are reflected upon throughout this study. They remain a challenge for academics who operate from a feminist perspective and who express the concern that, despite cries for inclusivity, institutions still reflect "traditional Eurocentric values" (Richer and Weir, 1995). Although feminist research and epistemologies provide a basis of respecting Aboriginal peoples and cultures, it has to be an inclusive feminism that recognizes and celebrates differences, a pluralistic type of feminism. This feminist perspective, in which differences are acknowledged and respected, reflects my world view as a researcher.

For Aboriginal students, the need to find a comfortable place in the Canadian, post-secondary, education system is of critical importance. This requirement is coupled with an urgent need for First Nations people to assume roles as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and administrators, in order to provide much-needed role models while, at the same time, bringing an Aboriginal world view to education, medicine, and law.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) provide four criteria that they believe university administrators and faculty members must consider in order to create a learning situation appropriate to First Nations students: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (p. 6). First Nations students require a) a post-secondary system that *respects* them as individuals and a cultural group, b) a curriculum that is *relevant* to their world view, c) a system that offers *reciprocity* and exchange of knowledge between teachers and learners, and d) a system that is

responsible in that it provides participants with the skills for self-determination. Of these criteria, the provision for a curriculum relevant to an Aboriginal world view may be the most problematic, for it often seems to assume that there is one world view within the Aboriginal culture rather than, as I will argue, a great diversity between and within communities.

Feminism offers a possible framework for reconsidering the curriculum. The feminist perspective, although rooted in a Eurocentric culture, has evolved to recognize differences and a multiplicity of world views. Feminist researchers have also recognized the need to articulate and understand these differences (Gorelick, 1996; Zukas, 1997), an essential perspective, I will suggest, when doing research with, about, and for Aboriginal people. Therefore, within a feminist perspective, a curriculum relevant to a First Nations world view can be better explained as a curriculum that allows diverse Aboriginal voices to be heard, and the creation of a learning environment that listens to Aboriginal views. Although the four criteria proposed by Kirkland and Barnhardt (1991) will not be accepted unanimously within the Canadian academic system, given the Eurocentric culture of universities, some change is, I suggest, possible where the two cultures meet. It is the extent to which change may be possible, or frustrated, and the qualities that should inform such changes, that lie at the heart of this thesis.

The learning experiences involving the meeting of two cultures can be found within a community-based delivery model, and are distinctly different from the experiences of Aboriginal students leaving northern communities to attend a university. The community-based model within the Canadian context involves the delivery of university-credit education within a community – that is, the professor travels to the remote site where the lectures are delivered. In this situation, the university must deliver education in a setting in which the students' own culture is present. Within the former experience, the students are required to enter a border world – to cross the border from their own world and enter the world of the university through movement "*from their own life-world cultures to other cultures*" (Aikenhead, 1996).

The greatest opportunity to create a post-secondary system that meets the needs of First Nations learners, I will suggest, exists within the delivery of community-based, university education. What is required is a move from a deficit-based model towards what I will term, to use Freire's (1970) language, a more dialogical approach in which both communities have things to offer, as well as needs. Within the intersection of two world views can evolve a learning transaction negotiated by the university and the learners and is described as "Community-Controlled Education." However, although community-based programmes do, at present, show greater retention and completion rates than do campus-based programmes (Inter-Universities North Student Record Data, 1992-1995), they may not necessarily provide a learning environment that fully meets the needs of First Nations students. Within this study, the documentation of the students' experiences in community-based programmes may provide some steps towards a more inclusive and equitable learning experience.

On average, 75% of the students in community-based programmes in Northern Manitoba are female and 25% are male (Inter-Universities North Student Record Data, 1992-1995). These statistics are reflected throughout other Canadian programmes in Northern Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Student Record Data, 1993-1995) and in British Columbia (Ignace, Ignace, Layton, Sharma, and Yerbury 1996). In general, a profile of a community-based learner can be described as a female between 25 and 55 years of age with at least two dependents. It is these learners who form the nucleus of this study. It is their stories that are central to the development of the thesis.

The research that constitutes the basis of the study can be divided into two parts. The initial research involved formal and informal discussions and interviews with three Aboriginal women who had completed post-secondary study and were employed in education. This initial research generated three tentative propositions, as well as some data that informed the refinement of the first proposition and its development into a deeper level of understanding.

The second part of the study involved an exploration and development of the second and third propositions via a series of group and personal interviews with female, Aboriginal learners participating in a community-based programme over three years. In addition, the university faculty members who were teaching within this programme were asked to consider their experiences of working in, and relating to, this community. These comments, primarily from the learners, but also from the faculty, provided the data for the discussion, analysis, and development of the second and third propositions.

Female Aboriginal Learners

Women within European cultures, who experience marginalization and change, often participate in post-secondary study and prove more flexible and adaptable than their male partners (West, 1995). Because female learners comprised a major percentage of the programme registrants, I decided that a crucial part of my research should explore the reasons why women in Cree culture are more likely than the men to enter and successfully complete a post-secondary education. I wanted to explore and to understand the adaptability and flexibility of Cree women, which would involve an examination of the role of women in Cree culture, in both historic and contemporary settings.

I discussed my ideas for this research with three Aboriginal women with whom I had both professional and personal relationships. These three women had completed university-level study and were all employed in the educational field. My discussions about my plans for research began on an informal level. Following the initial discussions, formal interviews were conducted with each of the three women. In the formal interviews, I learned much about how these three women perceived the role of women in their culture and why they entered and succeeded in post-secondary study. The discussion of *Women and Learning in Cree Culture,* found in Chapter III, was the result of this initial research. When these women spoke of their academic success in university study, they expressed the belief that they had "*succeeded in spite of the university*" and suggested that university administrators and faculty should listen to their Aboriginal students and

develop a more appropriate curricula for these learners. These comments indicated what appeared to be a clash of cultures between the university and these students, and suggested the need for the university administrators and faculty to critically examine their current curriculum, delivery modes, and support systems in Aboriginal communities. The comments made by Aboriginal educators (the three women initially interviewed) and students (the female students interviewed throughout the community-based programme) indicated different perspectives towards what a university might be – different, that is, from what was perceived to be the Eurocentric paradigm that presently dominates the university's assumptions, policies, and practices. Further, it became clear that the voices of the Aboriginal women did not represent a single voice. To represent these Aboriginal women as speaking in one voice would be an injustice to them, for it would obliterate the differences among Aboriginal people and communities.

Whereas there had been numerous studies involving the delivery of programmes in Aboriginal communities from the institutional perspective, a review of the literature revealed limited, but growing, research about the learning experiences of either male or female Aboriginal learners. Practitioners and researchers in the practice of adult and continuing education prided themselves in listening to the learner, but, in the area of community-based programmes in Aboriginal communities, there had been very little listening. As a feminist researcher, it was important to find a way of researching with, and not simply about, women. The significantly larger number of female learners indicated that the university administrators and faculty needed to be more aware of the perspectives of this growing clientele.

The decision to conduct interviews with women was based on three factors: a) the significant number of learners who were female, b) my interest in doing research with women, and c) the particular cultural issues that made it difficult for me to conduct research involving Aboriginal men. Aboriginal colleagues explained that Aboriginal men and women did not normally engage in conversations as did men and women within European-based, North

American cultures, and that Cree men might feel extremely uncomfortable in an interview situation with a female researcher. They suggested that any information I required from Cree men should be collected within a classroom or group setting.

Propositions of the Study

During the course of the study, three propositions provided a heuristic framework for the analysis, a starting point for an exploratory research, and a continuing point of reference in my research journey. The propositions served as an initial way of orientating myself to the topic, allowing some preliminary focus, allowing the process to be open to new possibilities, and providing an option to make changes in interpretation and theorization as one engaged with the participants. This heuristic framework also supported much of what I believed to be important as a researcher. I did not want to approach this study in the conventional positivist terms of a clear-cut sequence of hypothesis, experimentation, and confirmation or disconfirmation, in which the researcher is the one who knows the appropriate questions and has generated all the ideas. Rather, this process was more of a dialogue in which the interviewer and interviewees explore and generate ideas together. The idea of a joint exploration and generation of ideas appeared to be especially appropriate in light of the historical oppression of Aboriginal people (see Chapter IV) by the Eurocentric, Canadian population. As a non-Aboriginal woman doing research with Aboriginal women, I was acutely aware of this historical dimension and the need for collaborative research.

The three propositions were forged in initial discussions and in more formal interviews with the three Aboriginal women and from interviews with female students in the community. The focus of the study emerged from these informal discussions with Aboriginal educators who, themselves, had completed post-secondary study. These initial ideas, from which the propositions were constructed, became the basis for a series of intense and reflective conversations with many other people, including students and faculty members.

1. *The traditional roles of women within Cree culture might be shown to be an important element in facilitating their entrance into, and completion of, post-secondary study.* I explored the role of women within Northern Cree culture, both from an historical and a contemporary perspective. Earlier studies involving the role of women in Aboriginal culture revealed that the role of women was diverse and central to the community (Gillespie, 1994). Women were the caregivers, the nurturers, the storytellers, and the teachers within the traditional Cree culture, as well as the advisors to male leaders – roles which gave them the adaptability to deal with changing lifestyles within their community. In other Aboriginal communities, research revealed similar roles: women were seen as being more practical than were men, more adaptable and flexible in coping with change, and as having the ability to balance the entire range of familial and social responsibilities (Cruikshank, 1994; Armstrong, 1996). Because women were central to Aboriginal culture, there is a danger in super-imposing Eurocentric, hierarchical models or Eurocentric models of feminism to Aboriginal women and communities (Ross, 1996; Monture-Angus, 1996).

2. *A clash of cultures between the academy and the Aboriginal learners might be shown to exist.* The clash of cultures could challenge the appropriateness of the traditional university methods of teaching and learning for Aboriginal students. A study conducted by Hunter-Harvey, Matheos, and Doncaster (1995) argues that education within a traditional university, such as Brandon University, is based primarily on didactic approaches to learning; whereas, education and learning within the Aboriginal culture is based primarily upon mentoring and negotiation between learners and teachers. Mayo (1996), in discussing the work of Freire, stressed the need for a more dialogical teaching process in which the learners' culture can make its presence felt. Mayo further wrote that years of the banking system of education (described by Freire as a system in which the learners are seen as objects for the deposit of education) have often silenced learners in marginalized groups. He discusses the need for an emancipatory curriculum in which all voices can be heard.

The third proposition was connected to these first two propositions and encompassed the idea that universities need to provide a more hospitable learning situation for Aboriginal students.

3. *A systemic change might be required within the university culture in order to provide an inclusive learning experience for First Nations peoples – a systemic change across the academy involving policies and procedures.* Although the culture of the institution, in other words, might have to adapt quite radically to accommodate First Nations learners, such change must not be deleterious to university standards. The focus of the study has a strong practical and theoretical orientation, reflecting my dual role as researcher and programme administrator. As a researcher, I had the opportunity to learn about students' experiences and suggestions for programme changes and improvements. As a programme administrator, I had the opportunity to implement changes during the learning experience continuum. This applied research component of the study was critical in the development of the eventual model. It also lent credibility to the study within the Aboriginal community, given my ability to listen and to affect positive changes within the delivery of community-based education.

Significance of the Study

Conducting a study in an area in which limited research has been undertaken created problems such as a lack of relevant literature and accepted methodology. At the same time, it provided opportunities to explore the area with a fresh perspective and to utilize new methodologies. In this respect, this thesis is an exploratory study, the first phase of what needs to be a more extensive, but also empathetic and dialogical, programme of research. The challenge for me, given a history of colonialist and neo-colonialist oppressions, is to define the appropriate questions working with the peoples concerned, thus enabling them to tell more of their stories in their own way.

Most of the research surrounding the area of Aboriginal students within the post-secondary system has focused on upgrading and academic readiness courses, support systems, and student counselling. Although these aspects of programme delivery are important, this study

focussed on the Aboriginal students and utilized their comments and experiences to define questions that a post-secondary system might address as first steps in developing a learning environment inclusive of Aboriginal students. It is recognized that, in addressing these questions, the individuals within the Canadian, post-secondary system would have to set aside some of their more cherished beliefs about the construction of knowledge and free themselves to explore appropriate alternatives and the inclusion of new knowledge (hooks, 1986).

There are two final introductory comments on the thesis: my personal perspective on cross-cultural researchers and a timely *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996). First, I was concerned about the perception of non-Native researchers doing research with, and about, Aboriginal people, with particular reference to a comment in Haig-Brown (1994) attributed to Kirkness: "*Every time a white person stands up to talk about Indians, I get knots in my stomach.*" On the other hand, I faced comments from non-Aboriginal colleagues, with years of experience in community-based education, who made statements like: "W*e know what we have to do for Aboriginal people to survive in education and succeed and get a degree. You need to give them lots of support and sometimes more time to learn the materials*" (Brandon University faculty member, personal communication, 1993). From my perspective, as the research evolved, this was not sufficient. Although these supports may be positive, post-secondary institutions must listen acutely to the experiences of Aboriginal students to ensure an appropriate curriculum and learning situation. These comments reinforced the need to embark on such a study, both with the purpose of providing new knowledge to the academy and to initiate proactive changes in community-based, university education in Aboriginal communities.

Secondly, concurrent with my study, a national initiative was also taking place. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) involved briefs, submissions, round tables, and research reports from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, groups, and organizations throughout Canada. Within this report, the findings and recommendations concerning Aboriginal

peoples and post-secondary education (Volume 3) were critical to development and discussion of my model for Community-Controlled Education.

Structure of the Thesis

Subsequent to Chapter I, the thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter II: The Research Journey

This chapter provides a description and rationale for the methodology used in the study. Central to this chapter is my journey as a researcher, as I sought to explore and develop a methodology for this study. This chapter charts a journey from a more positivistic study to a more hermeneutic one. It also charts a recognition of my own changing consciousness of what educational research is and might be, including how my own role and history was crucial to understanding the process. I also explain the influence of other research approaches, including case-study research drawing upon a range of techniques: group and personal interviews, field notes, qualitative perspectives developed in life-history research, as well as aspects of feminist research suitable and respectful of Aboriginal cultures.

Chapter III: The Academy

This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of the Canadian university system focussing, in particular, on the last four decades and the relationship between this system and Aboriginal people. This chapter concludes with a description of Brandon University, the post-secondary institution on which the study is based.

Chapter IV: Aboriginal Education

This chapter begins with a chronological overview of education of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, from pre-colonial to contemporary times. This chapter draws heavily on the works of Gillespie (1994), a Northern Cree women and educator who has written about the Manitoba Cree from a feminist, Aboriginal perspective. It also includes an overview of three community-based university programmes within Aboriginal communities in Western Canada. This overview is provided as information to the reader and also as a signpost in which to contextualize the study.

The second part of Chapter IV focuses on the role of women in Manitoba Cree culture, historically and in present times. This section draws upon personal interviews with three Manitoba Cree women who have entered and completed degree study and now work as educators. The personal interviews involve a discussion and reflection on why these women entered post-secondary study.

Chapter V - VII: Years One to Three

These three chapters report on the relationship between the community of Great River and Brandon University over a three-year period, with each chapter describing one year of the programme. In these chapters, the researcher draws upon the personal learning experiences of the students, through personal interviews and through ongoing personal contacts with the students and the university faculty involved in teaching in the community-based programme. The chapters include student and faculty comments, as well as my ongoing reflections about the data, and a discussion of changes in the programme made in response to student and faculty comments. Finally, there is a reflection on these changes.

Chapter VIII: Revisiting the Propositions

This chapter revisits and develops the propositions, concluding in the presentation of an operational model, Community-Controlled Education, that provides some preliminary guidelines to assist the academy in delivering community-based education within First Nations communities. Central to the development and presentation of this model are the experiences of a particular group of Aboriginal women in a community-based, university programme, as well as drawing upon the experiences of the university faculty teaching within the programme. These experiences in border country (where the university and community meet), while reflecting the adaptability and flexibility of Aboriginal women, more importantly suggest the need for an inclusive academy that recognizes and celebrates different ways of knowing, teaching, and learning. As this study can be described as exploratory, this chapter will conclude with some questions for further research.

CHAPTER II: THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

Introduction

This thesis is a longitudinal and interpretive case study. It encompasses three years, from the inception, through the development, to the delivery of a community-based university programme for Aboriginal learners in the fields of teacher training and business administration. Although the interpretive case study provides the over-arching research design, the study also draws heavily on those aspects of feminist methodology that are appropriate for Aboriginal settings and, most especially, those research traditions that stress the importance of a dialogically based, non-colonialist praxis in research (Hampton, 1995). The result of this synthesis of methodologies is a particular type of feminist, interpretive case-study sensitive to research within an Aboriginal setting.

A central component within this chapter is my research journey, my personal journey in search of appropriate research methodologies. This journey becomes a central component within the thesis along with the chronological charting of Cree women's participation in community-based, higher education. Within my research journey, I indicate how I drew upon a diverse literature in developing an appropriate methodology. I will focus on what was done, why it was done, how the results were interpreted, the focus of the study and my motivation to undertake it, as well as the values and epistemological assumptions that increasingly guided my work.

Included within my research journey is my own intellectual biography and its development. This process includes the location of self in the research in order to render the whole research story as transparent as possible, to see above such objectives being well-established in this kind of qualitative study (Miller, 1993; West, 1996). My study includes an articulation of my personal and professional situations and the role they played in shaping the research design and its development.

Derived from feminist research, the study has also been based on the ethical necessity of

showing respect and empathy for research participants. It was achieved through the use of what I will term dialogical interviews, as well as a subsequent sharing of transcripts and research writing with participants, thus allowing them to participate fully in the process from its inception to its conclusion. In this situation, I sought to develop and practice a feminist approach that was respectful to Aboriginal culture.

I was also aware of the potential for a power relationship to develop between the respondents and me. Although I recognize the existence of power within any relationship; within any cultural and historical context, "there is power everywhere" (Focault, 1995). I refer to the potential for a power relationship of a particular type within this study. On a structural level, a power relationship could exist because of my role as a university programme administrator with the power to suggest and initiate policy changes in relationship to the programme. Second, my membership in the dominant culture as an urban, white, middle-class woman conducting a study involving the experiences of Aboriginal women – members of a minority, oppressed, sub-culture – also created the potential for a power relationship. I became acutely aware of the different experiences Aboriginal women might have encountered than I had experienced as a member of the dominant culture and, although it was necessary to recognize a commonality of oppression that all women might encounter, their life histories were quite different.

The Research Journey

Researching can be described as a voyage of discovery in which the researcher explores and develops a methodology for her study (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). This chapter tells of my journey as I struggled to identify and develop an appropriate methodology and articulate an associated ethical and epistemological frame of reference. My journey involved the exploration of differing research perspectives (feminist and Aboriginal) and case-study approaches. In this chapter, I want to share my journey as well as these perspectives with the reader, to show how I gradually pieced together a research design in a space where I felt I could engage with Others, and otherness, in mutually imaginative, empowering, and reflective ways. Further, as I pieced

together what I believed to be an appropriate research design, my philosophy for research, and what constituted good and honourable research, began to alter and evolve.

The Background

My interest in doing this research stemmed and evolved within the study from both my professional and personal self. From the professional aspect, I recognized that higher education was not meeting the needs of the Aboriginal clientele, and that university administrators wanting to rectify this situation would have to explore and establish new ways of delivering programming to an Aboriginal clientele within their communities. Thus, I felt a pressing need to explore practical solutions to these problems and to initiate changes in response to the students' needs.

At a personal level, I felt some responsibility for being a part of a system that had somehow failed these students, a part of a Eurocentric world view that sought to annihilate other world views, a need to right former wrongs. However, as I became more involved in the study, I found that the line between my personal and professional self became blurred – that my academic journey became part of my personal journey and my personal journey part of my academic journey.

The importance of self in research and the need to present the world view of the researcher is stressed by many interpretive and feminist researchers (Lincoln and Guba, 1990; Merriam, 1986; Gorelick, 1996). This aspect is particularly important within this study, for it involves a researcher with one world view (an Anglo-Canadian) doing research with individuals from a different culture (Northern Cree). Further, as Lincoln (1995) states, researchers embark on research with their own fears, biases, and motivation, which emanate from within their own personal and intellectual life histories. Although I recognized the importance of my own story at the inception of the study, it was only when I was well into the study that the reflections on my own self-identity and their influence and resonance in the research became clearer to me. I began to understand how my story became an essential part of the study, and that I learned as much about myself as I did about the experiences of the Cree women learners. I observed a changing

self-identify, for as the research evolved, so did I evolve as a researcher.

Giddens (1991) speaks of an evolving self-identify as "*something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual*" (p. 51). Although Giddens specifically refers to the evolving self in societies undergoing upheaval and change and the impact of the global changes upon local conditions, I believe that his ideas are also relevant to the personal changes and upheavals I experienced in my research journey. Throughout the study, I attempted to make sense of my own life story and its influence in the research story.

When I reflect on my own life, I realize that I grew up within an insular, privileged, and Eurocentric background. I lived in a neighbourhood that was inhabited solely by upper, middle class professionals: doctors, lawyers, and university faculty members of Protestant and Anglo-Saxon descent. As a child growing up, I believed myself to be typical of the Canadian mosaic and assumed that most individuals lived a lifestyle similar to mine. I participated in ballet and music lessons, attended the theatre, and inherited and maintained the cultural capital of the upper middle class: those Canadians holding professional positions, as well as successful business owners. Within the Canadian context, a country of immigrants, the upper middle class is comprised of a spectrum of people of various ethnic backgrounds ranging from European to Asian and African, but with the noticeable absence of Aboriginal peoples.

In short, I had a blind acceptance of my life and the assumptions inherent in it. I completed high school, taking courses that my parents believed to be appropriate, entered and completed university. During that time of my life, I never experienced the kind of border crossing that Aikenhead (1996) describes when entering post-secondary education, in that my university life appeared as a natural extension of my school and personal life. My family had participated in post-secondary education for generations; my grandfather and great-grandfather were doctors and my father was a research chemist. Academia, for me, was the expected route. However, I did not find university study easy. I had to work hard to achieve a degree, and I always believed that the majority of the student population was considerably more intelligent than

I was. Yet, I enjoyed the academic milieu, and completed a four-year agricultural science degree in accordance with my father's wishes and began working within my profession.

It was within this work that I crossed borders, that my self-identify began to evolve. I was employed in a community college (technical institute), where I was responsible for extension and agricultural education. In this position, I became responsible for a series of agricultural training programmes within Aboriginal communities. I had never had any contact with Aboriginal people, with the exception of gardeners in our neighbourhood and tour guides at a fishing lodge on a family holiday. My first visit to a reserve community was filled with trepidation and apprehension. However, we did deliver training programmes in an attempt to turn Aboriginal people into farmers and, ultimately, to improve their lives. We generally hired local agrologists who were also active farmers to provide on-reserve training programmes. As an administrator, I supported these programmes and further encouraged their delivery. I now realize that our delivery mode was a missionary, Eurocentric approach and did nothing to recognize the Aboriginal world view. This colonialist model of education was reflected in the farmer-trainer project and can be described as filling empty vessels with European knowledge, regardless of whether it is wanted, needed, or appropriate (Freire, 1974).

After working for several years, I entered and completed graduate school in the area of Adult and Extension Education. Although I respected pure science and the research associated with this discipline, I realized this was not the road I wanted to take. In retrospect, selecting a graduate degree in social sciences was probably my first independent decision. A four-year science degree did little to prepare me for the study of Adult Education in which most individuals had a strong background in the social sciences. I had little or no knowledge of any of the pillars of adult education, such as Freire (1974) and Knowles (1978), and had to begin reading many basic texts. Upon completion of my graduate degree, I moved from college-based employment to the position of Director of Extension at Brandon University, a position that I still hold today. The move to the university setting, augmented by formal study in the theory and practice of adult

education, resulted in some of the most tumultuous times in my professional and personal life.

The move to the university was the realization of a dream. I had pleasant memories of my own university years, and I had always thought that working within a university milieu would be a rewarding experience. I was also beginning to reflect on the whole area of adult education and the need for academic institutions to respond to issues of clientele – what they might need and have to offer. I no longer supported a missionary concept of education and the need to impose one's world views on others with the goal of improving their lives.

It was also at this point in my life that I experienced marginalization. As the director of a continuing education unit, seen as a non-academic discipline and myself holding only a Master's degree, I found that I stood outside the academic community within my university. I was informed on several occasions that I was not an academic, but merely an administrator whose role it was to facilitate the delivery of university courses within a non-campus setting. This hurt. In retrospect, I realized that I very much wanted to be a part of the academy, but I was also realizing the exclusive nature of parts of the academy, an exclusion that Aboriginal people had experienced for decades and was in need of change. For me, these feelings became an internal debate; I wanted to be part of the academy, but I realized that parts of the academy, as they existed, were at odds with my belief in, and commitment for, the need for change.

At the same time, I was flooded with requests from northern Aboriginal groups for programming within their community. However, if they were going to contract with Brandon University, they wanted the programme to meet their needs. They wanted a cultural orientation to the community, respect and understanding of the Aboriginal world view in the classroom and where possible, Aboriginal professors. They no longer wanted the transfer of carbon-copy, on-campus programmes to their community. They wanted input in the selection of the instructors and involvement with programme planning and evaluation.

I also realized that these community members assumed that I had the power that I did not possess within the academic institution to develop and deliver the requested programmes. In

many cases, I felt that I was in a no-win situation, assisting the academic departments while being silenced from providing comments about educational delivery in Aboriginal communities. Yet, I still had a commitment to deliver programmes within these communities. I recognized that the university was not serving the needs of these communities in the most appropriate ways, and that changes needed to be made. I began spending more time in the communities, trying to meet with students and educational directors, and trying to determine their needs in post-secondary education. As they spoke of their experiences in the margins of Canadian society, I could, for the first time in my professional life, empathize with them, for I felt marginalized in my university.

At this juncture of the story (for stories always evolve, are never finished; West, 1996), I believe I may have spent more time away from the university because of my feelings of marginalization within the campus community. In a sense, I found empathy and solidarity within these communities where people also experienced marginalization. As I spent more time in the Cree communities, where I experienced hospitality and warmth, I realized that the information I was collecting was only the "tip of the iceberg." As I formed relationships with individuals in these communities, I decided that I would speak with them about my plans for different approaches to curriculum development and study. They were all supportive; they offered to share ideas with me and to read materials, encouraging me to pursue my ideas. Concurrently, in assessing my position at the university, I recognized that embarking on a doctoral degree would help me with my career path in the academy. I wanted to continue as a part of an academic institution and a doctoral degree would enable me to do so. I also knew that, at this time of my life, I wanted to do something that interested me and that would provide some practicality with my work.

Planning the Journey

Although my doctoral dissertation was a professional venture, I needed to explore a topic for which I had a personal belief and commitment; in this situation, the need to explore and develop more appropriate ways to delivery post-secondary education within Aboriginal

communities. I approached the doctoral study with great apprehension. Initially, I knew that the study must be both exploratory, involving an area in which the questions were still being formulated, and qualitative. I wanted to explore and chronicle the experiences of Aboriginal students involved in post-secondary study within a community setting, guided by a return to narrative, empathy, and imagination in research (Josselson, 1995). I wanted to explore and find an approach that would encourage these participants to generate questions and possible answers in collaboration with me, as co-researchers. Of necessity, as a part of this, I knew I had to devise some alternative notion of valid research, grounded in respect and empathy for others in the meeting spaces of the border world.

I wrestled with the concepts of validity, particularly given that I came from a scientific, positivist perspective. Within an experimental and quantitative research, validity can be defined as the extent that the research technique measures what it is purported to measure. Within this study, which does not involve measurement and experimentation but, rather, dialogical and empathetic interviews designed to understand rather than establish causal relationships per se, I came to consider validity as the extent to which the research enabled the participants to honestly share their experiences and feelings to develop and experiment with their stories in their own words. Further, I considered both external and convergent validation within the study. I sought external validation through dialogue with other individuals working within the border world, with whom I shared my stories and experiences. I also relied upon my own historical experiences from working within Northern Aboriginal communities and my grounding (although limited) in Aboriginal culture. I sought convergent validation through interviewing individuals, both in group and individual settings.

Given my position within the university, I wanted to undertake applied research and to provide answers to some questions that might provide a more equitable learning environment for Aboriginal students. I would want to stress the growing importance of the research being collaborative. As a non-Aboriginal woman doing exploratory research with Aboriginal women

within a border world, I wanted the participants to explore and define the questions, as much as possible, for the academy to address. Finally, I wanted to learn about the experiences of faculty members who were teaching in community-based, university programmes and the effects of community-based studies on the academy. Their experiences were important elements in the attempt to develop new and better ways to provide post-secondary education.

The Beginning

The study began with conversations with three female Aboriginal educators who were my friends and colleagues. As we discussed our own university experiences, a remark that all three women made was "*I succeeded in spite of the university.*" This remark provided a catalyst for the study. It indicated an adversarial relationship between these women and the university, coupled with their strong determination to complete their studies despite this situation.

All three women commented that, in community-based programmes, female participants accounted for at least 80 per cent of the students, thus validating my assumption. Further data (see Chapter IV) also supported these numbers. When I probed further and questioned why these demographics existed, the educators responded in some surprising ways. For instance, they saw the entry and completion of post-secondary study as a natural extension of their traditional roles of leadership and adaptability within the community. Thus evolved the impetus to explore the experiences of Aboriginal women in post-secondary, community-based study with the intent of generating questions, and some possible answers, that the academy might consider in the provision of such education, which essentially formed the second part of the study.

To this point, I had engaged in what has been described by Haig-Brown (1994) as "research as chat," and from it emerged the idea for a study and the first tentative proposition. As I began to consider ways of developing the research, I recognized an obvious need to explore the existing literature about research with women, studying the writings on feminist research. There was a need for individual interviews with each of the three educators, and an exploration of the literature raised major questions about what was involved in women interviewing women and

about whether the conventional, detached, scientific interview was the way to proceed. All of this led me to Oakley (1981). Finally, I noted the need for a methodology appropriate within an Aboriginal setting. Clearly, I needed to explore research techniques used by Aboriginal researchers themselves, which led me to the work of Hampton (1994).

Feminist and Aboriginal Methodology: A Convergence

Feminist Methodology

Feminist research and feminist methodology emerge from a more general feminist critique of male and masculinist traditional research and theory within the academic world. Cook (1983) suggests four major characteristics found in all types of feminist methodology regardless of discipline:

a) the need to fill a gap in the knowledge about women in research,

b) the importance of women as researchers,

c) the need to reformulate concepts within the world so that these concepts apply to women, and

d) the explicit awareness of the research questions asked and how these questions may influence the nature of the results of the research.

Mies (1987) articulates a radically different, epistemological basis for research, in which the *"postulate of value-free research of neutrality and indifference toward the research object be replaced by conscious partiality"* (p. 17), involving empathy with their situation and struggle for change. It was Mies' perspective that essentially provided the basis for my study: the conscientization of both the researcher and the researched. Critical to my study was the need for empathy, which I define as the foundation that enables each party to walk in the other's shoes as closely as possible. This type of research identifies the inter-subjectivity of the research process and the importance of this process being empowering. What is required, so the argument proceeds, is an open, authentic dialogue between all participants in the research process, in which all are treated and respected as equally knowing subjects (Kirby and McKenna, 1989).

Knowledge about women: The profound lack of knowledge about women is reflective of the fact that academic knowledge has been created within the confines of a patriarchal, Eurocentric academy (Harding, 1987). Cook (1993), for example, cites this lack of knowledge as the first point of commonality in feminist research. Researchers traditionally have been Eurocentric males and have tended to focus on issues that they considered being important in relationship to their world view. And yet, as feminist writers have argued (Gorelick, 1996; Banerji, 1996), this perspective has not stopped them from producing a knowledge base considered to be reflective of the entire society.

Traditionally, researchers have ignored women and women's concerns and have seen them as irrelevant. Epstein (1981) and Patai (1983), in reviewing women's writing of the last 200 years on the subject of Utopia, found contemporary arguments of feminism that were articulated two centuries ago. The difficulty in locating these writings within the academy, and the very obscurity of these women's writings, is illustrative of the lack of credence that their work was given in the "mainstream."

Feminist research strives to create a knowledge base within the academy that provides information about women's worlds and women's ways of knowing and learning, and to develop theory grounded in the life experiences and voices of women (Hammersley, 1992). The second commonality within all feminist methodology is a need for more female researchers to conduct research about women (Cook, 1983). In many areas of the academic world, women are under-represented and much research is still characterized by traditional methodologies that are reflective of a Eurocentric, male world view, in the presence of power and with the tendency to objectify and silence the interviewees (figuratively speaking) from expressing their true feelings and thoughts, given the power differentials involved. However, women doing research about women does not always imply that feminist methodology is utilized.

Zukas (1993) provides some interesting insight into how feminist research paradigms can fall short of their intent, and often constitute women researching women within patriarchal and

empirical models. She argues that much of the research done with women in adult education has focussed on the under-representation of women in mainstream society and the role of adult education in improving the lives of these women. Zukas suggests that research about women for women, which is truly feminist research, should seek to develop methodologies that challenge patriarchal wisdom about sexuality, race, class, and gender, methodologies that provide new knowledge from women's perspectives.

Within the context of Aboriginal people and education, a similar concern can be raised, a concern that grew in importance for me as the research evolved. Much of the research about Aboriginal people in the area of post-secondary education has focused on their under-representation and non-completion of study. Although many of the studies have sought to find ways to improve successful participation of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary study, many concerns remain as to whether this research has truly challenged the ways in which universities meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

Women as researchers: Scholars in feminist research and methodology differ in their opinion as to whether men can study women, or whether the critical determinant should be the researchers' ability to adopt a feminist view, regardless of gender (Gorelick, 1996). Along the same lines, the question of whether non-Aboriginal people are capable of doing research about Aboriginal people is often raised as a major issue (Kirkness, 1990), one with which I obviously had to wrestle. The concern is that women conducting their research from an uncritical, Eurocentric perspective would silence their Aboriginal respondents in the same manner that patriarchal research has silenced the voices of women (Monture-Angus, 1994).

Reformulation and critical analysis: The third commonality found in all research areas adapting a feminist methodology is the critical analysis and reformulation of existing concepts so that they are applicable to women. In this area, critical analysis is crucial, as researchers must examine all concepts – initially, to determine if they are applicable to women and, secondly, to determine if they should be reformulated to be relevant to women's lives. Theories and concepts

that are found to exclude women, by definition, should be reformulated or removed from the methodology. Within this study, a methodology must be sought that was appropriate for doing research with Aboriginal women – a methodology that not only reflected gender, but also race.

Research questions: The final commonality discussed by Cook (1983) is the awareness of the kinds of research questions that are asked and how these questions influence the result of a study. Smith (1977) contends that research studies that originate from a male perspective are created to indicate control as the result of their studies. Essevold (1980), in discussing sociology for women rather than sociology about women, says that the former must be emancipatory. Cook reflects on sociological studies done on problems originating in female-led households that were designed in such a way that the study did not reflect the problems in male-led households.

Although these four concepts form a cohesive bond for all feminist researchers across disciplines, there are, as suggested, many differences in the actual practice of feminist research. These differences stem from the various ways that feminist scholars have chosen to deal with the inadequacies of traditional, objective research methodology when applied to women. Cook (1983) sees this diversity as a component of the richness in feminist methodology, as it encourages and enables scholars to move towards new paradigms in research. For purposes of this study, the main feminist influences are drawn from the field of sociology involving the works of Roberts (1981); the interviewing techniques suggested by Oakley (1981); and the feminist writings within this decade that recognize the diversity of women's experiences (Hill Collins, 1991; hooks, 1991; Lown, 1996).

In the review of literature on interviewing, I realized the importance of an empathetic, non-hierarchical relationship in the research process. I recognized that, within this study, it would be difficult to develop such a relationship, particularly given the potential for a structural power relationship between me, a university administrator and researcher from the dominant culture, and the interviewees, Northern Cree women. In an attempt to develop an empathic relationship with these women, I sought to find common ground, as we were all women and

mothers involved in post-secondary education. I realized that, in order for these women to share their stories with me, I must be willing to honestly share my stories with them. Further, feminist methodology respects differences in ways of learning and knowing, and encourages researchers to seek methodologies most appropriate for their discipline and the study they wish to undertake. As this study focuses on the experiences of Northern Cree women in post-secondary, community education, the methodology must reflect the issue of both gender and culture. As indicated, if Eurocentric models of research have excluded the realities of women's lives, so have most traditional methodologies excluded, in a North American context, the realities of First Nations people. Jacobsen (1998), in her discussion of feminist politics, refers to women as a diverse and complex group of persons with various interests, needs, and desires. She describes feminism as a series of alliances across a spectrum of issues and movements, and the need to work with this diversity, rather than contain it. To summarize, I needed a methodology that was suitable for women studying women in a cross-cultural context of unequal power bases, recognizing and respecting their differences.

Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1983) cite three principles as critical and non-negotiable to feminist research, all of which were essential to my study.

1. The research must contribute to the liberation of women by producing knowledge that women can use. This study involved the production of knowledge that would improve the experiences of Aboriginal women within post-secondary study.

2. The ways and means employed to gain this knowledge must not be oppressive. This study involved empathetic interviews, in which both the interviewer and the participants should share an open and honest dialogue.

3. The research must strive to create a feminist perspective that challenges both the dominant traditions as well as reflect on its own development as an emergent field of research. This study involved challenging patriarchal traditions of research as well as incorporating feminist perspectives that recognized diversity among women and their experiences.

The use of the interview techniques, and the underlying frame of values articulated by Roberts (1981) and Oakley (1981), is seen as being critical to the upholding of these principles. Acker et al. (1983) favour the use of an unstructured interview, in which the interviewee is encouraged to take the lead in the discussion. Harding (1987) sees feminist methodology as a way by which feminist scholars can break free of the confines of the traditional patriarchal academy and, in doing so, can develop research questions both pertinent and of interest to women.

Dubois (1993) cautions feminist researchers not to exclude traditional methods that may be appropriate, merely on the supposition that new methods must be found. Rather, it is important to consider each methodology in the context of the study. For example, my study uses a case-study orientation drawing heavily upon aspects of feminist and Aboriginal research. Thus, in essence, what evolved was a particular type of case study, grounded in feminist and Aboriginal perspectives.

Oakley (1981) and Hampton (1995) occupied a central position in the development of my thinking about the theory and practice of research, in general, and about the nature of interviews, more specifically. Oakley proposes a framework of analysis suitable for women interviewing women, whereas Hampton proposes an analytical framework suitable for interviewing Aboriginal people. The research of Oakley and Hampton reveals a convergence of frameworks of analysis, as both are focusing on different aspects of cultures. Oakley focuses on gender, which can be considered in itself an aspect of culture, and Hampton focuses on culture, or obviously the relationships between different cultures – Aboriginal and academic. A convergence of their work is particularly critical for this study, which involves the interviewing of Aboriginal women.

Oakley (1981) describes her use of the interview as a data-gathering technique. She finds the traditional methods of interviewing described by Benny and Hughes (1970), in which the interview is designed only as an information tool, unsuitable for her research about the personal experiences of women. Benny and Hughes state that the local, concrete, and immediate

circumstances are to be disregarded or minimized. The personalities of the interviewer and the interviewee should not affect the outcome. Rather, the results should reflect general areas or those items suitable for quantitative analysis.

Oakley (1981) found the methodology for the interview process provided by the academic world to be narrow and objective. She stated that few academics focussed on the process of the interview. Rather, they centered on what the interviews illustrated in quantitative terms: how many subjects were interviewed, how long the interviews took, and whether the questions followed a standard format.

Oakley (1981) sees the textbook models for a successful interview (Denzin, 1970; Sjoberg and Neff, 1968) as a masculine model that, she believes, is not a suitable methodology for the feminist researcher. Denzin (1970) sees certain tenets as being critical to a proper interview within the academy. The researcher must strike a balance between detachment on the one hand, and warmth and rapport on the other.

Sjoberg and Neff (1968) also state the importance of interviewers not responding to questions by the interviewee. Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch and Cook (1965) see this detachment as being critical with the sole role of the interviewer being the extraction of information from the interviewee.

Oakley (1981) believes that these techniques are inappropriate for women interviewing women with the purpose of providing data that is both relevant and liberating to the lives of women. She argues that traditional survey methods, including the interview process, do not facilitate a dialogical, respectful, and interactive process involving the researcher and researchee. The survey often focuses on the end rather than the means, she says; whereas, feminist research methodology pays heed to both the process and the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee.

Thompson (1988), in referring to the use of the interview within the oral history research tradition, stresses the importance of active listening and the importance of respect and interest in

the realities of the people interviewed. However, his comments fall short of feminist research, as he does not include the importance of the ongoing relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee; nor does he suggest that the interviewer should encourage, facilitate and respond to questions from the interviewee.

Oakley (1981) believes that the primary orientation of the interview process within a feminist paradigm should be women's subjective experiences as women. She sees several areas as being essential to feminist research: the social and personal characteristics of the researcher, the feelings of the individuals being interviewed, the quality of the interviewer-interviewee interaction, the hospitality of the interviewee to the interviewer, the attempts of the interviewee to ask questions of the interviewer, and the interviewer-interviewee encounters on an ongoing basis. Oakley employed these principles in a nine-month study involving 55 women. Other feminist researchers support the work of Oakley, particularly regarding the need for a dialogical, non-hierarchical interview. Stanley and Wise (1983a) argue:

> *... we reject the idea that scientists, or feminists, can become experts in other people's lives ... Feminism insists that women should define and interpret our own experiences ... Feminists must attempt to reject the scientist/person dichotomy and, in doing so, must endeavour to dismantle the power relationship which exists between researcher and researched* (p. 194).

Holloway (1989) and Usher and Bryant (1989) recognize the need for the interviewer to develop an open and integrated relationship with those who are telling their stories. Furthermore, they stress the need for the interviewer to reflect upon this relationship, involving the movement into a process of engagement or reflective practice.

Increasingly seeing myself as a feminist researcher, I began to conclude that it was critical to move away from the textbook interview techniques in traditional sociological research described by Benny and Hughes (1970) and Sjoberg and Neff (1968). The principles of feminist research, within the interview, involve and recognize an interaction and the necessity of searching for a non-hierarchical relationship. Further, six criteria essential to feminist research began to emerge: the research must be subjective, experiential, dialogical, interactive, relational, and

reflective. These were the criteria that guided my study.

It also became evident that not all research involving women studying women can be considered as feminist research. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), for example, have been accused of falling short of feminist research (Zukas, 1993). Their study purports to conduct a series of interviews with women and, through these interviews, to determine more about women's ways of knowing. However, little credence is given to the relationship and interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Although the sample consisted of women from dominant and minority cultural groups, the interviewers all came from positions of power within the dominant cultural group. Belenky et al. do not address the area of cultural bias or hierarchical relationships and tend to avoid these issues of hierarchy and culture, believing, because women are interviewing women, that they are cognizant of all women's realities. This position raises serious concerns with women from minority cultures within the Canadian context (Vaidynathan, personal communication, 1993) because, once again, as in the patriarchal colonial mode, minority women are being asked to support models created by the dominant culture.

Zukas (1993) argues that the perspective presented by Belenky et al. (1986), that the five epistemological categories reflecting women's perspectives on knowing – silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge – are based on hierarchical terms. They suggest that women learners move through these categories, from being mindless and voiceless, to a position where they see themselves as creators of knowledge. It appears, to Zukas, that the researchers see themselves in this privileged position as the creators of knowledge and that the women who are least like them are placed at the other end of the spectrum. This spectrum suggests a hierarchy involving the researcher and researchee that she considers inappropriate when doing feminist research. Zukas also raised concerns about the absence of information on the self, as a researcher, and the relationship between the researcher and the participants in the study.

Zukas' (1993) final concern involves the generalization or grouping of responses, which assumes that all women learn in a particular way and that they have a common world view. These conclusions tend, as Zukas states, to ignore differences between women and to perpetuate a romantic view of women. These statements by Zukas are reflective of the critiques on feminism provided by Black American feminists (Hill Collins, 1991; hooks, 1991), who suggest that feminism must move from its white, middle-class, Eurocentric roots to a more inclusive feminism or feminisms, recognizing the diversity of women's experiences as well as the interconnectedness of inequalities of race and class.

Lown (1995) believes that although one objective unites the spectrum of feminists – the improvement of the lives of women – feminist positions vary as to whether this can be done with reformation of existing institutions, or whether these existing institutions must be replaced. Further, in the 1990s many questions critical to feminism about power and power relations have been affected by post-modernism. A critical debate has emerged within feminism around the research perspectives underlying how we determine what we know about women. Haraway (1991) cautions feminists that the creation of some feminist knowledge is partial because it neither includes women within the margins, nor recognizes the situatedness of women involved in the production of the knowledge. Further, within this thesis it is important to recognize the multiple identities of the participants, located within varying bases of power, i.e., an Aboriginal women is an "outsider within" (Hill Collins, 1991) in which she is inside the category of woman, but outside the category of whiteness. It is these perspectives from feminists within the margins, feminists who were not a part of the dominant Euro-American culture that pervaded early feminism, that point to a need for a diverse feminism, or feminisms which incorporate and articulate differences among women.

Aboriginal Methodology

It was important for me to establish respectful ways to bring First Nations contexts and research together, and to create a suitable meeting place in a problematic border world. Much of

the research on First Nations education has been criticized, in ways similar to some of the research about women, for it is often designed and conducted by the dominant group to provide theory that does little to improve the lives of Aboriginal people. Hampton (1995) cautions researchers to think about motive and method and asks them to consider – "*Is this appropriate in a First Nations context*?" Rather than providing a set of criteria, however, he tells this story:

> *Old Man Coyote had just finished a long day of hunting. He had walked miles and miles that day, over some rough ground. It was starting to get dark, so he decided to set up his camp for the night. After supper, he sat by the fire and rubbed his feet. They were tired and sore from the long day's walk. After he rubbed them, he decided to put on his favourite moccasins. He took his favourite moccasins out of his bag and noticed that there was a hole in the toe of one of them. He looked for his special bone needle to mend the moccasin, but he couldn't feel it in his bag. (Old Man Coyote was a modern man. He mended his own moccasins.) He tried again, but he couldn't see or feel the needle. So, he started to crawl around the fire to see if he could find that special needle. Just then, Owl came flying by. He landed next to Old Man Coyote. "What are you looking for my friend?" said Owl. Old Man Coyote said, "I can't find my bone needle, my favourite needle. I can't find it anywhere." Owl said, "I have very good eyes. I'll fly around the fire and look for your needle." Owl made one big swoop around the fire and said, "I can't see your needle, my friend. If the needle were around the fire, I would have seen it," he said. "It can't be there." Then Owl asked Old Man Coyote, "When did you use the needle the last time?" "Oh, quite far away, over in the bushes, I mended my jacket there." Then Owl said, "If you last used it somewhere else, why are you looking around the camp fire?" Old Man Coyote looked at Owl. "Well, it's easier here; the fire gives off a good light and I can see better*" (p. 30).

The use of this story by Hampton (1995), in discussing methodology, in itself illustrated the oral tradition of storytelling and how such a story can be applied to contemporary educational research. To me, the story offers an implicit critique of much of the research conducted on Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people who are unaware of the culture in which the research is being conducted. As a result, it is often done in a mode more comfortable for the researcher than for the community, often looking in inappropriate places for answers to research questions. Although Hampton used this coyote story specifically in relationship to doing research with Aboriginal people, it can be used more widely to critique a lot of research. There are many situations where researchers select a methodology that would allow one to look at what is easy, or most easily measured or observed, as opposed to selecting a more difficult route that might bring

to light more meaningful results.

In response, Hampton (1995) conducted a study at Harvard University using personal interviews with Native students and many of the methods he utilized were similar to those discussed by Oakley (1981). Although he does not identify his methodology as feminist, he supports his use of the personal interview process as the most appropriate method for doing research *about* and *for* Aboriginal people. And, I would want to add, *with* Aboriginal peoples.

Hampton (1995) constructed a series of open-ended questions for the interviewees and responded to their questions in relationship to his role or his opinions on his research. His study sought to establish a theoretical model for the education of First Nation's people or, to use his terminology, Indian Education. He is critical of much of the research on Indian Education.

Lamframboise and Plake (1983) state similar opinions arguing that there is a void in current theories of Indian Education, and requiring researchers to import inappropriate hypotheses from other disciplines. Although Hampton (1995) does not attempt to develop a comprehensive theory within his study, he articulates some of the themes that a theory of Indian Education might encompass. He also considers qualitative analysis and participant observation to be the most useful methodological approaches, and the approaches he used in generating his provisional attempts at theory. He also draws upon the existing literature and an analysis of his own experiences to move toward what might be included in a theory of Indian Education.

Hampton's (1995) selection of participants involved only participants with whom he had close contact and an ongoing relationship, and would presumably commit themselves to the time and energy needed for the study. He determined that this selection criterion was critical to his study, for only when the interviewee and interviewer were comfortable with each other would a meaningful dialogue emerge. He selected a small number of individuals and focused on the depth of the interview rather than on large numbers from which to develop statistical analysis.

Colorado (1985) also reinforces the importance of depth as opposed to range of interviews. He believed that, too often, large numbers of Aboriginal individuals are involved as

research subjects with the sole result of providing surface generalizations, often to the advantage of the dominant culture.

Adams (1975) also provides a strong and articulate criticism of research conducted by members of the dominant culture as a means to create negative generalizations about Indians and perpetuating a colonialist mentality within Canadian culture. As a Metis scholar and activist he has lived with these generalizations, and seeks to confront and to expose this type of unethical research.

Haig-Brown (1994) has raised some similar issues. She also uses personal and group interviews as major tools for gathering data. Although Haig-Brown describes her research in Aboriginal communities as an ethnography, she states that her research has risen out of the "*respect of the people with whom I have chosen to work*" and that it "*should operate within goals and activities initiated by the groups seeking to direct the course of their own development*" (p. 97). She sees her research as a relationship with the subjects with whom she works and involves an ongoing two-way dialogue.

Hampton (1995) believes that Aboriginal research should construct knowledge for a purpose, and that that purpose should liberate and improve the lives of Aboriginal people. He sees his research as a means to free Aboriginal people from the constraints of the hypotheses and theories of another culture. As an Aboriginal person and an Indian educator himself, he also sees his personal thoughts and his reflections as critical to the development of the theories. He sees himself, as the interviewer, as being integral to the research process, not as a detached observer. His study includes an intellectual biography of himself as a researcher. At the time of his study, he was also operating in a dual role – as the Director of the Centre for Indian Education and as a doctoral researcher. This dual role could, he considered, result in his being seen in a position of power over the students. To transcend this concern, he acknowledged the dual role and openly responded to questions personal and professional by the interviewees. Through his role as Director of the Centre, he had developed personal relationships with his subjects and he

considered his research to be a continuation of those relationships. Thus, Hampton's research seeks positive changes within educational institutions. Adams (1995) provides a more radical voice in his research suggesting the deconstruction of colonialist and neo-colonialist institutions and structures and the need to recreate new institutions and structures inclusive of Aboriginal people. Adams is critical of Aboriginal people such as Hampton working within the confines of institutions and structures supported by the dominant culture, and referring to many of these institutions and structures as neocolonialist. These two perspectives, the liberal voice of Hampton who is working and researching within established institutions to improve the lives of Aboriginal people, and the radical voice of Adams who argues for the deconstruction of such existing institutions and the creation of institutions that are reflective of Aboriginal values and needs, are illustrative of the spectrum of views within Aboriginal populations. However, the underlying principle across this spectrum is the urgent need for positive change in the lives of Aboriginal people. Thus, within feminist perspectives and Aboriginal perspectives, there is a need to recognize diversity.

Hampton (1995) taped his interviews, transcribed them, and made notes around critical points. He says that he found the interview process exhilarating and exciting and believed that powerful learning was taking place. He further describes the learning process in the interview as reflective thinking, which he distinguishes from critical thinking. The interviews were not a question-and-answer period nor a critical discussion, but a reflective process during which the interviewer and interviewees shared thoughts to build a theory.

It is evident that Hampton (1995) used a research design that was convergent with that of Oakley (1981):

Convergences of Aboriginal and Feminist Methodology.

1. Within both methodologies, the researchers strive to find new ways of doing research, not merely the reformulation of traditional methods. However, both methodologies utilize appropriate techniques from traditional research.

2. Both research traditions focus on the importance of a non-hierarchical, personal interview in which both the interviewer and interviewee are a part of the process. They both stress the importance of interviewer-interviewee relationships and the opportunity for both parties to ask and respond to questions.

3. Both research traditions recognize the importance of the role of personal experiences of the researchers and the researchees.

4. Both researchers strive to conduct research to improve the lives of marginalized people. In Oakley's case, it is to provide information to improve the lives of women; and in Hampton's, to provide information to improve the lives of Aboriginal people.

5. Both researchers include their intellectual autobiography.

These convergences strongly shaped my work.

I was constantly aware of potential conflicts and concerns in completing my study. One major concern voiced by Aboriginal women is that they may be considered as "Other," relative to the non-Aboriginal, North American women's definition of feminist. Monture-Angus (1995) sees the relationship between the feminist movement and Aboriginal women as a strained one, and believes that there is no place for Aboriginal women within the present feminist movement. She does not believe that present-day feminism has succeeded in respecting and recognizing diversity. In the light of her position, to speak of using a feminist methodology in research about Aboriginal women would be unacceptable to many Aboriginal women. Stevenson, a Cree academic, offers the following perspective:

> *I do not call myself a feminist. I believe in the power of Indigenous women and the power of all women. I believe that while feminists and Indigenous women have a lot in common, they are in separate movements. Feminists define sexual oppression as the Big Ugly. The Indigenous Women's movement sees colonization and racial oppression as the Big Uglies. Issues of sexual oppression are seldom articulated because they are a part of the Bigger Uglies. Sexual oppression was, and is, one part of the colonization of Indigenous peoples.*
>
> *I want to understand why feminists continue to believe in the universality of male domination, the universality of sisterhood, and why they strive so hard to convert*

> *Aboriginal women. I want feminists to know why many Aboriginal women do not identify as feminists. I perceive two parallel, but distinct, movements, but there ought to be a place where we can meet to share, learn and offer honest support to each other* (cited in Monture-Angus, 1995:231).

I sought to engage the participants in reviewing what was said, in sharing with me their interpretation of the data, and in doing so according to their own world views rather than mine. To this end, the interviewees were provided, initially, with their own transcripts for comments and, later, with the collective transcripts and my interpretation of the data. I believed that it was critical, to include participants in the entire process including the identification and interpretation of key themes.

I should mention, at this juncture, that in conducting my interviews with the three Aboriginal educators, I chose to focus on two areas in the interview: (a) the role of women in traditional Aboriginal cultures, and (b) if, and how, these roles supported their entry and success in post-secondary study. I selected these three women for the interview in the same way Hampton (1995) chose his interviewees – because of my personal relationship with them. Hampton stressed the importance of empathy and understanding between interviewee and interviewer, and I also believed that the close relationship I had with the interviewees would facilitate an open and honest, non-hierarchical discussion.

These personal interviews generated data on the role of women in traditional Aboriginal culture, and on post-secondary education as an extension of this role. I recognized that I needed to further explore the experiences, and limited participation, of Aboriginal men in post-secondary study. However, my initial attempts at interviewing three male, Aboriginal students failed. They did not keep the appointments and declined to reschedule. Once again, I sought advice from my three interviewees, who explained that Aboriginal men would feel uncomfortable in a personal interview with a woman and that another method might be more appropriate. I decided to facilitate a group discussion with a class of 20 students (of whom 80% were female and 20% were male) who had just completed the first year of their community-based study, and with whom

I had already met several times regarding university business. Although I did not know any of the students well, I had spoken with most of them over the past year and we had developed some rapport. I met with the group informally, shared my ideas for the study, and asked them to comment.

This initial data – collected via personal interviews with the Aboriginal educators and the group interview with the students – are used in a section on *Cree Women and Learning* (see Chapter IV). The data also provided ideas for my first proposition, which suggested that the traditional role of Aboriginal women might facilitate their entry into, and completion of, post-secondary education.

The second part of the study, the documentation of students' experiences in post-secondary community-based education, required the selection of a community, participants within the community, and Aboriginal female learners who would be willing to engage in this collaborative research. I chose a community with little experience with post-secondary education, having had only one course within the past ten years. At the time of the study, the community was beginning a full-time, community-based degree programme and had selected 21 female and 4 male students for entry. The community is given the pseudonym *Great River*. I knew that, in my current role with Brandon University, I would be able to maintain ongoing contact with the community. I secured permission from the Chief, Council, and the local educational authority to pursue the study. At this juncture, I would like to reflect briefly on power structures within Aboriginal communities and in particular Great River. In the community of Great River, the Chief and Council had complete control and authority over any on-reserve activities. Adams (1995) is acutely critical of this form of local reserve government, describing it as neo-colonialist in which a small group of Aboriginal elites replaced the Indian agents perpetuating the colonialist repressive model. In my case, in order to do the research, I had secured their permission through the Director of Education. Further, after each election and new regime, I had to re-secure permission to continue my study. As a white researcher conducting a

study in their community, I was acutely aware of their power over me, and the potential that they could "BCR" me off the reserve, that is, issue a band council resolution requiring me to leave the community and discontinue the study. Fortunately, this did not happen to me, and I was able to complete the research.

I determined that I would collect data in three ways: through field notes and group and individual interviews.

a) First, I would maintain *ongoing field notes,* documenting any interactions with the students, programme administrators, and the university personnel for the duration of the study. These field notes included my own observations, feelings, and emotions as I engaged in the study, forming a reflective part of my research (Lukinsky, 1990). In essence, I maintained an ongoing diary, chronicling an almost-daily interaction with the students, instructors and administrators.

b) Secondly, I conducted *interviews with a group of women students* each time I visited Great River. Initially, I anticipated that I would visit Great River once each academic year, but, as the study evolved, my visits became more frequent. I decided that I would not select participants for the group interview but would provide an open invitation to all female students in the programme to participate in the group sessions and allow the group composition to be self-selecting. I did not request that group participants agree to participate over the three-year period, but assumed that interviewees would migrate in and out of the group throughout the duration of the programme. I did not believe that this process would hamper the study, but would allow me to gain a broader perspective on the students' experiences.

In the initial group interview, I attempted to ask students specific questions about their university experiences, a technique that proved to be a dismal failure. I moved to a circle discussion format, in which each student shared her thoughts. I began the session by sharing my experiences as a student and moved into an overview of the study, rather than posing questions. I used this format throughout the group interviews. During the group discussions, extensive notes

were made and, in certain cases, a tape recorder was used. Following the session and the compilation of the material, it was discussed with the participants in order to ensure the validity of, and their comfort with, the written document. Further, prior to each group discussion, I summarized the previous year's discussion.

c) The third aspect of the study involved the selection of three learners with whom I would conduct in-depth *personal interviews* for the duration of the study. This aspect proved to be a more difficult task. Of particular concern was the fact that I did not have a personal relationship with any of the students, as I had had with the Aboriginal educators that I interviewed in the first part of the study. Thus, I decided to speak to the group of female students to explain the nature of the study, and to ask for volunteers. Only 7 of the 21 female students expressed an interest in participating in personal interviews. After preliminary informal discussions with this group of seven potential candidates, I attempted to select students whom I believed would reflect the spectrum of learners in the class, a sample that, in Lummis' (1987) words, "*provide (collectively) a representative picture*" (p. 32) of age, family, and marital status.

There were three women selected for personal interviews. They were given the pseudonyms *Marie, Bernice,* and *Joan* for the duration of the study. Marie was the oldest student in the classroom, a grandmother who was now beginning to fulfill her dream for post-secondary education. Bernice was a recently divorced mother of four children who had moved to Great River 20 years earlier from an adjacent Cree community. Joan had recently moved to Great River with her husband who was a band member and teacher in the school. They had two children. Although Joan was Cree, she was the only member of the class who was not a Cree speaker.

After selecting these three women as long-term interviewees, I indicated that I hoped they would participate over the three-year period. I informed them that their anonymity would be ensured by their pseudonyms and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They agreed to the terms, and all three remained in the study for its duration.

The personal interviews were conducted following the group discussion each year. This

format allowed the three participants to reflect on the group comments they had just heard, and to provide additional input as well as to share experiences. The personal interviews were semi-structured (a conversation involving a list of possible topics drawn from the tentative propositions that I wished to discuss with the participants) and provided an opportunity for all students to reflect on their experiences. I initiated each interview with a review of the study, allowed the interviewee to review any written materials from previous sessions, and then moved to a conversation about the topics.

Within the interviews, I sought information on student experiences, suggestions for change and improvement, and reactions to changes implemented in response to student feedback. As with the group discussions, the information was discussed with the interviewees for approval prior to integration into the study. Despite the fact that the initial intent of this aspect of the study was to conduct individual interviews, Joan and Bernice asked to be interviewed together. This request was accommodated for the duration of the study.

d) The fourth aspect of data collection involved at least one in-person or telephone interview *of university faculty teaching in the community-based programme*. Interviews were semi-structured, and focused on the faculty experiences, areas of concern, and recommendations for improvement. As I had done with the student interviews, the written data were provided to the respective faculty member interviewed for review and revision prior to its integration into the study.

Finally, I would like to explain in greater depth the recording, transcribing, and conventions used in the reporting of interview data. Patton (1980) suggests that the most appropriate method of this type of data collection is to tape and transcribe the interview. In addition, note-taking is also recommended to augment the tape-recorded interview, documenting body language or visual cues during the interview. Finally, transcription should be done as soon as possible after the interview, while the researcher still has a clear memory of the event. I attempted to tape record interviews wherever possible, although, in some of the interviews, the

participants expressed discomfort with being taped. In these cases, I took written notes. When taping was possible, it was augmented with note-taking. Transcripts were prepared and the participants reviewed the entire transcripts. The transcript material was used to generate themes, drawing upon the tentative propositions as well as my field notes. The specific aspects of the transcripts relative to these emergent themes that were extracted and combined with my discussions and interpretations formed the analysis of the study. This material, the selected quotation material, and my interpretations were shared with the participants for comments. The quotes in the thesis were reported verbatim, using the language and grammar of the participants. Editing consisted merely of adding punctuation as appropriate; pauses and fillers were rarely reported. I had observed, however, that Aboriginal people in this study spoke more slowly than I was used to in hearing white conversations, neither interrupting one another, often pausing between words and rarely using fillers. In the reporting of the data provided by the instructors, and in situations of personal communication, I observed the same conventions as in reporting the conversations with the Aboriginal participants.

Case-study Research

Qualitative case study, as explained, provided a starting point for the study. As my thinking evolved, a particular type of case study developed, drawing upon feminist and Aboriginal methodologies and encompassing an interpretive and longitudinal dimension, as well as allowing for, as in some ethnographical studies, the development of tentative propositions and their use as a heuristic tool.

A qualitative case study of the kind this thesis represents is considered by many researchers to be an ideal design for understanding educational phenomena (Merriam, 1988). I was struggling with some obvious research questions and possible answers: if the researcher is asking quantitative questions such as "what?" or "how many?" a survey research design might be appropriate. But if the researcher is asking "how?" or "why?" a qualitative case study is needed (Yin, 1984). I reflected on questions of control in research; the more control the researcher

assumes she needs within a study, the more likely the researcher is to chose an experimental design.

In case-study research, the researcher has little control of the research process and is there to observe and document events as they happen, and to encourage those at the centre of the process to articulate their view of what might be happening. It is to be noted that interpretive/descriptive case-study research does not subscribe to a particular method of data collection, allowing the researcher to develop a mode of data collection suitable to the participants and the phenomena explored. Data collection methods in case-study research in the area of education can include group and personal interviews and focus groups.

My case study combines a number of methods, as discussed previously, including personal interviews, telephone interviews, group discussions, and the use of ethnographic field notes, and with a focus on feminist and Aboriginal research. The study is a reflective, chronological account of the development of a programme, with the learners at the centre of the process, and includes an analysis of the relationship between the university and the community in which the programme is delivered. Within the study, I did not attempt to answer questions such as "how many?" or "what?" Rather, I tried to develop and explore questions about why a particular group of women did, or did not, succeed in their post-secondary education and about how one university, and the university system more generally, may improve delivery of community-based education to Aboriginal communities. In essence, central to this case study is a concern with process and meaning in the research, asking how certain things happen and how people make sense of their lives and structure their world (Merriam, 1988).

Put differently, the case-study approach enabled an observation of a developing relationship between the university and the community, as well as the observation of a set of students over a three-year period. As Wilson (1979) states, case-study research is a process "*that tries to describe and analyse some entity in qualitative, complex, and comprehensive terms, not infrequently over a period of time*" (p. 4).

The four characteristics found in all qualitative, case-study research – *particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive* – were all essential components of my study (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988; Stake 1978; Wilson, 1979):

a) Particularistic: Case-study research is appropriate for a study that focuses on a particular event or programme and is particularly suitable for the investigation of practical problems. Therefore, case-study research readily lends itself to action research.

b) Descriptive: The result of case-study research should include a rich description of the event or phenomena under study. Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest that such research should include an interpretation of the meaning of "*demographic and descriptive data in terms of cultural norms, community values, deep-seated attitudes, and notions and the like*" (p. 19). Case studies often include numerous variables that cannot be controlled by the researcher and the interaction of these variables is often discussed over time.

c) Heuristic: Case-study research attempts to illuminate the reader's understanding of events, providing insights into the evolution of a phenomenon (Stake, 1981).

d) Inductive: Case-study research of the kind I developed also involves the use of inductive reasoning. These types of case studies are also characterized by the identification of new concepts and understandings, as opposed to the verification of a predetermined hypothesis. This type of research is essential within an exploratory study such as this.

The heuristic aspect of the study involved developing, as indicated, some tentative propositions as a starting point for the research. These propositions were constantly revisited and reshaped in light of the data and the insights generated in the interviews. This research perspective was, I believe, appropriate, given that research involving Aboriginal women in post-secondary study is still at the exploratory stage rather than the hypothesis-generation stage. Thus, there was a need to explore the area and allow the emerging data to guide the study through a process that was exploratory and perceptive.

The knowledge acquired from a case study differs from other research knowledge in three basic ways: through its *concreteness*, its *contextualization,* and its use of *reader interpretation.*

a) The knowledge derived from a case-study is *concrete* and bears the researcher's own experiences. Thus, it reflects the researcher's bias, reinforcing the importance of including a description of the researcher. Researcher descriptions are also critical when doing feminist research (which is also interpretive), in that researchers must be aware of, and be prepared to critique, their own social and cultural biography and world view. They must also be aware of their impact on others. Kenny and Grotelueschen (1980) reflect on the importance of the researcher within a qualitative case study, arguing that the investigator's theoretical orientation to the research shapes the research problem, and that the researcher's world view affects the entire research process from the conceptualization of the problem to the collection and analysis of the data, and culminating in the interpretation of the findings.

b) Case study also generates knowledge that is *contextual and situated.* It is important in a case study to generate a detailed description of the place and time in which the study was conducted, as well as of the research process, allowing the readers to consider the relevancy of any findings to other situations. However, a case study such as mine also seeks to illuminate complex relationships and processes that may help other researchers and educators understand processes in other contexts. Relatability, which allows readers to reflect on the study in the light of their own research experience, is as much in the eyes and experience of the readers, as the writer, in a study such as this.

c) Case-study knowledge is further developed by *reader interpretation*. When readers reflect on a case study, they do so with their own experience and understanding, which can, in turn, lead to new insights and possibilities for further research. The practical and descriptive nature of case-study research enables readers to relate the phenomenon to their own situations (Stake, 1981). The good case study can excite peoples' imaginations and enable them

to see their own experiences and struggles in new lights.

The view of knowledge being developed is one that recognizes a neglect of views from the margins, from those living in a context that is limited by inequality in the distribution of material resources, and often excluded from the production of knowledge (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). A research perspective that facilitates the inclusion of knowledge and world views from these margins became my prime objective. Thus, the case study developed is predicated on the existence of multiple world views and realities based on time, culture, and situation.

Finally, the applied aspect of the research gave rise to an operational model. This operational model, entitled *Community-Controlled Education*, flowed from the study and provided practical recommendations for the delivery of post-secondary programmes in Aboriginal communities. As the model was developed from an interpretive case study, I recognized the limitations of this model. Therefore, the model is proposed as a hypothetical model for further research involving First Nations communities and post-secondary institutions.

In this chapter, I have attempted to describe my journey as a researcher, as I sought to develop a suitable methodology for the study. My journey included my exploration of several research perspectives within the literature including case study and feminist and Aboriginal methodologies. As a result of my analysis, the methodology I selected built upon an interpretive case-study framework (Merriam, 1988), incorporating the interview techniques of Oakley (1981) that were appropriate for research within a cross-cultural Aboriginal setting (Hampton, 1995), and a diverse feminist perspective (Lown, 1995).

CHAPTER III: THE ACADEMY

Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a background for the reader about one of the communities within the border country: the academy, with a particular focus on the relationship between the academy and Aboriginal peoples. The chapter commences with a brief chronology of the Canadian university system, from historical to present day times, followed by a discussion of university programs that have been initiated in response to the Aboriginal population. The chapter concludes with an overview of Brandon University, the specific Canadian university involved in the study.

A Brief History of the Development of Canadian Universities

Canada was occupied by First Nations people until French and British colonization began in Eastern Canada in the 1600s and 1700s. Early settlers found themselves in a demanding land where survival was the first priority. Homes had to be hewn out of thick forests and there were severe winters to endure. Vast distances separated people from one another. It was natural that these British and American immigrants would want, for themselves and for their children, educational opportunities comparable to those available in the lands they had left behind. Early British and American immigrants had left countries where universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale had long been established, and where higher education had exerted an influence over society. Not surprisingly, however, the development of Canadian universities did not begin immediately among a people who were more concerned about survival than with education.

Impressively, by the time of confederation in 1867, all the large colleges and universities of Eastern Canada had been founded, with the exception of University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario and McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario (Wilson, 1961).

At the time of confederation, Canada was still a largely undeveloped land. The four

provinces that had been established by that time were largely rural, with little movement between them: Upper Canada (now Ontario) with its capital at York (now Toronto), Lower Canada (now Quebec), New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. The only truly urban cities were Montreal and Quebec in Lower Canada; Toronto, Kingston, Ottawa, and Hamilton in Upper Canada; and Halifax in Nova Scotia. It was within these centres that Canadian universities were established.

One of the first advocates for the development of a Canadian university was John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. Shortly after his arrival in Canada, Simcoe began lobbying for the setting aside of some Crown land upon which to build a university. In 1797, the Legislature of Upper Canada was informed that Simcoe's suggestion would be accepted. A recommendation was put forward that a university, King's College, be established in the town of York. However, it would take another 50 years for King's College to open its doors.

The main problem responsible for the delay in the opening of King's College centred around the intention and direction of a university, and the debate as to whether a university should be a religious or secular institution. On one side of the controversy were those who supported a charter for a university that was bound at its core to the values, principles, and rules of organized religion. On the other side of the issue were those for whom a university education meant freedom from anything that might restrict one's pursuit of knowledge or restrict access to the institution to those who belonged to a certain religion. This battle around King's College involved a Dr. Strachan, who fought to have King's College founded on the principles of the Church of England, versus a secular public institution.

Finally, in 1849, the battle over the charter was put to an end with passage of the *University Act* that completely secularized the institution and changed its name to the University of Toronto. Among the amendments to the charter were provisions that no religious qualifications would be required of students wishing to enter any faculty; nor would College

Council members or any instructors be required to be members of the Church of England.

However, the secularization of King's College led to the development of other institutions founded by various denominations anxious to ensure that they would have their own institutions of higher education. Bishop Strachan's reaction to the secularization of King's College was to secure, for the Church of England, a university cultivated on a strictly religious foundation. Toward that end, he helped to establish Trinity University in Toronto in 1852.

Protestants had opened McGill University in Lower Canada by 1821. Presbyterians established Queen's University in Kingston, Upper Canada, affiliated with the Church of Scotland. In 1841, adherents of the Methodist Church in Upper Canada established Victoria University, an institution under their control but open to students of all denominations. Roman Catholics opened three universities in Upper Canada: Regiopolis College in Kingston (1866-1869), Ottawa College in Ottawa (1849), and St. Michael's College in Toronto (1852). Baptists established Acadia University in Nova Scotia in 1840.

The battle for secularized and denominational institutions for higher education resulted in a multiplicity of universities in Upper and Lower Canada. The vastness of the territory of the new country also contributed to the tendency to establish more and more universities to meet the needs of its inhabitants. Although competition between the institutions could be viewed as healthy, some educators saw the large number of universities as a negative development that undermined the educational initiative; better to have concentrated on a few good universities than to have a scattered assortment, each following its own self-serving goals:

> *Religious bigotry and geography made necessary a multiplicity of colleges and this multiplication of effort inevitably retarded the general development of higher education. Initially, the churches did most to develop higher education; later church rivalry did most to retard it* (Wilson, 1986:214).

Politics provided another controversial issue for universities. The Legislative Assembly made it a general practice to give annual grants to universities, bringing into question the matter of higher education becoming bound to political trends. One of the main problems faced by

educational institutions then, as now, was financial. Efforts to secure funding necessarily involved these institutions in provincial politics.

The growing realization of the danger of political influences in universities led to a movement to separate politics and education. University charters began to include sections intended to forestall political influence in the operation of the university. The Methodist Church, in refusing a government grant to their college in 1855, warned against the risk of government interference and control:

> *Grants render the institutions which receive them dependent on the government of the day ... are a dangerous exercise of patronage, and often invidious distribution of Public Funds. While we are in favour of Legislative aid ... we disapprove of such aid unless it be given under some general system ... which makes provision for all, but conveys especial favour on none, and moreover is free from the influence, or control, of any Executive Government* (Wilson, 1986:47).

Although many Canadians were fighting to separate education from religion and politics, education was also viewed by some as a means by which to shape the political direction of the new country. Many of those who were influential in the development of Canadian universities held firmly to the belief that, in order to have that which was English survive and be nurtured in the developing colonies, it was necessary to provide a British-based educational system. The fear, shared by Lord Simcoe, Bishop Strachan, members of the Legislative Assembly, and others, was that the low cost of American education would entice Canadians and result in their being influenced by pro-American, anti-British propaganda. Strachan bemoaned the exodus of Canadian students to the United States where "*the school books from the very first elements are stuffed with praises of their own institutions and breathe hatred to everything English*" (Wilson, 1986:27).

To render the university an institution of public service, the mandate and curriculum of the institution began to be questioned early in the development of Canadian universities. Like the British universities upon which they were based, Canadian universities offered facilities for study

in classical literature, mathematics, natural history, philosophy, chemistry, botany, religion, law, and medicine. Soon there developed a need for the provision for education that would suit the demands of a rapidly growing society, in which agriculture and commerce played significant parts. The addition of new areas of study to the traditional curriculum called into question the nature and responsibilities of higher education:

> *... it led to a demand for the liberalizing of these studies; and it led inevitably to the long and sometimes brilliant, sometimes bitter, debate before the University Commissioners in which the philosophical bases of the whole university question were thoroughly discussed* (Wilson, 1986:185).

The Twentieth Century University

The First Sixty Years

The twentieth century marked the greatest changes in and challenges for the Canadian university. The first half of the twentieth century was marked by less government control of universities and by the move towards academic freedom. However, the student population remained predominantly comprised of white males from upper class families, and it was not until the 1960s that the student population included representation from the entire population. Women, who entered university during these years usually did so with an intent to study home science or embark on teaching careers. Universities during this time were virtually devoid of Aboriginal peoples.

One exception to this situation was the provision of university and college education to war veterans as compensation for their service to their country. Although Aboriginal men served in the war, they were not participants in post-war, post-secondary education. Their treatment by the federal government and exclusion from post-war study was not an overt federal policy but, rather, an example of covert exclusion and differential treatment of Aboriginal peoples. Essentially, Aboriginal veterans lacked the basic education to enter university and there were no upgrading or bridging programs that would facilitate their entry into post-secondary study. Furthermore, the Federal Government policy of providing farm land to veterans was not

accessible to Treaty Indians as they were not allowed to own land on the reserve.

In contrast to the move towards academic freedom within the post-secondary system, this sixty year period of time was one of the most repressive in respect to the grade-school education of Aboriginal peoples, and is marked by the expansion of the residential school system. In 1920, amendments to the *Indian Act* were made by the Federal Government making attendance at residential school mandatory, while at the same time giving Ottawa the power to force Indians to relinquish their legal status as Indians. The few Native people who attended university were encouraged to surrender their status, as a condition of their continuance in the post-secondary system. However, for the vast majority of Aboriginal people, a university education was not an option, the residential school doing little to prepare for them this route. Residential school officials often required Aboriginal students to leave school at age 16, and certain school administrators were reprimanded for offering a grade 9 level education to Indians on the grounds that providing them with high school would pave the way for university-educated Indians (York, 1989).

Despite the difficulty in obtaining education, Aboriginal leaders were beginning to organize and express vocal resentment of the residential school system and sow the seeds for local control of Indian education. In 1911, a Cree chief wrote a letter to the Canadian Governor General pleading that residential schools be replaced with on-reserve day schools, so children would not have to leave home and family for a basic education. The League of Indians of Western Canada presented a resolution to the Federal Government in 1931 to provide local schools on each reserve. Edward Ahenakew, a Plains Cree, and one of the few university educated Aboriginal people of this period having graduated from the University of Saskatchewan), presented a concern which is commonly referred to as the residential school syndrome. Ahenakew stated that, within the residential school system, Aboriginal children lost all ability to think for themselves, their cultural identity and their initiative. Furthermore, when they

are forced to leave school at age 16, they possess neither the skills to return to the reserve nor to remain in the "white world" (York, 1989).

Despite these concerns, there was little response from Canadian universities to provide post-secondary education to Aboriginal people. It was not until the 1960s that Aboriginal people began to organize and demand access to post-secondary study, and it was not until the following decades that universities began to respond to the needs of the Aboriginal clientele.

The Sixties and Beyond

The period from 1960 to the present has shown the greatest increase in student numbers, the greatest diversity in student population, and the greatest growth in numbers of new universities. It has also been the most challenging time for the university system, both academically and financially.

These four decades were a time of change in Canadian and American universities. The 1960s marked the entry of the "baby boomers," the generation of children born immediately after World War II, into the post-secondary system. This increased population of potential university students resulted in the establishment of several new universities such as Simon Fraser, Regina, Lethbridge, York, Trent, and Brandon. Some of these new universities, for example, Brandon University and University of Regina, had existed previously as colleges and were now acquiring university degree-granting status. Others were established initially as universities during the 1960s. In this decade, and until the late 1970s, the Federal Government provided funds directly to universities and, in addition, provided student loans for those who wanted to study. Under this generous system, university education became accessible to a record number of students.

This time of economic prosperity, coupled with a population surge of potential university students, created a unique situation for universities. Simultaneously, the Federal Government entered the research area in the form of granting agencies. The National Research Council grew and the Canada Council was established in order to provide funding for Canadian research

(Bercuson et al., 1997). Universities have never since enjoyed such a plentitude of funding. In the following decades, universities faced cutbacks and rationalization of programmes, coupled with an expectation to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

While the universities were experiencing affluence in the 1960s, the foundations were being laid for the changes and challenges that face the university of today. The 1960s was a period when the traditional white, male, Eurocentric values of North American society were questioned. Events such as the Viet Nam War, the Cold War, and the emergence of Black leaders such as Martin Luther King and feminist scholars such as Betty Friedan, all provided an impetus for change within the fabric of North American society. These events had a profound effect on the university campus, where they were often discussed and debated. Further changes in the demographics of the student body occurred, shifting from a body of white, male, upper-class students to a more diverse population including the working class as well as women and people of colour.

As these groups, which had historically been excluded from creating and transmitting knowledge, gained access to universities, they began to challenge the accepted views of society and history. New questions about the sociology of knowledge emerged: who creates knowledge? In whose interest is this knowledge perpetuated? Feminist scholars, in particular, noted that women's experiences and concerns had been systematically excluded from the knowledge base (Stacey and Thorne, 1985; Epstein, 1981) and criticized the academy for supporting inaccurate views substantiated by "scholastic inquiry" in order to justify the status quo (Mackie, 1991). Similarly, persons who were colonized or who occupied working class or underclass positions in society questioned middle-class assumptions about society (Martel, 1978; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Wotherspoon, 1991) and challenged racist stereotypes in literature and history (Grant and Gillespie, 1992). These challenges brought a new shift in course content within universities toward courses focusing on women's studies, Native studies, colonialism, and race and ethnic

studies. These transformations have not been instituted without notice and criticism (Bercuson et al., 1984; Bloom, 1987).

For Aboriginal people, the 1960s marked the beginning of a struggle against what had been more than 400 years of European colonization. The civil rights movement in the United States involving Martin Luther King and Malcolm X provided an impetus for a Pan-Indian movement and the formation of the American Indian Movement (AIM). At the time, similar movements were developing in Canada; in particular, in the Saskatchewan Native Action Committee (SNAC), Aboriginal people were becoming more political and more articulate in their demands for change (Adams, 1995).

Education was an issue at the forefront and the need to replace residential schools with local on-reserve schools, controlled and staffed by Aboriginal people, that not only taught skills for the non-Aboriginal world, but also reflected on the history, culture, and language of Aboriginal people. Despite the fact that, in 1969, the Federal Government responded with the *White Paper* which transferred the responsibility of Aboriginal education to the provinces, it was not until 1973 that the Federal Government in response to the *Red Paper* (1970) returned the control of Aboriginal education to its rightful place, the Aboriginal communities.

Universities, however, did make some attempts to provide opportunities for post-secondary education for Aboriginal people, in particular teacher-training programs. In the mid-sixties, governments and universities recognized the need for Aboriginal teachers in the school system. Thus was the conception of the Teacher Education Programs known as TEPS. The first TEPS were initiated in the mid-sixties in Ontario and the Northwest Territories and, since this first programme there have been 34 TEPS in Canadian universities. Many of the TEPS are community-based programs in which faculties of Education develop partnerships with local Aboriginal communities in order to provide an opportunity for a teaching credential obtainable in the students' home community. Such programs include the Native Teacher Education at

University of British Columbia established in 1974, a programme at McGill University and the Kativik school board established in 1975, the Northern Teacher Education Programme at the University of Saskatchewan established in 1977, the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Programme involving the Gabriel Dumont Institute in partnership with University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina established in 1980, and the Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Programme established in 1971. These programmes have been accessed by Aboriginal students from across Canada and have been instrumental in the training of Aboriginal teachers. Furthermore, many of these programmes have attempted to include components of Aboriginal culture and tradition in their curriculum, training Native language and Native Studies teachers, and involving local elders in the transmission of traditional knowledge (*Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 1996).

While the TEPS provided substantially for the training of Aboriginal teachers, these programmes also paved the way for the need for universities to provide education for Aboriginal people across the disciplines. The university responded with the initiation of ACCESS Programmes, which again are found across a range of universities in Canada. The University of Manitoba has a well-established ACCESS programme providing a transition year of coursework, and student support for Aboriginal students to pursue studies in the Health Field, Science, and Engineering. The University of Alberta provides perhaps the most comprehensive access programme in public, post-secondary education according to the *Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 1996. The university has established a quota of 5% Aboriginal enrolments in all faculties, and a transition-year programme that opens access to arts, agriculture and forestry, business, education, engineering, Native studies, nursing and science. Universities also provided opportunities for community-based degree study such as the Shuswap Project through Simon Fraser University and the First Nations Centre through the Open Learning Agency. These two programmes are discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

In addition, community-based and ACCESS-initiative universities have begun to provide special services on-campus for Aboriginal students attending their institutions. One example is the First Nations House of Learning, located at University of British Columbia, which provides culturally appropriate student support services, as well as a physical place that Aboriginal students can call their own. Similar initiatives are emerging in universities across Canada including the Aboriginal Student Centre at University of Calgary, and the Indigenous Peoples' Centre at Brandon University. Athabasca University (Canada's Open University) has established an Aboriginal Caucus to provide direction on university policy and practices to meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

Critical to serving the needs of First Nations learners are Aboriginally-controlled colleges and institutions of learning. These institutions include Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) which offers its own undergraduate programmes in linguistics and languages, education, fine arts and business. In 1995, in collaboration with University of Saskatchewan, SIFC offered the first Aboriginal M.B.A. programme in Canada. The Institute of Indigenous Government in British Columbia offers an associate degree in First Nations Governance and Administration and, in the fall of 2000, will offer a full-degree programme in First Nations Governance. Other First Nations Colleges that are well-established include Blue Quills College in Alberta, and Yellowquill College in Manitoba (*Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 1996).

The decades following the affluence of the 1960s and 1970s were fraught with economic recession, reduced federal and provincial funding, and less accessible student loans. Governments began to review programmes and to initiate a rationalization of programmes. Tenured and secure faculty feared for their employment. University administrators struggled with decreasing funding and anxious faculty associations. Statistical data were also reflecting that university graduates in Manitoba were experiencing difficulties in securing initial employment. Although data revealed that university graduates had greater opportunities for

upward mobility between and within their employing organizations than did community college graduates (University Grants Commission Data, 1994), two-year diploma graduates from technical colleges were faring much better in initial hirings (*Manitoba Community College Report*, 1992).

Although the university was facing some serious problems within its administration and finance arena, there was a need for the academy to become more responsive, more inclusive to the diverse population it served. The development of an inclusive university remains a challenge for Canadian academies as they enter the second millenium. Furthermore, the endeavour to build an inclusive university is, and will likely continue to be, met by resistance, given that it challenges many of the daily practices within the academy, ranging through textbook selection, classroom organization, teaching, evaluation, and hiring practices.

Within the Canadian university system, the challenge of developing an inclusive university is more than the recruiting of women, people of colour, Aboriginal people, and people with disabilities. It goes beyond the delivery of community-based programmes to marginalized communities otherwise denied post-secondary education due to geographic and monetary barriers. The development of an inclusive university involves the difficult task of remedying the situations in classrooms where women, people of colour, and Aboriginal people lack the confidence to speak, therefore, perpetuating their exclusion from the genres and registers in which theory has been developed from a Eurocentric, male perspective (Monture-Angus, 1994; Wilson, 1991). An inclusive university involves the redefinition of comparative literature to include the study of every aspect of western and non-western perspectives. The creation of an inclusive university requires that the traditional scholarly knowledge within the university needs to co-exist with non-western, Indigenous, and experiential forms of knowledge (Richer and Weir, 1995).

Within the contemporary Canadian university, the Continuing Education or Extension

units play a unique role as servers to marginalized students. In most universities, they are the source of distance education, community-based programming, non-degree credit and non-academic courses. These activities provide the potential for marginalization by members of mainstream faculties and programmes within the university. However, members of these Continuing Education units often see themselves as the change agents within the university. Through the delivery of community-based programmes, Continuing Education units provide the university with an opportunity to move outside the walls of the academy in the delivery of a university programme in a community, a community in which the culture is often very different from that of the academy. In the particular situation of a university delivering a programme in an Aboriginal community, the challenge involves the development of an appropriate learning experience to meet the needs of these students. This development of an appropriate learning experience for Aboriginal students provides the university faculty and administrators with an opportunity to explore and incorporate Indigenous knowledge within the academy and become a more inclusive institution (Carriere, Crate, and Matheos, 1994).

Within the area of distance education, some continuing educators see the use of learning technologies as a way to experiment with new ways of teaching and learning, moving from the traditional classroom lecture model to time-and-place-independent models in which the instructor acts as a mentor and facilitator of learning. Although these new ways of teaching and learning were initially developed to reach geographically disadvantaged students, the technologies also allow the university to provide a learning experience for those students whose learning styles are not accommodated within the traditional lecture model (Laurillard, 1993). Bercuson et al. (1997) discuss the importance of distance and distributed learning and the need for universities to "*recognize that their mandate includes distance and not just on a token scale*" (p. 89).

Any discussion of distance education within the Canadian university system would be remiss in not including a relatively new type of university that is also emerging within Canada

and internationally: the virtual university. Farquhar (1998) argues that, although most Canadian campuses have provided distance education for many years, this type of learning has originated from the campus base and is not a virtual university. A virtual university, he argues, is a network of connections rather than an extension of a place. It does not originate from a single source as does distance education, but from a variety of sources.

In order to respond to the presence of the virtual university, Farquhar (1998) explains that traditional universities will have to change and stresses that the needed changes must be driven by academic vision rather than technology. Learning theory has long highlighted the shortcomings of the traditional approaches to higher education, showing a need for academics to move beyond the traditional classroom lecture method. Administrators and academics, he concludes, must transform their perceptions of learners and learning into something much closer to the reality that educational research has found. This transformation requires university administrators and academics to reinvent themselves as learner-driven rather than teacher-driven. The learning models must include the changing nature of information, new forms of knowledge and scholarship integrated with the traditional knowledge within the academy, the genuine needs of diverse and individual learners, and the emerging characteristics of lifestyles, work, and learning. This perspective will require traditional universities to re-orient their entire value system and academic culture. Universities will look different and their inhabitants will behave differently, accomplish different results, and relate to new academic goals, values, and attitudes within the post-modern information age (Farquhar, 1998).

Whatever the solutions, it is clear that they will vary among and within academic institutions. Each Canadian university will evolve in a unique way, within its own unique academic culture (Bercuson et al., 1997). As Nordman argues " ... *there are as many cultures as there are universities Each Canadian university has its own culture*" (C. Nordman, personal communication, 1998).

Certain universities focus on research and post-graduate studies and certain universities develop strengths in specific disciplines. Other universities, such as Brandon University, find their strengths in teaching and providing access through an open admission policy to students who would otherwise be excluded from a university experience. These students are provided with academic and personal support during their degree study. Canadian data indicate that graduates from these access institutions fare as well or better than graduates from the institutions with higher admission requirements in securing employment and admission to graduate school (COPSE data, 1998).

Some Reflections on Past and Present

Upon reflection on Canadian universities over the last 200 hundred years, some observations can be made. Currently, within the Canadian context, the portfolio for education (including kindergarten to grade 12 and post-secondary education) remains the jurisdiction of the individual provinces. Each provincial university operates within its respective provincial charter. Although the universities generally operated without a specific religious affiliation, there were, and continue to be, colleges within a university system that are affiliated with particular churches. Within The University of Manitoba (Manitoba's largest public university), for example, St. Andrew's College is affiliated with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and St. John's College is affiliated with the Anglican Church of Canada. Although these colleges maintain some church affiliation and house a chaplain and chapel of their faith, students and faculty come from a range of religious views and there is no requirement of adherence or church membership. However, the 1990s have seen the reemergence of this type of post-secondary institution in Canada: the private degree-granting university that operates within a strictly religious foundation and is not in receipt of provincial funding. These institutions appear to be expanding alongside a recent emergence of Christian fundamentalism in Canada.

One example of such an institution is Trinity Western University, originally founded as a

Bible college with affiliation to Evangelical Free Churches, but was given degree-granting status in 1993 within the Province of British Columbia. Unlike the publicly funded college affiliates discussed earlier, this university requires faculty to be adherents to an Evangelical Christian Congregation. Students are accepted on academic merit, and, although they must follow a strict behavioral code, they are not required to be church adherents in order to study and obtain degrees. Tuition for this private university is slightly higher than the corresponding public institutions; but, unlike sister public institutions, is experiencing increases in student numbers. It appears that these types of universities will continue to emerge and grow in Canada as more Bible schools acquire degree-granting status. In light of the early move to free universities from a strictly secular religious foundation, this private institution phenomenon is somewhat ironic. As Canadian universities are currently under pressure to become inclusive and diverse institutions, these exclusive Bible schools-turned-universities appear to be on the increase.

A second reflection involves the exclusion of Canada's Aboriginal population in the development of Canadian universities. As the original inhabitants of Canada, these populations were present during the development of Canadian universities. While researching the initial establishment of universities in Canada, I could locate no historical information about the inclusion of Aboriginal people within this system. Education of Aboriginal people at that time was provided by the church and government residential schools. Frideres (1994) argues that the initial role of these schools was conversion and assimilation and only secondly the provision of a basic elementary education for Aboriginal students. There was no evidence that these schools were initiated to provide a route for Aboriginal students to enter universities. It appears, therefore, that the inclusion of Aboriginal learners within the university system has been fairly recent, within the last 25 years (Monture-Angus, 1994), and is linked to the Procurement Period (1969-1994) as described by Gillespie (1994) when Aboriginal people moved toward control of their own education system. See Chapter IV.

A third reflection surrounds the impact of American culture on the Canadian academy. Although initial concerns about American influences on Canadians were iterated over a century ago, the concerns are still prevalent within the Canadian academy. The proliferation of American textbooks still used in Canadian institutions is apparent today, despite the intent by Canadian academics to locate Canadian-written and Canadian-published texts for their courses.

A fourth reflection involves the impact of political influence on the Canadian academy. Over a century ago, Dr. Strachan, though reputedly a man of strong opinions and words to match, probably did not exaggerate the importance of limiting political influence in post-secondary education. The same concerns are discussed today. Whose story are we hearing? Whose truth is being told? Where a person receives an education and from whom shapes the knowledge and world view acquired. Education is one of the main methods whereby national unity and political purposes are achieved. Modern universities recognize this relationship and converse about the importance of limiting political influence. In his address to Queen's University, upon his installation as its Principal in 1984, David Smith emphasized the importance of freedom of intellectual inquiry:

> ... *a careful dividing line must be kept between public accountability which is a legitimate requirement for a public institution and public controls over activities which could undermine the very public benefits universities create. It is the freedom of intellectual inquiry and its uncensored dissemination that is at the core of a university's public service* (The Mission of the University, 1985:90).

Similar discussions continue today, as the university strives to develop within a post-modern world. There are 77 universities and 206 colleges in Canada (CAUT Bulletin, August 1996), and each must continue in its individual struggle to foster a learning environment free from influences that bend "the truth" in self-serving ways. The Canadian universities needed religion to give them impetus, and they continue to need political will for the funding to keep them alive.

Brandon University

Manitoba is served by three universities that are listed in order of size: The University of Manitoba, The University of Winnipeg, and Brandon University. Brandon University, in the City of Brandon, is the only university in the Province of Manitoba that is located outside the city of Winnipeg. The smallest university in the province, the institution focuses on access, excellence, and student support. Manitoba is a province in western Canada and is bordered on the east and west by the provinces of Ontario and Saskatchewan, on the north by the Northwest Territories, and to the south by the United States. The province has a population of one million and an area the size of Germany. The provincial capital is Winnipeg, with a population of 670,000; the second largest city being Brandon, located 200 km. west of Winnipeg and having a population of 42,000.

The forerunner of Brandon University was established by two Baptist missionaries, Dr. John Crawford and Rev. G. B. Davis, in 1880, as Prairie College. It was located in Rapid City, some 20 miles north of Brandon. The college failed, and Rev. Davis founded an academy in Rapid City which was subsequently taken over by Professor S. J. McKee and became know as McKee's Academy. This academy was moved to Brandon in 1890, with the projection of the Canadian Pacific Railway mainline through Brandon and the expansion of the city. In 1899, the Baptist Convention of Manitoba established Brandon College and McKee's Academy merged with this new institution. Brandon College began as a liberal arts college offering theology, a high school programme, and a commercial department. A School of Music was added in 1906 – a school that today enjoys an international reputation. Between 1911 and 1938, Brandon College was an affiliate of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Both universities shared Baptist roots. In 1938, the Baptist Union of Western Canada found itself unable to sustain Brandon College financially. Through an exceptional display of interest, money, and hard work, the residents of Southwestern Manitoba managed to keep the university open. In 1938, Brandon

College became an affiliate of The University of Manitoba, an affiliation that lasted until 1967 when Brandon University became established as a provincial institution (Brandon University General Calendar, 1998-99).

Brandon University's rural roots, inspired by the Baptist Home Mission and the need to provide access to college and university education for settlers, was apropos to its current access mission. As a rural university, Brandon University has developed a mission statement, which focuses on serving the needs of rural and remote learners.

> *Objective 3:*
>
> *To provide educational services in general and specialized knowledge of particular applicability in responding to the needs of people in rural and remote areas as well as those in the City of Brandon.*
>
> *As an institution of higher learning situated in a rural city in Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon University provides educational services in general, and specialized knowledge of particular applicability. In this way, it responds to needs of persons living in rural, northern, and remote areas of Manitoba as well as of those residing in the City of Brandon (*Brandon University Mission Statement, 1990:2*)*

The mission statement of Brandon University further reflects a commitment to access and educational opportunities for all students eligible for admission. The statement also reflects a commitment to student supports and recognizes that students enter the university with a varied level of readiness:

> *Objective 4*
>
> *To provide educational opportunities for all students eligible for admission.*
>
> *Brandon University has long been committed to increasing the accessibility of university education to all eligible students.*
>
> *In recognition of the fact that students enter university with varying levels of readiness, resources have been committed to services designed to enhance the likelihood of success* (Brandon University Mission Statement, 1990:4).

As a university with a mandate to provide access to education for northern Aboriginal learners, Brandon University has a mature admission policy that allows university entrance

without formal high school completion, under the following conditions:

1. Students must be at least 21 years of age by the last date of final examination for the first sessions in which they wish to register.

2. They must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada.

Once such students have gained "regular" status, the courses that they have taken are added to their present academic record (Brandon University Undergraduate Calendar, 1998-99:18).

For Aboriginal learners, this admission policy is critical as the majority of these students, in both on-campus and community-based programmes, enter the university without formal high school qualifications. For example, within two full-time programmes offered in two Northern Cree communities with a total of 50 admissions, only 4 students entered under the regular admission policy (IUN Student Records, 1992-93).

Cognizant of the fact that many of these students may require upgrading courses, Brandon University faculty deliver preparatory or transitional level courses in English, mathematics, and the sciences. Two of these preparatory courses, which carry the course number of 90 to distinguish them from first-year courses, may be used for degree credit. Individuals entering the university as mature students may move to regular status upon the achievement of a C average, or grades in the range of 60 to 70 percent, in their first eight courses.

As a result of its access mission, Brandon University has been at the forefront in serving the needs of the Aboriginal population through the delivery of community-based education. Over the past 25 years, Brandon University's community-based, teacher-training programme has been delivered throughout northern Manitoba through programmes such as the Project for the Education of Native Teachers (PENT) and the Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Programme (BUNTEP).

The PENT Project, which began in the 1970s, was designed to give Aboriginal students

from remote and rural communities the opportunity to complete baccalaureate-level degrees in education. The individuals in the programme work in their respective communities as teacher aides between September to May of each academic year, fulfilling their practicum requirement while, at the same time, participating in the distance-education offerings of university credit courses in the arts and science streams. The students then spend May to August of each year at Brandon University, completing education methods courses that will be credited towards their degree.

The BUNTEP project is designed to offer a complete baccalaureate education degree within a local community with both the instructor and the course materials travelling to the students' location. Since the inception of BUNTEP in 1971, the majority of the students have been Aboriginal and the vast majority of these students have been women. Although BUNTEP was not a programme designed primarily for women, their increase in access to education has greatly increased the status and recognition of Aboriginal women within and beyond their communities. Hudson (1990), herself a BUNTEP student and graduate, believes that access to a degree within her own community was the only means by which she could have achieved a baccalaureate degree in education.

PENT and BUNTEP have been successful programmes, with many PENT and BUNTEP graduates employed as teachers in their home communities. As a result of these successful, on-site programmes, there have been requests for community-based delivery of a variety of degree programmes including General Studies, Business Administration and Native Studies. Unlike teacher training, other degree programmes involving Northern Manitoba locations are administered by Inter-Universities North (IUN). IUN is a cooperative programme of the three Manitoba Universities: Brandon University, The University of Manitoba and The University of Winnipeg. It was established in 1972 with the aim of providing university education to Manitobans who live north of the 53rd parallel with all courses fully transferable between

universities.

Although the IUN consortium proposes a sharing of course offerings, Brandon University is the major player delivering over 60% of course offerings in the North. This predominant role in northern education is a result of Brandon University's mature admission policy as well as its offerings of transitional or 90-level courses. Because Manitoba's northern population is primarily Aboriginal, this mature admission policy and the provision of transitional level courses are critical elements for university access in the north.

In 1992, Brandon University became involved in the delivery of full-time, community-based degree programmes, through IUN, offered in a delivery mode similar to that of BUNTEP. These programmes, although similar to the BUNTEP, provide a variety of degree programmes. One of these programmes, involving the delivery of an education degree and a business administration degree in a community that will be named Great River, is the focus of this study.

CHAPTER IV: ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Introduction

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of Aboriginal Education in Canada from a historical perspective, beginning in pre-colonial times and moving on to the present. Three current programmes – the Shuswap Project in conjunction with Simon Fraser University, the First Nations Learning Centres in conjunction with the Open Learning Agency, and the Northern Teacher Education Programme in conjunction with Brandon University – are discussed in detail. The final section explores and discusses the role of women in Cree society, historically and in present times, and examines the relationship of traditional roles to entry and success in post-secondary education.

Aboriginal Education: A Historical Perspective

In order to examine the status of Aboriginal learners in post-secondary learning situations today, it is essential to understand the history of Native education in Canada from pre-European influences to present times. The search for writings dealing with the history of Aboriginal education from the Native perspective reveals a telling truth. Despite an abundance of literature on the topic, most is written from a Eurocentric point of view, and there is a decided dearth of writings by Aboriginals. Personal communications and discussions with Native teachers, scholars, and elders were sought to supplement the literature review, and provided valuable information and insight into traditional and contemporary Aboriginal education.

At this point, it is necessary to discuss my use of the term "Eurocentric" within this study. A Eurocentric view involves a constructed narrative of the world, based upon European culture, history, and thought – a presentation of the story of the world derived solely from a European perspective, and the defining of all differing perspectives as the "Other" (Young, 1990). Within the North American educational context of the study, Eurocentrism involves the development and delivery of education predicated upon the cultural norms of European-

Americans. Although the term "Eurocentric" in some of the literature is equated with western thought, I chose not to use the term western thought within the study because I consider it to negate the world view of Aboriginal people – as the first peoples of the western hemisphere.

It is to be noted that the use of oral accounts and discussions are congruent with the aspects of a feminist-inspired research design. I have argued, in Chapter II, that feminist researchers recognize the need to incorporate personal and experiential knowledge in the construction of knowledge (Kirby and McKenna, 1994). However, there is an ongoing concern about non-Aboriginal people doing research in Aboriginal communities, given the historical relationship of oppression of First Nations people by European newcomers. In particular, such research and research relationships can embody – in their practices and assumptions – precisely the same kind of disempowering relationships that have characterized, and continue to characterize, Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian interactions. In this sense, this project was approached with some hesitation and trepidation as the researcher sought to explore a reality and culture different from her own. As Ross (1993) has written in his exploration of traditional Aboriginal justice systems: "*When you try to be a bridge between two cultures, you should expect to get walked over by some people from both sides*" (p. *xx*).

Given the nature of the study and the aforementioned comments, the researcher has chosen to contextualize the history of Aboriginal education, using a model introduced by Gillespie (1994). Gillespie is a teacher, scholar, and Cree speaker who has researched the historical background of education relative to the Manitoba Cree.

It may be appropriate, at this juncture, to explain why I chose to use Lavina Gillespie's work as a central framework for this chapter on Aboriginal Education. I had a personal relationship with Gillespie and I knew that her research represented her struggle to present Aboriginal history and education from her point of view. She explained to me that her study was not only an academic work, but also a means by which she could personally bring an Aboriginal perspective to the academy. So, for me, the incorporation of her model within my own thesis was

much more than a review of the literature; rather, it was an attempt to experience the Other, as Josselson (1995) used the term: "*to imagine what another person is feeling, wishing, perceiving, and thinking*" (p. 27).

The model Gillespie (1994) employs is known as the "Tipi Model for Native Education" (TMNE). (See Figure 1 for an illustration of this model.) The *Tipi*, a common focus of Native life, is defined by World Book Dictionary (1994) as "*a tent of the North American Indians formed of barks, mats or animal skins stretched over poles arranged in the shape of a cone.*" Gillespie has used the acronym TIPI, with each letter representing an epoch of Native education: the "T" represents the *Traditional Epoch*, the "I" represents the *Imposition*, the "P" represents the *Procurement*, and the second "I" represents the *Instauration*.

In Gillespie's (1994) model, the letter "T" (Traditional Epoch) is represented by the base of the tipi, and refers to the period of Native education in Manitoba prior to contact with the Europeans in 1632. This epoch is characterized by traditional education and culture, where learning takes place inter-generationally. The letter "I" (Imposition Epoch) is represented by the four upright poles of the tipi and refers to the period of Native education from initial contact with the Europeans until 1969. This period is characterized by colonial policies that isolated Native people from their families, communities, and language. The letter "P" (Procurement Epoch) is represented by the opening at which the poles and ribs intersect, and occurred between 1969 and 1994. This period is characterized by a precarious state of Native education as bands moved toward local control. The Procurement Epoch is a time of high attrition, non-completion of basic schooling, and lack of access to post-secondary education. The letter "I" (Instauration Epoch) is represented by the inverted cones on the top of the tipi and occurs from 1994 onward. The period is characterized by the rebirth of a philosophy of Native education that includes traditional Native ways of knowing and learning.

Gillespie's (1994) model, in conjunction with a chronological table of historical events in Native education (see Table 1), provides a comprehensive view of the history of Cree education.

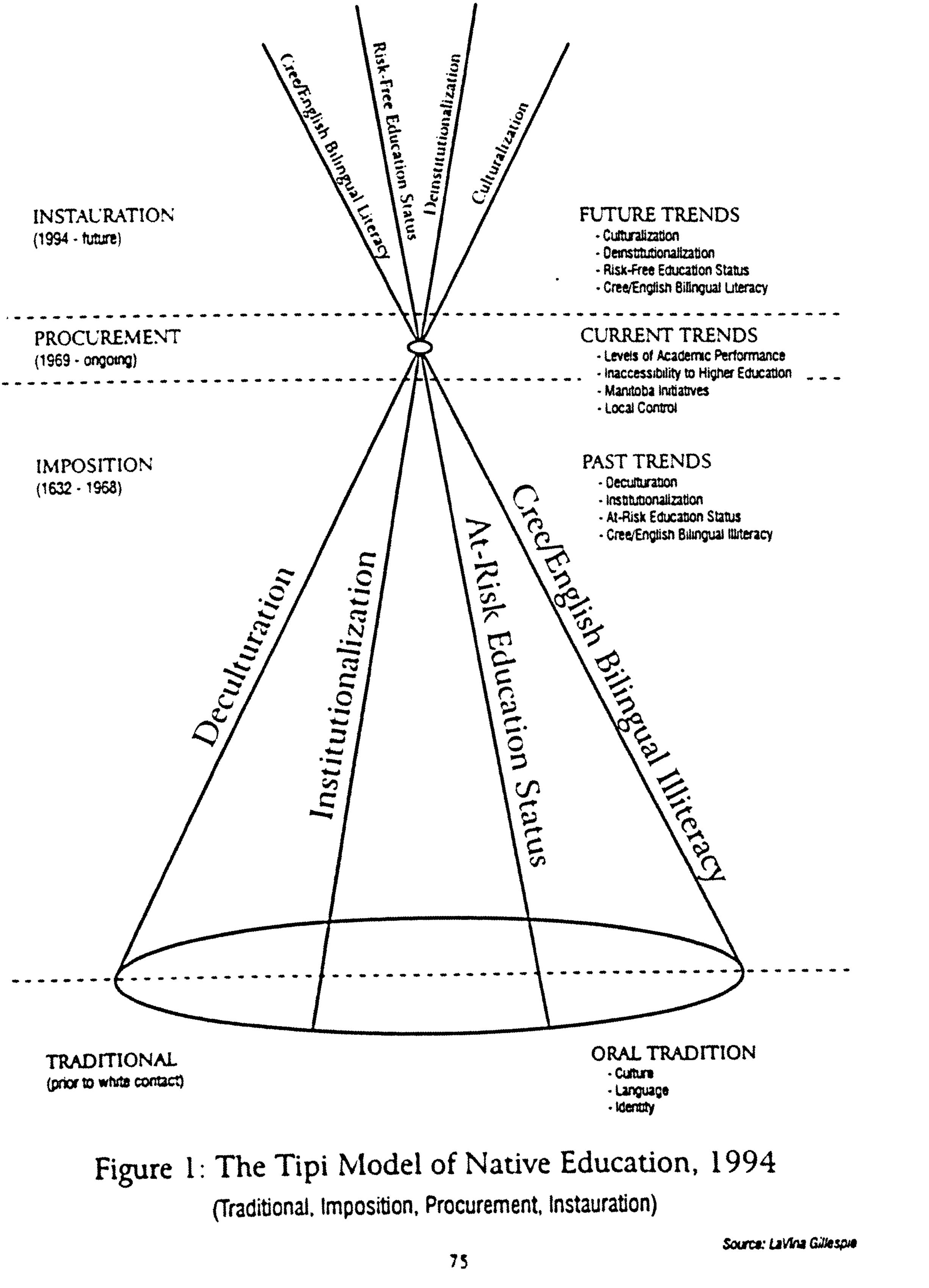

Figure 1: The Tipi Model of Native Education, 1994

(Traditional, Imposition, Procurement, Instauration)

Source: LaVina Gillespie

Table 1

HISTORICAL TIME LINE *of* EVENTS SHAPING NATIVE EDUCATION

→ 1632	Natives trained each other in preparation for life.
1733	First trading between Cree and Europeans *(Dickason, 1992)*.
1830	Reponsibility for Native schooling given to federal and provincial governments - missionaries operate schools on reserves *(Tobias, 1983)*.
1876	Indian Act in place - Federal Administration of Native Education.
1876-1945	Native education delivered paternalistic ideology *(Hawthorn, 1967)*.
1894	Amendment to Indian Act, empowering authorities to commit children to boarding schools *(Frideres, 1988; Tobias, 1983)*.
1945	Beginning decline of residential school.
1945-1988	Native education described as democratic ideology where Native students were allowed to attend schools off the reserve. Integration idea born *(Frideres, 1988)*.
1968	Liberal Government introduces White Paper - an attempt to repeal the Indian Act, Natives would lose their educational rights.
1973	Indian Control of Indian Education published. Birth of Native Control of Native Education.
1988	Last residential school closes *(Dickason, 1992)*.
1991	First Aboriginal High School opens in Winnipeg in a mainstream school division.
1993	First Aboriginal Elementary school opens in Winnipeg in a mainstream school division.

Source: LaVina Gillespie

The Traditional Epoch

This epoch is likened to the broad base of the tipi, and is seen to provide the foundation for Native learning as it has existed for the Manitoba Cree for over 10,000 years (E. Sanderson, personal communication, 1993). Prior to the time of contact with the Europeans, the Manitoba Cree were a flourishing people who were politically, economically, and culturally active (Cardinal, 1969; Weatherford, 1992). Theirs was a society of nomadic hunters and gatherers travelling in family groups and clans with a well-established mercantile system, and they traded both intra- and inter-tribally (Frideres, 1998). The culture of this period was rooted in the oral tradition and traditional Native ways of knowing. Gillespie (1994) provides this definition of the oral tradition:

> *The oral tradition of the Manitoba Cree is a complex process synonymous with the Native Ways of Knowing and Interacting, through which language, culture, and identity are transmitted inter-generationally. This process is distinctly different from the European method of schooling in the following ways:*
>
> *Instruction is individual and personal: Teaching rites are earned through perfection of a skill where the theoretical and practical implications can be explained and applied without artificial prefacing activities, age is not important. Instruction takes place in the natural setting, no artificial time is set for learning to take place;*
>
> *Education is different for girls and boys: Instructional materials are based on human relations and Mother Earth as opposed to books and man-made materials; Curricula stresses enjoying present as opposed to continual preparation for an uncertain future; Attitude is gentle coaching with the understanding that errors will be made without harsh punishment, although there were consequences such as being ignored or ridiculed, practices still used today; Philosophy is holistic as opposed to compartmentalization* (p. 14).

Despite its lack of a written language, the culture of the Traditional Epoch encompassed a complex educational system whereby children were fully prepared for their roles as productive members of their society. Children and adults received instruction from teachers and elders in all areas of life, learning through experiential means, observation, and storytelling. Cardinal (1969) argues that the oral tradition, which flourished during the Traditional Epoch, had no counterpart in the literary European culture of that time, and, hence, proponents of Eurocentric education saw

no value in its preservation. Cree scholars, such as Ing (1992), Kirkness (1993), and Gillespie (1994), who have written about Native education during the Traditional Epoch, emphasize the critical role of language in the transfer of intergenerational knowledge. All three cite language, culture, and identity as critical components of the traditional Aboriginal education system.

Language. The role of language is central in the creation and continuity of a particular culture or identity. Within the oral tradition, language made possible the transmission of the collective memory of the culture, and collective memory enabled the preservation of an entire history. When a culture such as that of the Manitoba Cree, which is based upon an oral tradition, experiences language loss, it can be likened to collective amnesia (Frideen, 1992). During the Traditional Epoch, the Cree language was used to provide an understanding of history and culture that, in turn, could be passed on inter-generationally through the oral tradition.

Culture. Within the Manitoba Cree tradition, culture is a body of unwritten wisdom transmitted by stories and folklore from generation to generation. Within the Traditional Epoch, education took place within the extended family. Children learned the mental and physical skills necessary to survive as adults. Culture provided a framework for teaching and learning, through which the common identity of the specific culture was transmitted (Blondin, 1988).

Identity. Within the Oral Tradition in traditional education, stories and folklore tales reaffirmed learners' identity and interaction with land and life. Within this period, traditional teachers such as parents and elders reinforced the importance of integrated experiential learning by the involvement of all family members in daily life. All aspects of daily life were inter-related and explained in a holistic learning experience (Sealey and Kirkness, 1973). There were no distinct subjects such as science, health, or mathematics. Rather, all subjects formed a component of each lesson, which was task-based rather than subject-based. For example, skinning an animal would involve science (knowing the anatomy), health (maintaining cleanliness and hygiene), mathematics (dividing and measuring), as well as the element of spirituality in receiving gifts from Mother Earth. Thus, during the Traditional Epoch, learning can be described as a lifelong

subject in a lifelong lesson (Leavitt, 1992).

During the Traditional Epoch, individuals were taught to live by standards consistent with tribal life. Evaluation and completion of learning was measured by family standards. When children were learning to make a fishing net, for example, their success would be determined by the standards of that family or clan; the standard of net would allow for survival of the family through the catching of fish. Affective learning, such as respect and tolerance, was also measured by the standards of the clan or tribe, and gentle coaching continued until this standard was reached (Pepper and Henry, 1991).

Real-life activities, such as games and storytelling, were utilized to develop mental and physical skills among learners (Stairs, 1991), and learning was accomplished by observation and self-directed practice. Testing took place at a time chosen by the learner (Kroskrity, 1987). In learning skills for a trap-line, individuals would observe the teacher, practise, then present themselves at a time when they felt that they were ready to illustrate that they were now capable of the task (E. Sanderson, personal communication, 1993).

The roles of language, culture, and identity in Aboriginal ways of learning make up the oral tradition on which traditional Aboriginal education is founded. Many contemporary Aboriginal educators believe that the study and understanding of the Traditional Epoch is critical to the development of a model for contemporary Aboriginal Education (Kirkness, 1992). Unfortunately, much of this tradition has been eradicated under colonialism, with the only records being passed down generation by generation in the Cree language. If the number of Native-language speakers continues to diminish, Gillespie (1994) argues, traditional ways of knowing and learning may be put further at risk.

The Imposition Epoch

The Imposition Epoch is represented by the four upward poles of the tipi and is marked by the arrival of the Europeans in 1632. The four poles rise up and away from the broad base of the tipi, reflecting the loss of traditional Native knowledge at this time.

Early explorers and traders needed to learn the survival skills from Aboriginal people, as the topography and climate experienced in northern Canada was very different from anything they had known in their European homes. Thus, the initial period of contact with the Europeans, between 1632 and 1830, is seen to be a time when there was greater European tolerance for Aboriginal culture than during later periods (Murdock, 1981). However, Frideres (1998) argues that the tolerance was based more on an economic need rather than on a genuine wish to understand and learn. Fur traders quickly found that Native wives who knew the ways of their people, and who possessed language and survival skills, were valuable commodities. The Cree language remained the language of business in northern Manitoba, and many Europeans learned and used Cree on a daily basis for this reason (E. Crate, personal communication, 1993).

In the early Imposition Epoch, the Aboriginal people also made contact with missionaries. Because the main goal of the missionaries was the conversion of the Aboriginal people, not in making dramatic changes in their lifestyles (Dickason, 1992), the oral tradition and traditional Native education remained intact. Thus, the early Europeans did not enforce European systems of schooling, allowing families to remain intact and responsible for their children's traditional education.

The period between 1632 and 1830 has been described by Cardinal, a Cree scholar, as the "military" period (Frideres, 1998). During this time, it was the military arm of the colonial government that maintained the responsibility and control of Aboriginal peoples and lands. Aboriginal people were allowed to maintain their nomadic existence. However, in 1830, with the arrival of more settlers, the nomadic lifestyle of the Natives was seen, by the governing bodies, as detrimental to the European settlers. Recommendations were made that Aboriginal people take permanent homes, own land, and take up agriculture. In short, their lives should mirror those of the Europeans.

The post-1830 era of the Imposition Period was marked by plans to change Native practices and lifestyles to eradicate traditional systems that were in place prior to European

contact (Burnaby, 1980). The Europeans did not recognize the existence of traditional Native education and, therefore, could hardly be cognizant of its value (Stanley, 1983).

In 1876, the Canadian Federal Government enacted the *Indian Act* as the foremost of legislative acts in Canada affecting Aboriginal peoples (Frideres, 1998). This Act was the principal instrument by which the Federal Government (and indirectly, the Provincial Government) succeeded in controlling and altering, forever, the lives of Aboriginal people. With the enactment of the *Indian Act* came the stated desire from the dominant culture for Aboriginal culture to change and to reflect British-agricultural-Christian patterns of behaviour. Aboriginal people were no longer free to pursue the nomadic hunter lifestyle and were often forcibly moved to lands to take up an agrarian lifestyle. Furthermore, this Act not only promoted conversion to the Christian faith, it also prohibited many of the traditional, Aboriginal, spiritual practices such as Sun Dancing and Potlatching. It was a contradictory Act, built upon a philosophy of paternalism that sought to make Aboriginal people industrious and independent in a European context, while destroying their culture and their nation.

Although the *Indian Act* provided for control of all aspects of Aboriginal life, ranging from the prohibition of the sale of alcohol to Native people to the lack of voting rights, this study will focus on two areas only: the creation of the reserve system and the creation of the residential school system. Both these initiatives had long-term, devastating effects on Native culture and education, effects that are still apparent today. The *Indian Act* of 1876 succeeded in disrupting traditional Native life and destroying: (1) Native social order, (2) Native spirituality, (3) economic inter-dependence, and (4) Native education. Although members of the Federal Government contended that the Act was passed to protect and sustain Aboriginal people, Whiteside (1972) contends that the *Indian Act was* intended: (1) to undermine traditional religion, leadership, and culture; (2) to sever natural relationships with other Amerindians; and (3) and to ensure that the authority for all important decisions was removed from the influence and control of Native people. "*As such, it should be known as the 'Efficiency Act' which has over*

time inflicted mind-rape among some of our people" (p. 31).

Native Social Order. The creation of the reserve system compelled Aboriginal people to subscribe to a European capitalist system that devalued the collective lifestyle (Tobias, 1983). The reserve administration was controlled by Federal Government employees known as Indian Agents. Reserve lands were allocated for the homes of specific Aboriginal people; reserve residents carried pass cards, and they were allowed to leave the reserve only with permission from the Indian Agent. With the creation of the reserve system, the extended family, which was central for the continuity of Native culture and tradition, was destroyed. Grandparents were often separated from grandchildren. With the demise of the extended family, many children lost contact with their teachers and their traditional educational system. The reserve system left many communities devoid of storytellers and carriers of the oral tradition.

Hunting, a primary occupation of the men that was passed down from generation to generation, was also discouraged within the reserve system. Men were often denied permission to leave the reserve when animals were in season, resulting in a shortage of food on the reserve and providing evidence to the Europeans that Aboriginal people could not sustain their own lives. Hunting, trapping, and fishing were discouraged by the Federal government administrators because families often took children with them to teach them the skills that were a critical part of their education. The removal of children to participate in traditional learning eventually became a punishable offence that could result in a jail sentence (Grant, 1996).

Native Spirituality. Legislation within the *Indian Act* included the banning of traditional practices such as pow-wows, give-aways, and feasts, all of which had been important elements of Aboriginal spirituality. Pow-wows were events held during the summer season, evolving around dance, song, and celebration. Give-aways were events celebrating marriages or the coming of age of children, during which the host would give gifts to the guests. Feasts were gatherings of a clan or tribe to celebrate an event such as summer and winter solstice or the end of a hunt, involving food and song. Feasts differed from pow-wows in that they could be held year-round.

Winter feasts involved story telling, an activity reserved for the winter seasons only – stories were not told in the summer. Violation of government bans through organization and attendance at these activities resulted in severe punishments, including segregation from family and imprisonment (Dickason, 1992). During this period, missionary activity continued fervently, with conversion valued for both evangelical and economic reasons.

Economic Inter-dependence. Aboriginal people had traded throughout Canada in a well-organized inter- and intra-tribal mercantile system. With the establishment of the reserve system, the backbone of Aboriginal economy – hunting, trapping, fishing, and trading – was destroyed. Their economic system suffered complete collapse.

Native Education. Between 1876 and 1894, education on the reserves fell within the purview of the churches, and most Native children attended missionary schools. In 1894, the residential school system was introduced. Within this system, children were removed from their homes at age five and were required to attend a Federal Government-controlled boarding school until the completion of their studies. The residential school system was operational for over 90 years, with the last residential school closing in 1983 (Dickason, 1992). At least four generations of Aboriginal students were subjected to the residential school system.

With the inception of the residential school system came the decline of the oral tradition. Children attending residential schools were forbidden to, and punished for, speaking their Native language or for practising any traditional Native act (Former residential school student, personal communication, 1992). Residential schools were seen as vehicles for the removal of all traces of Aboriginal culture and language (Ing, 1992). Gillespie (1994), herself a residential school student in her youth, describes four primary effects on Native culture and education resulting from the residential school system: (1) the effects on Native children, (2) parental influence on education, (3) transmission of Cree knowledge, and (4) state of the Cree language.

Native Children. Education within the residential school system was assimilative. Aboriginal culture was viewed as being inferior to the Eurocentric culture of the immigrants, and

the lives of Aboriginal people bore out a discontinuity as they tried to find their way between the paths of their traditional past and the coercive present (Hunter-Harvey, Matheos, and Doncaster, 1995). Residential school administrators blatantly discouraged any appreciation of Native cultures and traditions. Although residential schools purported to prepare students for life in mainstream white society, in reality, it has been argued, they left students stranded and unprepared for life in either the white or the Aboriginal world (Former residential school student, personal communication, 1995). Students often lost many of their first-language skills and lost the opportunity to learn the traditional skills that would allow them to survive when they returned to their community. Yet, if they chose to remain within the white culture, they could only expect to find employment in non-professional fields on the lower rungs within the hierarchy of white society (Titley, 1986). As John Tootoosis, a former residential school student, says, "*I realized how little they had taught me*" (Grant, 1996:163). Less time was spent on academics than on skills such as cleaning and washing for girls and outdoor labour for boys. As well, less qualified teachers were hired for residential schools than would have been considered appropriate for the public school system. Residential schools, I believe, were one example of a legacy of dislocating consequences of education for Aboriginal students, of students being taken from a place where they felt that they belonged, and placed in a new social and cultural territory about which they had ambivalent and negative feelings.

One women, who is now in her early fifties and who completed high school in the residential school system, spoke of how, upon completion of grade 12, she expressed her wish to become a teacher. She received no encouragement or support from teachers or administrators in the residential school, so she returned to her home reserve 600 kilometres north. At home, she married a Native man several years her senior who made his livelihood hunting, trapping and fishing. She joined his extended family, bore children, and learned traditional skills from her mother-in-law. Although she had returned "home," she barely knew her own parents, having been separated from them throughout her school years. During her years at residential school,

she had acquired none of the skills needed to survive in a traditional culture and felt like a stranger on her own reserve. Despite these difficulties, she considers herself lucky to have been able to return to her community and regain some of the traditional skills and values which she, in turn, can pass on to her children. She sees her husband as a good provider and support to her. Now, at an age when some people might be looking forward to a retirement income, she is completing a degree in education and plans to embark on her long-awaited career as a teacher (Former residential school student, personal communication, 1995).

As the attendance at residential school became mandatory, parents had no choice but to relinquish their children or face prison terms. Children were required to attend residential school from ages 5 to 18, with the exception of summer breaks and Christmas vacation. Children were deprived from growing up within a traditional family situation and inter-generational learning, critical to Aboriginal culture, ceased. When these children themselves became parents, they had learned none of the parenting skills of the previous generations. The rise and eventual demise of residential schools created generations of individuals who spent minimal time within families and, subsequently, had no idea how to parent. This situation was exemplified by one residential school graduate who describes a difficulty she was having with her teenage son and her concerns about whom she could approach for guidance; both her mother and grandmother had attended residential schools (Former residential school student, personal communication, 1992).

Parental Input in Education. Within the residential school system, parents had no input, which was contradictory to the traditional Native education model in which parents and elders were responsible for the comprehensive education of their children. Children's negative experiences in residential schools often led to unresolved feelings of anger with their parents for allowing them to be subjected to such a system. One former residential school student described how she blamed her parents for her residential school experience. It was not until after they died that she realized how helpless they had been to exercise any control over the matter (Former residential school student, personal communication, 1994).

Ing (1992) argues that grandparents and parents, who experienced failure in the residential school system, often transmitted their anticipations and fears to their children. The result was low self-esteem among many Aboriginal learners and a feeling that they would also be unable to succeed in a school system. These effects are still prevalent today, as Ing (1992) points out, with high attrition rates among Aboriginal students often being attributed to this cycle and fear of failure.

Transmission of Cree Knowledge. Residential schools isolated children from the traditional Cree knowledge, the wisdom of the elders, and their culture. When one spoke in Cree, telling stories and fables, a Native world view was perpetuated. With the eradication of inter-generational teaching, children lost contact with who they were. They recollected that they should behave in a certain fashion, but, without the cultural context, could not explain why they should do so (Hughes, 1991).

State of the Cree Language. Language is essential to the survival of the Cree culture. Forbidding the use of the Cree language further removed children from their culture and heritage. The residential school system failed to realize that the Cree language was a part of an articulate society that had survived 10,000 years prior to European contact (Gillespie, 1994).

The residential school period had, by far, the greatest detrimental effect on Aboriginal culture and the Native oral tradition (Frideen, 1991). Educationally, it was a period of systemic failure. However, despite this period of severe acculturation and oppression, there remained a fragile knowledge of Aboriginal culture, language, and the oral tradition. It is this fragile knowledge that must be guarded, carried forward, and shared in future periods of Native education.

The Procurement Epoch

The Procurement Epoch, between 1969 and 1994, is symbolized by the opening in the TIPI, and refers to the time during which the Aboriginal people move toward control of their own education systems. It is marked by the 1969 *White Paper*, which originated with the Federal

Government of Canada and sought to transfer the federal responsibility for Native education to the individual provinces. The goal of this proposal was that Aboriginal students would be assimilated by mainstream society. Aboriginal people responded with the *Red Paper*, the forerunner of the National Indian Brotherhood document on Indian Control of Indian Education. In 1973, the Federal Government accepted the Indian Control of Indian Education, in principle, and acknowledged the right of Aboriginal leaders to assume responsibility for Aboriginal education. During this time, the Federal Government also funded cultural centres and access programmes at universities throughout Canada. Programmes to train Aboriginal teachers became a priority, so that Native people might be able to return to their home communities to teach in locally controlled schools.

Locally controlled Aboriginal education presented many challenges for its advocates and administrators. Although bands and tribal councils took control of schools, many of them were without sufficient financial resources and local expertise. There was a shortage of Aboriginal teachers, curriculum consultants, and administrators. The curriculum available for use in locally controlled schools was still Eurocentric and did not account the oral tradition and Native ways of knowing. As Aboriginal communities took control of their education system, they were faced with moving from models of colonial domination and assimilation to models that were culturally, linguistically, and philosophically relevant (Battiste, 1995).

Another problem was, and is, the content of teacher-training programmes that are available to Aboriginal learners, but rooted in a Eurocentric culture and tradition. Professors within these teacher-training programmes often find that their experiences and knowledge is vastly different from what is needed in Aboriginal communities. Likewise, students in these programmes express the need for an inclusive curriculum to better provide them with the skills to teach within their Aboriginal community. The need for an appropriate and respectful curriculum is a theme that will be returned to, for discussion, in Chapter VIII.

The Instauration Epoch

The Instauration Epoch is represented by the inverted cone on the top of the TIPI and reflects the present time within Aboriginal education. This time is seen as a period when Native education is redefined, relying on the knowledge of the Traditional Epoch. It is the time of Aboriginal Education when institutions must move forward to provide culturally relevant and risk-free educational opportunities for Native students (Gillespie, 1994). The Procurement Period was the time in which this study began and was completed in the Instauration Period.

Within the Instauration Epoch, it is evident that, if administrators and faculty members in Eurocentric institutions are to serve Aboriginal clientele, they must recognize the distinctiveness of Native culture. Academics and administrators in universities and colleges need to understand that there are profound differences between the two cultures, and that they would be wise to make a serious attempt to accommodate these differences. As Ross (1992) says:

> *They began their journey to today not where we did, with the Mediterranean world view classically enunciated by Plato and Aristotle. They began it in Asia, then brought that Asian world view to the reality of a harsh, nomadic existence on this land mass many thousands of years ago before Plato was born. They developed, refined and sustained it over those centuries and it sustained them. The paths they followed were completely different from ours as we passed through the rise and fall of Greece and Rome, the Christian Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the development of a wage and money economy, secularization, and the growth of major cities. For most Indians of the North, even the Industrial Revolution took place without their knowledge or direct involvement. If we recall, apart from the occasional missionary or trapper, the Native people of North-western Ontario had no sustained contact with the outside world until some twenty or thirty years ago, we should not be surprized that we have difficulty communicating with each other. The wonder is that there has been any successful communication at all* (p. xii).

Yet, the Northern Cree have proven themselves to be survivors. Despite the residential school and reserve systems, the culture and language have precariously survived. There are still Cree speakers in northern Manitoba and most communities are making a concerted effort to ensure that their language is retained. There is also a new group of scholars emerging within Manitoba – Aboriginal people seeking to bring their knowledge and cultures to the academy.

Although the Instauration Epoch culminates years of ineffective educational systems for

Canada's Aboriginal peoples, it is also a period of positive changes, a time when Canadian, post-secondary institutions have begun to move from the confines of their traditional academic walls to reach out and provide access opportunities for Aboriginal students.

This thesis explores the experiences of some Aboriginal students who have been involved in a community-based, university programme. The aim of the study was to listen to the experiences of these students in an attempt to develop a series of systematic questions about programme delivery, curriculum, and student support to Brandon University and, more widely, to the Canadian post-secondary system. A central component of the development was a recognition and exploration of the contributions, insights, and other ways of seeing and being that Aboriginal peoples might bring to the educational system.

Current Models for Aboriginal Education in Canada

Within the Canadian, post-secondary system, there are numerous community-based, access programmes providing university education for Aboriginal students. Below is an overview of three such programmes that are currently operating in Canada, an attempt to locate the work in the context of specific communities. I also believed that it was important to provide the reader with information about community-based, university programmes in Aboriginal communities as a backcloth to the study, in much the same way that information about the academy in Canada, found in Chapter III, provides such a backcloth. The overview focuses on the administrative structure of the programme, the curriculum, the student supports, and the recommendations made by programme administrators relative to programme improvement. The programmes discussed are the Shuswap Project, the Open Learning Agency's First Nations Learning Centres, and the Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Project. Information about the first two projects draws heavily on a sabbatical study prepared by Epstein (1994-95), in which she explores tertiary-level open- and distance-education programmes for Aboriginal people in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Information on the Brandon University project draws upon studies by Hudson (1990) and Grant (1995), as well as personal contacts. I selected

programmes that I believed would provide representative information about post-secondary education in Aboriginal communities. In addition, the three community-based programmes were subjected to the following criteria:

1. All projects had to be operational in Western Canada.
2. All projects had to involve either a formal partnership or input from the First Nation community in which the project was occurring.
3. All projects had to involve open and distance learning within a community-based model.
4. All projects had to provide for the delivery of university degree credit.

These were the same criteria met by the community-based programme in Great River, which formed the basis of this study.

The Shuswap Project

The Shuswap Project was initiated in 1987 as a means for the Shuswap Nation to regain control over the education of its people (SCES Annual Report, 1989). The project involves a partnership between the Secwepemic Cultural Centre (SCES) and Simon Fraser University (SFU). The partnership enabled the university, located in Burnaby, British Columbia, to deliver post-secondary credit programmes on an Indian reserve located in Kamloops, British Columbia. The programme has won a national award of excellence from the Canadian Association of Continuing Education, and has formed a major part of a submission from the Canadian Association of Distance Education to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1993.

The aim of the programme is to provide Aboriginal students with a firm grounding in Social Sciences while enhancing student knowledge of personal history, language, and culture (Spronk, 1995). This community-based programme involves university credits in the following areas of study: Native Studies research, general studies (undergraduate level), and Arts degrees (undergraduate level), with majors in anthropology and sociology and minors in archaeology, linguistics, and First Nations study. The university programme was adjusted to meet local

circumstances while maintaining academic requirements.

The programme involved weekly visits from the SFU faculty and ongoing tutorial sessions provided by resident faculty members (Spronk, 1995). This model also provided for delivery of certain pilot courses, wherein SFU faculty made bi-weekly community visits, with bi-weekly teleconference sessions. The mixture of on-site and distance education delivery has proved successful in the areas of student satisfaction and academic achievement (Haughey, 1993).

The partnership between the Shuswap Nation and SFU began with the signing of a three-year renewable agreement. The agreement included:

1. a provision for courses oriented towards the needs of people of an identified culture,
2. a joint programme of research and training,
3. the possibility for the incorporation of new disciplines that would meet the needs of the students both in their cultural perspective and the academy,
4. a co-ordination of offerings with local educational institutions, and
5. a study of academic, financial, and materials limitations (Epstein, 1995:6).

The agreement has been renewed annually, and now involves 17 Native bands in association with SFU. A joint steering committee comprised of equal representation from the Aboriginal community and the university provides direction and input to the programme. Instructor appointments and evaluation, provision for library and student support services, research activities, course and programme development, course monitoring, and any other matters deemed appropriate, fall under the jurisdiction of a seven-person committee: three members from the academy, three members from the Shuswap Nation, and a student representative. Speaking on behalf of the Committee, the chair, Dr. Sharma, provided these comments:

> *The SCES/SFU programme has demonstrated that a university can transplant itself into the cultural and physical milieu of the First Nations people. That, in order to fulfil their educational aspirations, the Native people do not have to uproot themselves from their community, from their environment, from their families, and from their support systems. That, formal pedagogy can adapt itself*

> *to the needs and aspirations of those who, for a long time, have been deprived and denied. That, a partnership, a genuine partnership, can indeed work between a mainstream institution and the First Nations people* (cited in Epstein, 1995:4).

Although Dr. Sharma's comments indicated a very successful programme, it is important to evaluate such information carefully to determine if it is merely institutional rhetoric, or if it is truly reflective of the opinions of the learners.

The Shuswap project provides for the incorporation of language and culture. Landmark points such as course completion and graduation are celebrated with traditional community feasts. Most students speak English as their first language, and instruction is in English. However, Native language courses and Native studies courses are included in the curriculum.

Women comprise 60 to 70 percent of the student body. Most students lack the formal admission requirements, entering as mature students. Over 50 percent of these women have dependent children or grandchildren (Epstein, 1995). During an interview, one student counsellor reflected that Aboriginal women are very concerned with the health and welfare of their community, and that this concern accounts for their interest in post-secondary education. She added that men were often too immersed in band politics to have the time and patience to pursue a formal, post-secondary education.

Accessibility of degree programmes within the individual's home community has proven to be critical for the Aboriginal learner. Women learners with the Shuswap project are able to study locally, while maintaining family and community responsibilities. They do not have to face the financial and emotional burden of relocating to an urban centre. Within the Shuswap project is a well-defined and well-developed network of local student support services. A local band member with an undergraduate degree, currently working on her graduate thesis, is employed as a student counsellor. As a university graduate, she can relate to many student issues. Although appointments can be made for counselling, she has an open-door policy and also sees students in their homes and outside office hours as required. She finds the personal counselling of at-risk

students to be the most difficult and challenging aspect of her job.

In addition to her other duties, the student counsellor provides ongoing formal study-skills sessions. However, as attendance is not mandatory, she finds that many students who are in need of such skills do not attend. Mandatory attendance of these sessions for first- and second-year students is deemed to be critical to student success. In the initial stages of the project, the student counsellor was also responsible for individualized student tutoring sessions, but, since 1992, a peer-tutoring system has been in place. Library resources are available to students through the local community college or through the extension library system from SFU. Students are involved in an active student association and publish a newsletter about the programme.

In addition to the student counsellor, there is a local academic co-ordinator who oversees the academic areas of the programme, provides academic counselling to students, and works with the non-Aboriginal faculty who deliver the university courses in the community. She facilitates ongoing communication between the student counsellor and the academic faculty members, ensuring that individuals are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

In the early stages of the programme, distance education involving print-based materials, augmented by teleconferencing, was found to be unsuccessful. According to Spronk (1995), the impersonal study model is not appropriate, given the cultural heritage of Aboriginal learners. The importance of the oral traditions, group solidarity, and learning by observation and self-testing is not reflected in this form of distance delivery. However, Aboriginal learners appeared to find acceptable a mixed mode of open and distance learning with face-to-face contact with the instructors, teleconferencing, ongoing on-site tutor support, and printed materials.

Teleconference sessions were found to be more successful if the instructor had spent some time with the students prior to the teleconference sessions (Haughey, 1993).

Distance-education models, such as those suggested by Spronk (1995), have been implemented by the Shuswap project since 1992. These models have been met with mixed responses from the students, many still preferring face-to-face delivery. In a survey of 25

Shuswap programme participants, 92% of the respondents did not want distance-education delivery of university courses, and requested that the practice of travelling professors continue (SCES/SFU Bi-Annual Report, Fall 1992-Spring 1994).

Regarding the incorporation of distance delivery into the Shuswap project, the student counsellor suggested that only students in third and fourth year with strong academic skills should be encouraged to register in distance-delivered courses. Ignace makes the following recommendation: "*Students should be considered for group enrolment in distance education only after they have demonstrated their ability to study effectively, and ongoing, on-site, administrative support could be provided to them*" (cited in Epstein, 1995:11).

The Open Learning Agency of British Columbia First Nations Learning Centres

The Open Learning Agency (OLA) located in Burnaby, British Columbia, offers approximately 300 college- and university-credit courses using a variety of non-traditional delivery methods. All OLA courses allow continuous intake. Institutions or organizations may arrange for the delivery of these courses, all of which include self-directed learning packages, in rural or remote communities. These may be delivered with an off-site OLA instructor and a local facilitator, or the agency may contract for an on-site OLA instructor to deliver these courses in person. All credit courses may be transferred to other post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. The OLA operates a unique system in Canada called the British Columbia Educational Credit Bank, which allows the students to bank credits from formal and non-formal learning situations to apply them towards a degree.

The OLA has worked with First Nations communities across Canada in the establishment of 18 First Nations Learning Centres. Courses are delivered in these communities using on-campus OLA instructors located in Burnaby and on-site, community-based facilitators who assist the students in working through the print packages. The OLA provides each learning centre with self-study course packages augmented by television delivery, video tapes, or audio tapes. The on-campus instructor is available for scheduled teleconference sessions with the students in the First

Nations Learning Centre. The OLA also employs a full-time First Nations advisor, an Aboriginal person responsible for liaising with the communities and for ongoing co-ordination of the programmes.

Within this OLA model, the establishment of a First Nations Learning Centre involves the following prerequisites:

1. The community must identify an educational need.
2. The community must ensure that funding is in place to support development and delivery of the programme.
3. The community must provide a facility in which to house the learning centre, one that includes both classroom and study hall space.

If these conditions are met, consultation between the community and the OLA First Nations Advisor occurs and a plan to meet the educational needs is put in place. The community is responsible for the identification and hiring of a local educational co-ordinator who, in collaboration with the OLA, will establish the selection and sequencing of courses to be offered. This local educational co-ordinator is also responsible for the identification and selection of students. As each First Nations Learning Centre is distinct from the others, a yearly contractual agreement is negotiated between the respective band and the OLA.

The OLA hires an on-campus instructor-tutor responsible for the academic aspect of the course, and for the evaluation and the submission of grades. OLA provides all course materials to the learning centre such as course packages, study guides, and visual aids. The local community is then responsible for hiring course facilitators to work with the students in the centre, to provide motivation, and to assist students in working through the self-study materials. The OLA model can be described as tutor-enhanced, group, and distance learning.

In hiring an instructor, the OLA looks at academic qualifications. A Masters degree is required to teach first- and second-year courses and a doctoral degree for third- and fourth-year courses. The OLA First Nations Advisor is critical of the OLA academic department's emphasis

on paper credentials over interpersonal skills, teaching skills, and cultural awareness. The advisor has suggested that an Aboriginal person with Masters preparation and good attitude and teaching skills would be more effective than an individual holding doctoral qualifications who has never been in a First Nations community (Epstein, 1995).

The First Nations Learning Centre is solely responsible for the hiring of local course facilitators. These individuals are chosen either by a selection committee or by the local educational co-ordinator. Input is often sought from the First Nations Advisor who prefers that the local facilitator, an Aboriginal person, should have at least an undergraduate university degree in the course or courses that he or she will facilitate. The role of the facilitator is seen by the OLA as a bridge between the on-campus instructor and the students. A facilitator should be able to provide the students with ongoing personal and academic supports to work through the course materials, and to create a local learning environment that is sensitive to the Aboriginal ways of learning and knowing. This would include the use of a talking-sharing circle for discussions, as opposed to the didactic method evident in Eurocentric pedagogy. The talking-sharing circle is a traditional method for teaching and learning, discussion, and counselling and conflict resolution. Within an educational context, it involves the leader or teacher acting as a facilitator through the expression of ideas, followed by an opportunity for individuals to provide comments. The method does not include the questioning of learners, but an opportunity for them to speak in turn, should they wish.

Each First Nations Learning Centre has a different management structure. In some centres, there is an advisory committee comprised of OLA and band members; in other centres, administrative duties are performed by the educational co-ordinator. This flexible structure is advantageous, as it allows each band to forge a unique agreement. However, as the OLA First Nations' Advisor states, problems can arise when respective parties are not aware of their roles and responsibilities (Epstein, 1995).

The OLA First Nations Advisor supports the use of First Nations Learning Centres for

Aboriginal learners. The educational model has several advantages. Students may stay in their home communities where they may be supportive of, and supported by, their friends and families. He also believes that students benefit from two ways of knowing: the Eurocentric way (through the OLA instructor) and the Native way (from the on-site facilitator). Finally, the Advisor supports the use of print packages and study guides from the OLA; these materials enable students to work at their own pace, while being a part of a group of cohort learners. He believes that, although they do not have face-to-face contact and daily interaction with the OLA instructor, the distance-education packages and supportive environment are much more suitable for the Aboriginal learner than are large on-campus lecture theatres. He believes that the traditional lecture method is not the one most appropriate for Aboriginal learners, but prefers a well-developed, self-study package with an on-site facilitator (Epstein, 1995).

Although the majority of OLA courses offered at First Nations Learning Centres are identical to those offered elsewhere, the OLA is beginning to develop courses that are intended to provide an appropriate cultural content for their Aboriginal clientele. Three such courses are Composition and Indian Literature 1 & 2. During the development of these courses, the OLA development teams had First Nations scholars in Aboriginal literature review and critique the materials in an attempt to ensure their relevancy. The courses were run in several Aboriginal learning centres in 1993 through 1994. Although the course content seemed appropriate, the student success rate was relatively low with fewer than 50 percent of the learners receiving passing grades. Further discussion with the OLA instructors and local facilitators revealed that, in many centres, there had been no contact between the OLA instructor and the local facilitator. Despite the fact that the local facilitator was responsible for providing on-site support to the students, the individual had received no information as to the expectations of the academy, a situation that was found to be the norm rather than the exception in other OLA First Nations Learning Centres. This lack of contact, I believe, is a critical problem for the current OLA model, which needs to facilitate a mechanism for both initial and ongoing contact between the

university-based course instructor and the community-based local co-ordinator.

The OLA First Nations advisor made the following recommendations to improve the model: (1) that there be a structured and ongoing relationship between OLA faculty and local facilitators; (2) that there is a structured and ongoing relationship between OLA administration and the community educational co-ordinator so that the co-ordinator is better able to advise students about academic matters such as course changes, course withdrawal, and examination deferrals; and (3) that ongoing study skills and student supports be developed jointly by the OLA, the local community educational co-ordinator, and the local facilitator (Epstein, 1995).

Although the evidence about the OLA First Nations Learning Centre model does not appear to reflect the same kind of success story articulated by the academy about the Shuswap project, it must be remembered that the OLA has been in operation for only three years. The OLA model differs from the Shuswap model in that the former begins with distance delivery and moves to inter-action and face-to-face sessions; whereas, the latter commences with an open-education, face-to-face model and moves to a distance-delivery component. Although these two programmes start from opposite ends of the delivery spectrum, the discussion indicates that the administrators of both programmes are suggesting a move towards an enhanced, distance delivery with a face-to-face component and strong local supports.

In the discussion of these two programmes, I relied heavily on the study conducted by Epstein (1995), in which she had provided an overview of these and other programmes within Aboriginal settings. To me, however, a notable omission was an absence of comments from the learners about their experiences, and the need for a further review of the evidence including the voices of the learners.

The Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Programme

The Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Programme (BUNTEP) has provided community-based teacher-training in Aboriginal communities since 1971. The long-range goal of the programme is to provide qualified Aboriginal teachers for Aboriginal students

(Hudson, 1990).

The BUNTEP model involves a partnership between Brandon University and communities wanting to receive on-site teacher training for their members. A community interested in such a centre makes application to Brandon University. At the time of the application, the community must agree to provide a facility (classroom and study area) and housing for both the travelling instructorial staff and the BUNTEP centre co-ordinator. There must also be a guarantee of at least 25 students in order to form a cohort. The BUNTEP model allows Aboriginal reserve communities, as well as northern and remote non-Aboriginal communities, to make application for a BUNTEP centre. However, over 80% of the BUNTEP centres have been located in reserve communities.

Upon approval of an application and designation of a community for a BUNTEP centre, Brandon University, with input from the community, recruits and hires a centre co-ordinator. The co-ordinator is an employee of the university who will reside in the community for the duration of the programme. As a university employee within the professional associate rank, the centre co-ordinator must possess a minimum of a graduate degree, and, for purposes of co-ordinating a teacher-training programme, must have a valid Manitoba teaching certificate. In the early stages of the BUNTEP programme, most centre co-ordinators were non-Aboriginal people. As the number of Aboriginal people with graduate degrees has increased, it has been possible to staff several centres with Aboriginal co-ordinators. The co-ordinator is the major facilitator of a smoothly operating centre, providing a bridge between the university and the students in the community. The centre co-ordinator has been described as one who must "... *have all the qualities of a mediator, know all the policies of the programme, the goals and objectives, act as a supply clerk and social worker...*" (Hudson, 1990:99).

The BUNTEP programme offers a four-year degree in education in selected communities throughout Manitoba, administered by a director, currently a non-Aboriginal male. Numerous support staff service areas of clerical support to the programme as well as student support such a

library access. The faculty members involved in the BUNTEP programme hold full-time positions within the Faculty of Education at Brandon University, and, in this situation, are interviewed and appointed solely by members of their academic discipline. Currently, all but two faculty members teaching in the programme are non-Aboriginal, but many have spent more than 20 years working within northern Aboriginal communities. The programme also has an advisory board consisting of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In addition, many individual centres have local advisory boards for programmes in their community. The courses are delivered by travelling instructors who remain in the community for the four-to-six-week duration of their course. Students take only one course at a time; this allows students to concentrate on one area of study according to BUNTEP administration. This concept has attracted criticism from university academics, as it does not provide students with an opportunity to integrate knowledge from several courses but, rather, compartmentalizes knowledge. The curriculum is composed of on-campus content presented in an off-campus situation. As many of the students lack sufficient academic preparation and study skills, preparatory courses are provided prior to embarking on university credit study. The length of courses was also increased to allow students more time for contact with the instructor. An on-campus, three-credit-hour course would involve 36 hours of teaching time, whereas the same course delivered through the BUNTEP model would involve at least 52 hours of teaching.

When the cohort of 25 students has completed their four years of teacher education, it is anticipated that they will be hired to teach in their home community. In Aboriginal communities, non-Aboriginal teachers are hired with the understanding that they will be replaced by Aboriginal education graduates. The centre will remain in the original community if there is interest in a second BUNTEP offering or move to another community requesting teacher training. Although the model has been successful in training Aboriginal people to teach in locally controlled schools, the ongoing transfer of a southern model to a northern situation has been questioned. Academics and community educators have requested that the university incorporate traditional knowledge of

the elders into a teacher-education programme for Aboriginal people (Grant, 1995). This request has proven a challenge for the BUNTEP, and only recently have steps been taken to recognize the importance of traditional knowledge. An example of incorporation of traditional knowledge into the curriculum can be found in the Bear Lake/Stevenson Island Project.

The Bear Lake/Stevenson Island Project was co-ordinated by an Aboriginal resident of the community who had graduated from a teacher-education programme. The project provided an opportunity for students to:

> *... learn from seasonal trapping, hunting and fishing experiences, to observe participate and consider the experiences of children and adults, the ways by which they learn, how the time is used, what resources for learning are presented by these experiences the environment and the knowledge of the elders...* (Harper, cited in Grant, 1995:213).

When a BUNTEP Centre was opened in the Island Lake area, community leaders argued that the students should participate in the Bear Lake/Stevenson Island Project, and that this educational experience should form a part of their university credit. Through negotiations with the Faculty of Education, it was determined that students who participated in the project would receive a university credit in the area of Outdoor Education. A retired teacher, with a graduate degree in education, who resided in the community, was chosen by the university to ensure the academic integrity of the course. This individual worked collaboratively with the project co-ordinator and the elders who taught the course.

Students participated in the camp, maintained logs, prepared a report on what they had learned, and submitted one lesson plan based on an activity in the camp. These requirements satisfied the evaluation process within the university; however, evaluation became a source of concern for the elders. Within traditional Native learning, the criteria for measuring success must be individualized. Individuals who participated in the Bear Lake/Stevenson Island Project entered it with varying levels of competency, and, according to the elders, must be evaluated by accounting for their entry level of competency. Individuals who came to the project with a high level of competency, but did little to improve or provide leadership, were not deemed successful

in the course by the criteria of the elders (Grant, 1995). Pursuant to these concerns, evaluation for this course came to involve individualized assessment by an elder that was then articulated to the course instructor and formed a part of the students' overall grade. The Bear Lake/Stevenson Island evaluation method mirrors the philosophy of evaluation within adult education that has tended to avoid standard forms of assessment, and celebrates the origins of individuals and the distance that they have travelled within their learning (Waldron and Moore, 1991).

Paterson and Hart-Wasakeeskow (1992) discuss a model of Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning, and suggest the incorporation of this model into graduate education within the academy. They suggest an individualized method of evaluation, determined through discussion and negotiation, as was done in the Bear Lake/Stephenson Island project.

BUNTEP has been successful in training Aboriginal teachers in their communities. However, the model has yet to explore ways of improving modes of distance delivery within the centres themselves. As Aboriginal communities move to local control of education and the incorporation of traditional wisdom into the school systems, BUNTEP administrators and faculty members need to investigate ways to train teachers in both Eurocentric and traditional ways of learning.

Women and Learning in Northern Cree Culture

As previously mentioned, Brandon University has been involved, for the last 25 years, in the delivery of post-secondary education to numerous Aboriginal communities within northern Manitoba. In reviewing enrolment data for Brandon University, as well as Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, it became evident that the largest proportion of learners in these programmes is female. Within Brandon University community-based education, the student population indicates a ratio of 75% female students to 25% male learners. In the Province of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College reports similar statistics, with an average of 80% female learners and 20% male learners. Further, employment statistics within First Nations communities in Manitoba show that the majority of teaching, health and social service jobs are held by women

holding post-secondary educational qualifications. Aboriginal women are not only entering education, but are also succeeding in their studies and securing employment. This disproportionately large number of female, Aboriginal students is not a new phenomenon. Roberston and Loughton (1976) describe the mythical Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Programme student as a "*female Aboriginal person with at least two dependants (spouse or children) with family and community responsibilities*" (p. 2).

In this section, I will introduce some possible reasons why Cree women enter post-secondary education in significantly higher proportions than do Cree men; reasons to be examined later with the learners themselves. In order to answer this question, it is imperative to examine the role of women within Cree culture from a historical and contemporary perspective, and the ways in which these roles have influenced women in their successful pursuit of post-secondary education. Although the topic of Cree men and education could comprise another entire research study, it was decided to include some brief comments on this issue in the section entitled *Cree Men and Education.*

The information discussed within this chapter was collected and is presented in two ways: through a review of the literature around the role of women in Aboriginal culture and through personal interviews with three Cree women. While the interview information focused on the role of Cree women, within the literature review I included information about the roles of women in other Western Canadian Aboriginal groups for, as the writers suggest, there are similarities among the role of women in a Pan-Indian situation (Armstrong, 1996).

Review of the Literature

Women played a central role in traditional Aboriginal culture. Winona Stevenson (1995), in her article, *Post-Colonial Reflections on the Past and Future Paths of Canadian Aboriginal Women,* provides an insightful overview of the traditional role of Aboriginal women including the effects of colonization on their traditional roles. She commences her article with a Cree saying "women are the backbone of our nations" (p.9), arguing that the oral traditions reinforce the

central and diverse roles of women as keepers and transmitters of knowledge, healers, and community decision makers. This view is corroborated by Armstrong (1996), an Aboriginal author, who says: "*the role of Aboriginal women in the health of the family systems from one generation to the next is one of immense power*" (p. *ix*). Armstrong further states, "*we find our strength and power in our ability to be what our grandmothers were to us: keepers of the next generation in every sense of that word – physically, intellectually, and spiritually. We strive to retain our power and interpret it into all aspects of survival on this earth in the midst of chaos*" (p. *xi*). In Aboriginal culture, the anthropological evidence suggests women were responsible for the transmission of both skills and knowledge (Sheldon, 1992).

Aboriginal women prior to colonization had a great deal of autonomy. In traditional Aboriginal culture, women controlled their own sexuality, could divorce their partner, could be involved in their own business enterprises, including the control of land, resources, and the products of their labour. In the traditional clan system of Cree governance, women played a key role in advising and decision making. This central and powerful role was to be a direct clash with the Eurocentric perspective on the role of women, as dependent and submissive, brought by the European colonizers and missionaries 500 years ago (Stevenson, 1995).

Cree women, using these strengths, played a central role in the fur-trade culture of early Canada. Van Kirk (1980) argues that the role these women played was far from the passive role that earlier historians had attributed to the Native wives of early Canadian fur-traders. For early traders, a Native wife was essential for survival in the new land. Her knowledge of climate, hunting, trapping, travel routes, Native languages, and the skills to make appropriate clothing, were all essential to the traders. She describes Aboriginal women in the fur-trade as the "women in the middle." She argues that their negotiating skills and understanding of European and Aboriginal cultures were essential to the fur-trade, and that they took an active role in the business aspects of the fur-trade. Weatherford (1979) states that women in traditional Aboriginal societies were key players in trading and negotiation between bands and tribes as was their

participation in trading missions, as bands traveled from one geographic area to another to secure goods.

However, it was because of this powerful central role and independence exhibited by Aboriginal women that made them the greatest victims of colonization. Stevenson (1995) says that, although Aboriginal men and women were sufferers of colonization, the experience of colonization by Aboriginal women was decidedly different from that experienced by Aboriginal men. She provides this explanation. In traditional Aboriginal culture, women maintained a critical role in the political, commercial, and educational aspects of their community. In Cree culture, women collectively bore the sole responsibility for child rearing, and for teaching the children the skills and values necessary for them to become productive members of the community (Van Kirk, 1980). This matriarchal structure of society was completely at odds with the Eurocentric perspective of the state and church. On the political site, European women had no political involvement, and the government negotiations were between men. As a result, the colonizers sought to restructure Aboriginal culture eliminating the role of women in political and commercial areas of their communities. On the side of the church, missionaries condemned the way of life of Aboriginals considering their activities immoral and sought to create a patriarchal structure with complete female subordination. For Aboriginal women, these two agents – state and church – sought to strip them of their public and private roles in their traditional society. These two agents were a powerful force, the state seeking to gain control of Aboriginal lands and the church providing the state with the religious and moral reasons for control and colonization.

Stevenson (1995) cites the period of 1867 to 1951 as the most repressive for Aboriginal women. In 1867, the *British North America Act* provided the government with complete jurisdiction over Indians and Indian land. The *Indian Act*, pursuant to the *British North America Act* attempted to annihilate the "traditional roles, authorities, and autonomy of Aboriginal women" (p.13). The traditional Aboriginal forms of government were replaced by an on-reserve local government based on the European model. This system gave rise to a system of Indian

Bands and an elected Chief and Council. However, women could neither vote nor run for election in this system until 1951. This was a huge blow for Aboriginal women who had traditionally maintained a central role in community governance. Under the *Indian Act,* Aboriginal women were also not allowed to possess land, and widowed women became wards of their children. Furthermore, if Aboriginal women married non-Aboriginal men they and their children lost all status rights. All passage of status was based upon the father; if non-Aboriginal women married Aboriginal men, they and their children qualified for Native status. This legislation concerning the loss of status was only rectified in 1981, with the passing of Bill C-62. Finally, the most devastating effect of the *Indian Act* was the establishment of the residential school, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Despite the harsh impact of colonization on the lives of Aboriginal women, the literature reveals their ability to adapt and survive in adversity. Early ethnographic research suggests that the Aboriginal men found the transition to reserve life to be profoundly detrimental. Women, on the other hand, continued to function as before (Carter, 1996). As Wissler (1938) has said in his observations of Aboriginal people from 1902-1905:

> *I am sure that the Indian man was the real victim of the reservation policy. When the soldiers herded a tribe onto a reservation, the Indian men joined the ranks of the unemployed and went on relief. They would have gladly hunted, followed the warpath, and engaged in all the occupations they had been trained for, but there was no chance. So they sat around in idleness. On the other hand, the Indian woman had no time to loaf. As of old, she was the housekeeper, gathered wood, reared the children, cared for the sick and made most of the clothing. Then, it was her job to gather whatever vegetable food was to be used up. Any day in camp would reveal the females toiling early and late. To see so many useless males around frequently aroused my resentment, but the women never complained about it. True, they were often vociferous in demanding the return of the old time, but not with the idea that they would have less to do. So far as I could see, the morale of the women was far less shattered and it was they who saved tribal life from complete collapse* (p. 239).

Fiske (1996) describes the adaptability of Aboriginal women who ensured the survival of their families during the Depression by using the domestic skills they had acquired in residential school to diversify and increase their subsistence livelihood. They also found employment in the service industries and as domestics. Some of the more competent women organized extended-

family productive units. Aboriginal men were never able to transfer the skills they acquired in residential school back to their home communities. Although the residential school system is considered responsible for the genocide of Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal women seemed to emerge from these schools with more skills than their male counterparts (Grant, 1995; Fiske, 1996). Girls tended to spend more time in class than boys did, as boys were also responsible for farm and outdoor labour within the schools; thus, girls often acquired a stronger academic education, completed more grade levels, and achieved higher marks. It is generally the women who adapt and who bring about positive change. McDonald (1989) says that there is an increasing number of Aboriginal women, in post-secondary study, who are seeking to better their lives and those of their children, and thus their community. Post-secondary education, McDonald argues, is the release from their "dismal dowry" within a rapidly changing community.

Armstrong (1996) argues that, as it was the women who shaped the thinking of all its members in traditional Aboriginal society, it is the strength of the female force that holds the Aboriginal communities together and is the bridge to the next generation. This central role of the Aboriginal women in traditional society has continued as the communities have faced immense changes in the last century. Fiske (1996) has studied former female, residential school students who, in the 1940s, refused to register their children in residential schools until conditions improved. They petitioned Ottawa and succeeded in bringing about changes in the school system. In the 1950s, the spread of industrialization and a growing influx of white labour displaced men from the employment market. Again, women took the lead roles by petitioning and lobbying the government for improved housing, health services, and social assistance. The men, on the other hand, with their traditional livelihood of trapping now under provincial control and on the decrease, became further marginalized within the economy. In 1951, when the Federal Government of Canada allowed Aboriginal women to participate in community elections and office, women from this Aboriginal community were some of the first to be elected in provincial and national Aboriginal associations. As women had honed their domestic and employment skills

from their residential school days enabling them to adapt to changes, they also honed leadership skills that enabled them to lobby governments for proactive change within Aboriginal society. As one women stated: "*I went past school. I became a chief and professional person*" (Fiske, 1996:178). This adaptability of Aboriginal women is also reflective of their traditional roles.

Historical research describes Aboriginal women as managing a variety of roles, ranging from educators and advisors to hunters and trappers when men were absent for long periods. Essentially, the traditional nomadic lifestyle of Aboriginal people, and the absence of men for extended periods, made it necessary for women to assume a variety of roles.

This personal adaptability of Cree women has also enabled them to assist their communities and to deal with the rapid changes that have occurred over the last fifty years. In a study of the educational and employment patterns of Cree women in two northern communities, the researchers found that women invest in their communities, as they have been instructed by their own mothers and grandmothers and have, in essence, modernized their communities while, at the same time, revitalizing their families and their communities. The study, conducted by Blythe & McGuire (1996), found that Cree women over 60 years of age possessed basic elementary education (first grade) and spoke little English. However, the women had been taught various skills that prepared them for life on the land: independence, self-reliance, and flexibility. Although they were best trained in traditional women's tasks, they were also provided with enough skills to survive on the land when the men were absent at hunting or gathering times. As industrialization entered these communities, it was these women who first found employment as domestics in the local trading company, residential schools, and hospitals. Men in the same age group continued their traditional employment of hunting and fishing.

As the economy changed from a small trading town with a hospital and a residential school to a northern urban centre, the women between the ages of 45 and 60 also faced a changing world. Compared to their mothers and grandmothers, the majority of these middle-aged women lived in town, rather than in the bush. Most spoke English and had at least a Grade 6

education. Their employment opportunities expanded to include working in service industries, northern stores and health care facilities. The majority of men of this generation often continued hunting and fishing, although some began town-based businesses and seasonal labour. Women in this generation were seen to have the difficult task of bringing the traditional expectations into the urban-based cash economy. Finally, women in this community who were under 45 possessed more education than their male counterparts, and stressed the importance of a solid education, and the establishment of a career. In this age group, women were using the local educational institutions in a new way – to serve their ambitions. Men within this age group were often seen doing seasonal work, such as carpentry and construction, and few were interested in attending local training programmes. This study revealed the changing employment patterns of women in this community over the last 50 years and, in essence, also reflected the women's ability to survive within a rapidly changing socio-economic sphere. Aboriginal men, on the other hand, had more difficulty dealing with the changing environment and were unable to make inroads in new employment.

In concluding this section, I would like to return to the words of Winona Stevenson who says that you cannot discuss the past, the present, or the future roles of Aboriginal women apart from their communities. Their raison d'être is intrinsically linked to the healing and rebuilding of their communities.

Personal Interviews

Interviewees were, as explained in the methodology chapter, three Northern Cree women, all of whom had completed graduate level education and are currently working in the area of Aboriginal education within northern Manitoba or Saskatchewan. All three women were fluent speakers of the Cree language and came from three different Northern Cree communities.

The interviews were semi-structured, and each individual spoke of the roles of women in her community, why she entered post-secondary study, and her experiences as a student. The three women are identified by pseudonyms: Cathy, Georgia, and Sara. In order to glean some

information about Cree men in education, a group interview with 5 male students and 15 female students in a northern Cree community was conducted. From my experiences in Cree communities, and upon the advice of the three Cree women, I determined that a group of men would not feel comfortable discussing a topic in a small group with me – an outsider and a female. Rather, I decided to discuss the topic with a cohort of 20 students in a Northern Cree community who were also involved in community-base education, in the hope of learning why only 25 percent of the class was male.

The traditional Manitoba Cree society relied on the land as its economic base in trapping, hurting, and fishing. Within this traditional society, according to Sara (one of the interviewees), women participated in the decision-making process and acted as advisors to men within their clan and community system. She says that:

> *Women always played an important role in the clan system, and were often called upon to give advice to the clan leaders.... The clan leader might have been a man, as the Chief is today, but the women had a lot of input into whom would be the clan leader, and were often his advisors. Their role was critical to the survival of the clan. I belong to the Bear Clan; we were the workers within the clan system. When things needed to be done, the Bear Clan was often the one called upon.*

Another interviewee, Georgia, recounted that, as recently as the last 50 years, women in one northern Cree settlement essentially ran the community:

> *I remember my mother telling me they (*the women*) were responsible for the making of the fishing nets, co-ordinating the delivery of freight both into and out of the community, the shipping and marketing of the fish, the operation of the radio, and any of the important events in the community. Whenever there was an event, either happy such as a birth or marriage, or sad such as a death, the women saw everything through. While the men were responsible for the actual catching of the fish, the women saw that the men could do their job. They saw that the nets were ready and then ensured the fish had a place to go after it was caught.*

Men's work within this northern, remote community was described by Georgia as being completely dependent upon, and organized by, the women. Women provided the critical infrastructure central to the life of the community.

The oral tradition is central to Manitoba Cree culture, and education is a complex method

of passing on traditional knowledge and culture from generation to generation. The oral tradition records the entire history of the Cree culture and, as this culture had no written language until the late nineteenth century, with the creation of Cree syllabics by a missionary, oral tradition provided for the only means of preserving Cree history (Gillespie, 1994). Sara described women as playing a critical role in the transmission of knowledge within the traditional oral culture, through their responsibility for the education of children and the family unit within the traditional culture. Georgia, in referring to her own experiences as a child, recalls her grandmothers and aunts as being the community storytellers, "*... it was my mother, my aunt and my grandmother who told us the stories that I still remember today. They were the ones in the community who were responsible for preserving this tradition and being sure that our history, our spirituality, and our culture was kept intact and passed on.*"

Sara described women as the creative force within the First Nations community, as she says: "W*hen women functioned as advisors to the clan leaders, they were the challengers of injustices and the change agents of their communities within the traditional culture. With the influx of European culture, and the creation of the reserve system, a system of order and governance, that could be identified within European norms was developed.*" The traditional system of clans, according to Sara, became subordinate in the eyes of the Europeans to the system of Chief and Council. The positions of Chief and Councillors were filled by men; however, according to Sara, women continued to provide the advice, to these male leaders, that they had always provided their clan leaders. Georgia corroborated Sara's remarks about women as the challengers and change agents. She recalled the ways in which her mother challenged controversial issues on the reserve by using a playful, non-confrontational approach. She further recalled her mother's description of how women challenge systems and each other, in this manner; whereas, men readily accepted each others' views and did not participate in this playful game of challenge. Georgia said:

If you look at what is happening on reserves today with issues like the wrong-doing in Child and Family Services, both from outsiders and from our own people, it was the women that actually brought about the change, not the men. In education, it was the women that often put pressure on Chief and Council and local school boards to make change in the interest of the betterment of the children in the community. So, women are still doing it today, like my mother and her generation used to do fifty years ago. Today the concerns are different, but it is women that are still not afraid to open up issues and tackle them, and demand change.

Cathy believes that it was women's creative way of challenge that enabled them to initiate proactive changes within their community. She described the female elders in her community as the change agents and challengers; whereas men, according to Cathy, are the pleasers – the accommodators of everyone's wishes as an attempt to be popular. Sometimes, she believes, in order for positive changes to take place, unpopular positions must be taken. Of women in the community, Cathy said:

> *... she may not sit in the Council office, she may not sit in the administrator's desk, but she is a force behind those people and, when they do speak, they are listened to. In working with the elders these last two years, the men are the spokesmen, but when the women speak, everyone listens, everyone pays attention, and the way they say it, usually, they say it with such feeling, and such commitment and such a clear way you want to make sure it happens.*

All three interviewees recognized the role of women within their culture as the central force of their communities. Cathy described the critical role that women have played in the community during times of birth and death. It is women who assist other women in giving birth, and it is women who care for the dying and prepare the body for the wake and burial. Cathy also reflected on women being those who grieved openly for the dead and she expressed the belief that this open expression of grief freed them to return the community to its equilibrium. Thus, she says, it is the women who maintain and nurture the community as midwives, caregivers, and storytellers, and the pursuit of education within the academy is a natural extension of their role.

The three interviewees believed that the central role of women as the elders, advisors, and storytellers within traditional Aboriginal society is reflected in the central roles they now occupy in contemporary Native society. Although women have maintained their traditional roles, they have entered the Eurocentric-dominated society, completed post-secondary education, and

continued in their roles as the educators and change agents within their own communities. Sara suggests that women had maintained their roles as the doers of their communities, and, as Georgia said, they worked together for changes such as child and family welfare and local control of education.

Sara described women in the traditional Cree society as being the holders of the power. Cathy reflected on her own childhood, wherein she was cautioned that she must be careful in the use of her power, particularly around men. For example, she says, "*When we were children, we were always told never to step over a man's gun – that is, after we became women. Our power would affect the hunt. He might not be successful getting the moose or the duck that the house needed.*" She also reflected on this power that has remained a part of women, despite colonization, whereas men have lost much of their traditional life and their power and have often mirrored a European patriarchal model in favour of their own Indigenous, egalitarian model:

> *I have seen what the colonizers have done to the Indian people and now, somehow, I can accept that. That is a part of history. But what is harder to accept is when you see your own people doing the same thing that the colonizers did and sometimes worse. Somehow, the men in our culture lost what they had, their power to do what was right. Somehow, women didn't lose our power; we seem to still be able to work together to try to improve things. Sometimes, I think the men have just given up. Things will never be the way they used to be. My grandfather told me that when he said "get on that bombardier and go to school. You need an education to do something to make things better. Your mother and father made a good life for all of you on the land. But it's not going to stay the same, you need to help us find the new ways. Remember who you are and where you came from. You have to understand the white man's world if you want to help your own culture."*

Cree Women and Education

All three women indicated that, in their home communities, it was women who entered post-secondary education, women who completed post-secondary study, and women who occupied the permanent, professional positions in the community. All three interviewees saw women's entry and success to be based, first, upon their innate sense of power as the locus of their community from traditional times to present day, and, second, upon their role as the nurturers, the storytellers, and the caregivers of the community. For those who occupy such a prominent role in

their own tradition, it appears that education within the Eurocentric academy is a natural extension, totally congruent with that tradition. However, this idea begs a further explanation. In the case of these three women, all had participated in a teacher-training or education stream within post-secondary study and were currently working in the area of teaching and learning. Although this type of education is totally congruent with Aboriginal women's traditional roles as educators and nurturers, it is less consistent with other types of education such as engineering. This issue is revisited later in the thesis in interviews involving female students who are enrolled in education and business administration degree programmes.

All the interviewees said that their major reason for engaging in post-secondary study was to improve the lives of their children and of their communities. Georgia reflected that the initial incentive was monetary, but stated that, in her situation, the remuneration quickly became secondary, as her education enabled her to help her children through their own educational processes. Sara said that study was an extension of her traditional role as the centre of the family and caregiver to her children, and saw education as a route by which she could improve the lives of her family. She saw that, just as women in earlier generations had played specific roles on the trapline, in the preparation of the fishing nets, and as contributors to the family income, education became a means whereby these helping roles continued in modern society. As women in traditional society played key roles in advising clan leaders, they, according to Cathy, saw their new role as advisors to Chief and Councils in local control situations to be enhanced by education. Cathy added that her course studies in history, English, and Native studies provided her with insight into the dominant culture, and enables her to advise her own community as it moves to local control. Sara's initial reason for entering post-secondary education was to improve the life of her family, but she continued her studies in order to improve the life of the Aboriginal community, and to enable her to provide leadership in an Aboriginal institution. Cathy, Georgia, and Sara all believe that post-secondary study for Aboriginal women is a logical extension of their traditional role. Yet, they also stressed that most Aboriginal women succeed at

university in spite of family obligations, lack of spousal support, and a content and delivery system of knowledge and pedagogy based upon patriarchal Eurocentric models. This position is consistent with the findings of Graveline (1994).

The fact that many Cree women have been successful, despite colonization and the Eurocentric nature of the Canadian post-secondary system, is an indication of their innate sense of power and their strong identification with the oral tradition. As Cathy said: "*In spite of many obstacles put forth by the Western academy, we've been conditioned to think, to know, that we are more powerful than our men and that we need to nurture them and take care of them.*" It is this innate sense of power, rooted in their knowledge as keepers of the oral tradition, that has, according to these three women, made post-secondary education a viable choice in their lives.

Cree Men and Education

The major roles for men in northern Cree communities are hunting, fishing, seasonal construction work, limited trapping, and political positions of Chief and Council members, and few Cree men choose to enter post-secondary education. In a discussion with 20 students in a northern Cree community, the following reasons were given for the low enrolment of males in post-secondary studies in a full-time, community-based programme that commenced in 1993:

1. A mental and sedentary activity such as post-secondary education is not a job suitable to a man's status.
2. Should men take on the role of student, they may lose their perceived role as head of the family unit.
3. Should men fail in their attempt at study, they could not cope with their perceived loss of status within the community.
4. Studying is not seen as an extension of the traditional role of men. Rather, outside physical activities are seen as the natural extension of the roles of hunting and trapping. Men have no role as caregivers and advisors in traditional society, whereas women always maintained these roles.

5. Men who are enrolled in post-secondary study generally receive spousal and family support, but often do not receive support from other, non-student males in the community.

Conclusion

In northern Cree communities, the number of women enrolled in, and completing post-secondary education, is approximately three times greater than that of men. A similar figure exists for women versus men in full-time employment. In one large community, all full-time jobs, with the exception of Chief and Council members, are occupied by women. Cree women envision education as being a part of their role in contemporary Aboriginal society, a role congruent with their traditional role. Cathy, Georgia, and Sara all said that women have never lost their power, a power that has enabled them to deal with the changes that has affected their culture. As Cathy says:

> *I feel that, as women, we are the ones with the power – not power in a bad way or a controlling way, but power to bring about and cope with changes in our community. Sometimes, I feel that it's that power we have as women that helps us go through so much, and education is a part of it all. We have to move ahead. Why, we missed the industrial age; now, if we are not careful, we will miss the information age too. Women have a big role in Aboriginal communities especially at this time as we move to local control and rebuilding our communities.*

In pre-colonial times, women played critical roles in Cree communities, roles that they continue to play today. As the keepers of the Native oral tradition and traditional learning, women have been involved in teaching and learning for over 10,000 years (Gillespie, 1994). The involvement of Cree women in post-secondary education is an extension of their traditional role. Although universities have succeeded in the bringing of education and learning to Northern Cree women, it is a task that must not be construed in a missionary fashion, for these women have a long tradition of learning and teaching.

Today, as in traditional society, women may be the locus of the community. They have adapted, better than men have, to the dramatic changes in Aboriginal culture over the last 50

years, and have found ways to maintain and develop their roles within the community. Men, on the other hand, have lost much of their traditional power through colonization. Thus, they have abdicated their traditional roles, replacing them with models introduced by their European oppressor. Cathy, reflecting on this loss of power by Aboriginal males, sees that their regaining of traditional power will have to be facilitated by the Aboriginal females. "*How do we give them back their power*?" she asks.

CHAPTER V: YEAR ONE

Introduction

Chapters V through VII document the story of the community-based programme, with each chapter representing one year of the programme. The story is told in chronological format, providing a comprehensive account of activities over the three-year period of the study. The story is compiled from group and personal interviews with students, local student co-ordinators, university faculty members teaching in the community, and field notes maintained by the researcher. As discussed in Chapter II on methodology, all individuals interviewed were given pseudonyms. The story is told using extensive quotations from interviews, both group and personal, followed by my reflective comments as a researcher.

The Community

Great River is located 600 km. north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and has a population of 1,400. It is accessible year-round by twice-daily air service, and throughout the winter by utilizing the winter road that links the community with the cities of Thompson and Winnipeg.

Education within Great River falls under the jurisdiction of the Tribal Council, with a Director of Education who, at the time of the study, was a non-Native woman residing in the community, and a local school board appointed by the Chief and Council. Tribal Councils are organizations managed and staffed by Aboriginal people to assist reserves with the move to local control. The Tribal Council agrees to manage specific areas such as health or education, within the community until such time as the local reserve government can assume control. When a local reserve government assumes control of a certain area, it then becomes totally responsible for that area. For example, if a local community assumes responsibility for education, this includes financial management, hiring of teachers and administrators, and selection and support of students for post-secondary study. The members of the local reserve government, the Chief and Council, would decide at what point the community is able to manage a certain area, and then

assume management from the Tribal Council. In essence, the role of the Tribal Council is an interim caretaking role until the communities are ready to assume control of all matters. The portfolio of education in the community of Great River was overseen by the Keewatin Tribal Council (KTC), with head offices in Thompson, Manitoba. As a result, KTC was responsible for the financial management of the university programme in Great River.

The Director of Education and the members of the local school board remained in their positions for the three-year duration of the programme. However, political changes within the community resulted in the resignation of the Director of Education and the dissolution of the local school board following the third year of the programme. Circumstances such as the resignation of a Director of Education and changes within school board structure are common in Aboriginal communities, usually the result of a local election and changes in the composition of the Chief and Council. These positions are, in many cases, politically linked, and a change of local government will often result in new appointees suitable to the new regime. These conditions of uncertainty and ongoing change present a challenge for community-based university programmes; for, although a programme may be a priority for one Chief and Council, it is not necessarily a priority with their successors.

Within the period of this study, the community of Great River experienced the defeat of the Chief and Council members who initiated the programme. They were replaced by a new governing body with little involvement in post-secondary education and, in particular, in partnerships with academic institutions. The second governing body was also eventually replaced, culminating in the resignation of the Director of Education and a disbanding of the school board. The instability in local Aboriginal governments is similar to the political instability inherent in developing countries which, like Aboriginal communities, are dealing with the aftermath of colonization. Working educationally within a border world in a post-colonial situation is the central theme within the study, as the learners and the academy strive to create an appropriate learning situation.

The community of Great River has a community-based school that provides education to students from kindergarten to grade nine (from ages 5 to 15). The majority of the teaching staff is non-Aboriginal. Only two Aboriginal teachers were employed in the school system at the beginning of the programme. Students who complete grade nine and wish to continue their studies must leave the community. Typically, they either attend a northern residential school managed by KTC or they move to Winnipeg or Thompson and attend a public school. Students who move to either city are required to stay in private home placements, with KTC covering these costs out of the educational funds. There is a plan within the community government to expand the current school to provide kindergarten-to-grade-12 education within five years, enabling students to finish secondary school (grades 10 to 12; typically ages 15 to 18) within their community.

Successful completion of secondary and post-secondary education was not common among the residents of Great River. Fewer than 15 of the 1400 band members had completed secondary school and only three had graduated from university. Of the three university graduates from Great River, two had completed education degrees and were teaching in the community, and the third had completed graduate studies in resource management and was employed outside the community. As a result, grade-school students, children in kindergarten to grade nine, had few role models to observe and often came home from urban centres without completing secondary school.

Several attempts have been made to offer post-secondary, community-based education programmes to residents of Great River. There had been a Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Programme (BUNTEP) started in 1980, but this programme was discontinued after two years, due to student attrition. I was curious about the BUNTEP programme and the high attrition in what is usually a successful, community-based programme in terms of student retention and completion. I spoke with the current Director of BUNTEP, who was also employed with BUNTEP in 1980, and, although he explained there had been no follow-up study

surrounding the failure of the programme, he did say that there had been poor community support for BUNTEP in Great River at that time. He said that the initial cohort of 25 students resulted in only one graduate – a female who attended classes on-campus immediately following the dissolution of the programme and completed her education degree. Four other students from the original 25 did eventually complete their degrees over the next 15-year period, attending other BUNTEP centres, or on-campus offerings.

Since 1980, only one university course had been offered in the community and it was completed by only three students. During the year prior to the start of the full-time programme, a one-year carpentry course for women was offered and proved very successful, with all 17 of the participants completing the programme.

The idea of a community-based degree programme originated with the Chief and Council who wanted to lower attrition statistics and create a place for university education in the community. This idea of creating a place for university education in the community was also reflected upon by Alcorn (1995), in a study examining the development of university, community-based programmes in Northern Manitoba. He quotes one Aboriginal administrator who suggests two criteria necessary for the delivery of successful post-secondary education in the community: it must be both culturally relevant and it must be accepted as a part of community life. This Aboriginal educator describes the latter criteria as putting post-secondary education back into the culture.

Prior to programme start-up, the Chief indicated that, with a local programme, individuals would benefit from family and community support and provide role models for other community members. He stated that, as Aboriginal communities moved to self-government, there would be a need for individuals with post-secondary education to assume leadership roles (Chief, Great River Band, personal communication, 1992).

Programme Planning

Programme planning and negotiation began in early 1992. Negotiations involved the Chief and Council, Inter-Universities North (IUN), and Brandon University, with the Chief initiating the discussions. Administrators from Brandon University, in particular myself, were invited by IUN to be involved in the programme because of experience in the delivery of Northern programmes, as well as providing on-campus education to a large Aboriginal clientele. Further, the delivery of university education in Northern and remote communities is a central part of the Brandon University mission statement. The Tribal Council allocated the funding and a plan for a three-year degree programme to be offered over a five-year time frame was developed. The programme was to include preparatory, upgrading courses in Mathematics and English, as well as a study-skills component.

The selection of students for the programme was the responsibility of the community, a request made by the Chief, in early stages of programme planning. Administrators from both IUN and Brandon University were in agreement with this request, stating that a local selection committee would be best able to select students. In this selection process, the Chief and Council once again took a lead role in establishing an interview committee composed of the Chief, the Director of Education, and a representative from IUN, who acted as a resource person. There were 40 student applicants, of whom 25 were selected. The selection process involved a personal interview and the completion of standardized tests. It is important to note that the suggestion and implementation of standardized testing was the proposal of the Chief and Council, and involved a basic test in reading and comprehension and basic arithmetic skills. The Chief and Council were concerned that students lacking these basic skills would be incapable of managing university study, losing self-confidence along with their funding for future post-secondary study. It was decided by the Chief and Council that applicants who did not have these basic skills would not be accepted for funding in the university, community-based programme, but would be enrolled and funded in a community-based literacy and basic education programme that would commence

within one year.

The whole area of standardized testing, in order to determine an applicant's level of competency, has been the topic of much debate within the North American post-secondary system, as a procedure that colonizes learning rather than truly evaluating the learner's knowledge. However, all students in the community-based programme recommended the use of standardized tests for the measurement of quantifiable skills in the areas of reading and mathematics.

From my experiences in the provision of education programmes in Aboriginal communities, I also support the use of standardized testing to ensure that students have necessary basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills in order to commence post-secondary study. If these results indicate that they are not at a level appropriate for university study – that is, they are not at a level of basic mathematics and writing skills – it is a grave injustice for institutions to accept funding for these students. The use of standardized tests raises issues surrounding the introduction of Eurocentric selection and stratification into the border country, and whether these gate-keeping functions employed by the Chief and Council are appropriate. Of critical importance, is the fact that the standardized tests were initiated at the request of Chief and Council, not at the request of the university. Further research also indicated that Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Canada's only Aboriginal controlled institution, also required standardized testing prior to admission to a university programme. Individuals who did not meet the minimum requirements were provided with a college or university preparation programme (Personal communication, Director of Extensions, SIFC, 1994).

A programme advisory group was struck and two major disciplines were identified: business administration and education. A female community member, who had completed two years of post-secondary study, was hired to act as a local student co-ordinator. Duties included on-site programme administration as well as the provision for academic personal support of the students. During the first year of the programme, the local student co-ordinator left the position

and moved out of the community. She was replaced, initially, by a male community member who had completed one year of university and, finally, by a second male community member who was a former airport manager.

The Programme

Fall 1992: Programme Initiation

The Brandon University, full-time, community-based programme commenced in October 1992 in the community of Great River, with a complement of 25 full-time students. These 25 participants were selected by the three members of the local selection committee who based their decision, as previously indicated, on the personal interview and the results of the standardized testing. The programme was housed in a classroom in the locally controlled kindergarten-to-grade-nine school. In an office attached to the classroom, the local co-ordinator conducted administrative tasks and provided personal and academic counselling to students. Students attended classes from Monday to Friday, between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., to correspond with the regular hours of the school. The Chief and Council members, who had selected the local school as the venue for the full-time programme, based their decision on the following needs:

1. *To provide a role model for students in the local school system:* The Chief and Council concluded that it was critical for local students within the kindergarten-to-grade-nine system to see their parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles as university students. The Chief also believed that, by locating the university within the local school system, it would be envisioned as an extension of the local education system and, as a result, the community would feel greater ownership for the programme.

2. *To enable university students to be in close proximity to their children:* All 25 students had children, grandchildren, or both, within the local school. As the majority of these students had been working in the home, this proximity to their children eased the transition from homemaker to student.

3. *To enable administrative supports like secretarial and library services, computer labs,*

fax machines, and photocopiers to be utilized by the university programme: The provision of these essential services through the school provided a cost-saving option for the programme.

The university supported these decisions of Chief and Council at the inception of the programme, recognizing the importance of community ownership and involvement in the programme. Because the programme was located within the community, the identification of a facility was the responsibility of the community.

The start-up of the programme involved the establishment of a Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) that met on a monthly basis to provide management and direction.

Membership of the PAC included the following positions:

Chief
Council Member, responsible for the education portfolio
Local Director of Education
Inter-Universities North (IUN) Executive Director
Local programme co-ordinator
IUN Co-ordinator, responsible for community based education
Brandon University Director of Extension
Tribal Council representative

Elections for Chief and Council are held bi-annually and duly elected individuals sit on the PAC. Because the community entrusts the financial management of its educational programmes to the Tribal Council, the Education Administrator within the Tribal Council also holds a seat on the PAC. The representation of the Tribal Council on the PAC, although seemingly straightforward, resulted in some interesting dynamics. To me, it appeared that the representative of the Tribal Council, although herself Aboriginal, was seen as an individual from the outside, one who did not have the necessary intimate knowledge of the community and the learners as did the local PAC members. This situation was particularly apparent when the local members requested lengthening course times to accommodate the learners, a point of contention between the local members of the PAC and the Tribal Council.

At the time of programme inception, the PAC members identified four concepts that they considered critical to the success of a community-based university programme. The following

objectives were taken from the minutes of a PAC meeting held in June 1992. The information was provided by C. Van Roodselaar, the IUN representative on the PAC, and recording secretary for the committee.

1. The provision for student support services by a local person, hired by, and responsible to, the Chief and Council of the band, should be implemented. The PAC agreed that the individual must be acceptable to the university in that he/she must be able to administer the centre in a manner acceptable to the academy. The individual was to receive orientation and ongoing training from the university, but, ultimately, must be responsible to the Chief and Council. Although the university was seen to provide academic expertise, a local individual with an understanding of the community provided ongoing support to the students.

2. The provision for local tutoring services should be implemented. Local school teachers with expertise in a variety of subject areas agreed to provide tutorial support.

3. The availability of university faculty to provide time with students, in addition to the traditional class time of 36 to 39 contact hours for each three credit hours of course work, should be implemented. At Brandon University, a regular, single-term courses requires 36 to 39 hours of class time. This increased number of class hours was particularly important, given that the students in the programme had been away from the formal education system for a substantial length of time and that all but one student were second-language speakers of English, their first language being Cree. Bearing these concerns in mind, members of the PAC instituted the extension of teaching responsibilities to 48 hours of class time. These additional contact hours were used in evening study hall sessions where the instructor would be available to the students for group or individual tuition.

4. The opportunity for university teaching faculty to be oriented to the community and its culture prior to teaching courses in the community should be facilitated. The PAC recommended that all prospective teaching faculty would be required to spend two days in the community prior to the development and teaching of courses. The orientation was to be conducted by a member of

the PAC and the local student co-ordinator. The concept of an orientation was, I believed, a positive aspect, in that it would provide instructors with some exposure to the community prior to teaching. However, in reflection, I had concerns about the provision for a cultural orientation, and how precisely this could be accomplished within a two-day period. Much would depend upon the skills of the local student co-ordinator and her understanding of the academic perspective of the instructor. Further, did she, in fact, have an understanding of how university education was "constructed" by the learners and what they wanted and why? Critical to the role of the local student co-ordinator was the ability to act as a cultural translator between two very diverse worlds. It was evident that this recommendation was much easier to present than to operationalize because within a two day period in an Aboriginal community it is only possible to touch the surface of many areas. In retrospect, I believe that, while an orientation to the specific community in which they will be teaching is useful, potential faculty would benefit from university involvement in an orientation that includes an Aboriginal perspective on higher education. The work of Kirkness (1995), Hampton (1995), and Archibald (1990) all suggest criteria that would enhance the delivery of higher education for Aboriginal people, and potential faculty would benefit from exposure to their research.

These comments, emanating from the PAC discussions, I believed, indicated a sophisticated understanding of the needs of mature learners in community-based learning situations. Although the community had supported a BUNTEP centre for only one year, the Chief and Council and other members of the PAC were aware of other successful BUNTEP programmes throughout the north, and drew upon this model to create the full-time programme. For a community with limited and rather negatives experiences with post-secondary study, this knowledge is noteworthy. To me, the quality of the criteria reflected the strong leadership and support provided by the Chief and Council in the planning and development of the programme. The PAC met monthly the first year of the programme.

An individual who, as I will reveal, was critical to the success of the programme during

the first year, was the local co-ordinator, Lorraine, a woman in her mid-forties. Although Lorraine was a band member, she had been living off reserve for the last twenty years, but had remained in close contact with her family in the community. She had completed residential school, married a non-Aboriginal man, had two children, separated, then completed two years of an on-campus university degree. Her children had grown and were both in university in the city. Lorraine was working in the city when she decided to return home. She had worked in the city as an employment counsellor with the Federal Government. Her appointment by the Chief and Council was supported by the university because she possessed university experience, counselling skills, and intimate knowledge of the culture of the community. Like many of the students, she had attended a residential school system but, unlike the students in the programme, she had also lived in an urban centre and worked in the Eurocentric culture. Following the selection of students, a meeting was held between the PAC and the students to provide an overview of the university programme and address student questions or concerns. This PAC meeting was followed by a session involving only the students and the local co-ordinator where she provided an in-depth orientation to university study.

Although the students asked no questions, the meeting did provide an opportunity for initial contact. I had hoped that students would ask questions about the programme and, in doing so, would allow me to get to know them a little. However, it is essential to remember that, for all of these students, this was their first introduction to a post-secondary setting. In all but one case, they were the first members of their family to enter a university; their lives did not include the culture or patterns of conversation inherent in the academy. For these students, just trying to understand the university was, I believe, a difficult task, let alone pose questions on the matter. The absence of questions gave rise to one other concern – the students' perception of their relationship with me. Did they see me only as the "university" – as an individual in a position of power over them – or would they be able to relate to me as a feminist researcher, someone truly interested in hearing their stories and engaging in dialogical interviews within a border country.

In the documentation of the interviews, reflections and analysis, I have attempted to answer this question.

Overview of Year One

The delivery of courses commenced in December 1992. With the exception of Marie, all the students were admitted under the mature student admission policy. This admissions policy exists at Brandon University to allow students, who did not complete a formal high school education, are over 21 years of age, and have been out of school for at least one year, an opportunity to enter first year university. As explained in Chapter III in the section on Brandon University, it is then possible for students admitted under the mature student admissions policy to move to regular student status upon the achievement of a C average upon completion of their first eight courses. As all students had been away from the formal education system for between 7 and 30 years, initial course work included study skills and preparatory level courses. These preparatory studies were followed by first-year courses commencing in the fall of 1993. During their first year of study (December 1992 to June 1993), students completed a study-skills course and a university credit course in Communications (actually a basic writing and grammar course), with both courses conducted by the same instructor, over a twelve week block.

On the advice of the student advisor, a weekly schedule of study-hall times was also prepared so students were aware of the availability of academic supports. Following the Communications course, the first-year courses were offered over a six-week block. All 25 students successfully completed the Communications course. However, 14 chose to leave the full-time programme upon completion of the first year. Six attended on-campus programmes, and eight pursued other goals. I attempted to locate those latter students, to learn why they had left the programme, but I was unable to speak with them in person. In reflection, I still question if they were avoiding speaking with me, given my responsibility for programme administration. Further, this situation illustrates the difficulty in doing follow-up work, a concern that I had noted in working in other Aboriginal communities. It appears that when students leave the programme,

it is virtually impossible to contact them. However, to me, the experiences of the non-completers were essential in constructing the stories of Aboriginal learners in a community-based programme, but was something that I was unable to achieve within the study. Rather, I had to rely on second-hand information that I received about these students, information that I received from the local student co-ordinator, the Director of Education, and other students who had remained in the programme. From this information, it appeared that seven of these individuals had found employment in the community (five returning to positions they had held prior to commencing post-secondary study, and the remaining two finding employment in the band office) and one individual had chosen, at this time, to stay home with her family.

When I questioned the local student co-ordinator, the Director of Education, and the other students about why these students left the programme, the responses were very non-committal, however, they explained that the departing students had stated that they believed that employment was a preferable choice to study at that time. For a university administrator, this response was "ideal" and did not, in any way, reflect in a negative way on the programme. For a researcher, this response was anything but "ideal;" but rather, indicated a need for further exploration for, in any story, often what is not said is a critical component of the story. As a result of the student attrition, the PAC chose to backfill the programme with three other applicants who had achieved the required level of readiness on the standardized tests, but had been placed on a waiting list. These three new students missed the opportunity to participate in the preparatory skills courses, but were provided with tutoring services, over the summer, in an attempt to prepare them for first-year study. These 14 students formed the new cohort that was to remain for the duration of the study.

For the duration of the programme, students received tuition fees, textbooks, and financial allowances from the Tribal Council. The financial allowances were dependent upon records of attendance that were kept by the local co-ordinator. The providing of student allowances is a necessary component for students in First Nations communities involved in full-

time study. These allowances enable them to cover the basic expenses of food, clothing, and child-care while studying. As mentioned, allowances were dependent upon class attendance, and students who missed classes, for reasons other than illness, had a percentage of their allowance deducted.

The relationship between attendance and allowances is a very common occurrence in programmes within the border world, and is indicative of the power structure on the reserve. Essentially, the Chief and Council initially determine who is sponsored for post-secondary study and through monitoring attendance who continues to receive allowances, as well as who is allowed to continue in the programme. Although Aboriginal students attending on campus receive allowances, the continuation of their allowance is based upon academic success. And, within the university system in Canada, generally, attendance is not mandatory; rather, you are evaluated on academic knowledge, whether it is learned in the lecture theatre or independently in the library. The relationship between attendance and sponsorship raises some questions about learning in the border world academy as to why students may attend classes – to avoid the loss of their allowance or because they consider the programme a valuable learning experience.

Personal and academic counselling for programme participants was provided by Lorraine, the local student co-ordinator. Each Friday afternoon, she facilitated a sharing circle in which all students had an opportunity to talk about their week in school. The sharing circle, as mentioned earlier, is a traditional method of group counselling wherein a group comes together in a circular formation and each person is given time to share his or her thoughts. Protocol within the sharing circle requires that each individual must wait until the preceding speaker has completed speaking before beginning to speak.

The Chief visited the full-time programme weekly, generally on Friday mornings, in order to show local government and community support for the students. As the initiator of the programme and a member of the selection committee, he was also a stakeholder in the success of the programme. He maintained his commitment to the students for the duration of his office,

offering both official and personal support. The Chief's involvement, in this manner, reflected his leadership and understanding of community-based programming and was a critical factor in the early success of the programme. His visible support of the programme through weekly visits was also perceived as a positive contribution by the students, as was stated in both group and personal interviews over the three-year period.

My contact with the students within the first year of the programme occurred only when I visited the community and met with the students during group and personal interviews. However, the local student co-ordinator reported on the general sense of excitement and anxiety on the part of the students surrounding the initiation of a local university programme. Lorraine also relayed student comments to me, from which four positive aspects of the programme emerged. I determined that I would use these four points as a starting point, and in my group and personal interviews further explore these areas, in an attempt to begin to develop criteria for the delivery of post-secondary education in Aboriginal communities. These four points, distilled from Lorraine's comments were: the opportunity to access education at home, local support, study space, and the presence of instructors in the community.

Throughout the first year of the programme, I relied solely upon information from the local co-ordinator regarding student concerns, questions, and progress. The students used the local co-ordinator as a conduit through which messages were relayed to me at the university. Later, in the second year of the programme, after I had made personal contact with the students, they contacted me directly at the university. However, despite my ongoing personal relationship with the students, the local student co-ordinators remained a conduit for messages to the university involving contentious issues. This transfer of information via an intermediary seemed to be a common occurrence when working with Aboriginal communities. When I asked an Aboriginal educator to offer some explanation, she provided the following:

> *I presume by now that you know our culture is not one that condones open criticism of another person. I think that often, when there are issues that could be considered as a criticism, the students feel more comfortable dealing through*

> *the local co-ordinator. Also the students often feel better discussing a concern in their own language first* (J. Mason, personal communication, October 1995).

These comments appeared to support the need for a local co-ordinator, a first language Cree speaker, who has a good understanding of the culture and politics of the community, as well as knowledge surrounding the requirements for university study. The individual must be able to move easily between the two cultures, and to act as a conduit between the students and the university. The skills that Lorraine possessed in this area were contributing factors to the success of the programme in its initial year.

The Interviews

The Group Interviews

The initial group interview was held in the classroom located within the public school. The group interview was conducted in June, 1993, one week after the completion of the first year of the programme. I chose to conduct the group and personal interviews at this time, as I wanted to ensure the first year experiences were fresh in the minds of the students. There were nine women present, three of whom would remain after the group session for personal interviews. The group session was introduced by the local student co-ordinator and myself. We explained that I would like to speak to them about their experiences in the post-secondary, community-based programme, and that I hoped that they would share their ideas on both the good and not-so-good aspects of the programme. I shared with them aspects of my personal life, that I was also a student and a mother who was trying to complete a degree programme. It was important to me that the students knew me as a person, rather than just as a university administrator, and that I, like them, faced many of the difficulties of trying to study, while managing family and work responsibilities. This sharing of information was critical to feminist research and to the development of an empathic relationship between researcher and researchee. Then, moving from my personal life and the roles of student and mother, I began to focus the discussion on my role as a university administrator who was anxious to listen to their comments about the programme.

I explained that this full-time, community-based programme was one of the first such IUN programmes in northern Manitoba, and that I needed to hear their opinions in order for the university to provide improved programmes in the future. I then opened the floor for discussion: Did they think that the community-based programme was a sensible approach? From my previous experiences involving similar discussions or focus groups with Anglo-Canadian urban women I anticipated responses and debate. In this case, I received nothing but silence. Although I felt uncomfortable with the situation, I continued with the intent to initiate some group discussion. Ross (1993) describes a similar experience he faced in an Aboriginal community, which enabled me to consider what may have been happening at this moment.

> *Brant struck an even more responsive chord when he spoke about the impropriety of giving advice even when it is asked for. As the outside, white stranger coming into remote Native communities to conduct criminal courts, I was always conscious of how little I really knew. For that reason, it was my regular practice to ask people for advice, especially about what kinds of sentence I should recommend to the judge. Just as regularly I would be answered by shrugs of the shoulders or I dunno. ...*
>
> *I puzzled a long time over Dr. Brant's hypothesis about the impropriety of advice-giving. On several occasions, just to test the hypothesis, I directly asked, "Do you think I should do X?" The response was always something like "Maybe" or "You could". Then I would ask, "Do you think I should do Y?" that was exactly the opposite. I usually got the same response. Quite clearly, the real message was that it was my decision* (p. 20).

The response by the local student co-ordinator when I explicitly asked for her advice was quite clear: it was my decision. As a band member in her local community, surrounded by friends and relatives, she responded to me in a traditional manner and did not provide advice. Prior to this meeting, when she spoke with me in the university setting or on a one-to-one basis, she had moved, perhaps, into a different space, with different cultural norms – the Eurocentric sphere. This situation, although difficult, made me realize that one of her greatest skills and resources to the programme was her ability to move between two cultures. If she had provided direction and advice to me, it would have cost her credibility in her own community and negatively affected her success as a local co-ordinator. This incident reinforced the need for a local individual who, like

Lorraine, is able to function within both the Aboriginal community and the Eurocentric academy.

As described in Chapter II, my methodology evolved because of such experiences in the community, and reading widely about what others had done, including the work of Hampton (1995), Oakley (1981), and Ross (1995). As a result, I was able to move this group meeting from a process in which I posed questions for discussion and debate to a sharing circle group discussion. The group maintained their semi-circular configuration, along with their silence and only fleeting eye contact. I began to speak about the community-based education programme and about my own experiences in education.

It was at this point that I was beginning to feel a part of this border world, no longer the outsider I had been at the initial sessions one year ago. I was beginning to develop a methodology inspired by feminist research, but also appropriate for doing research with a group of Aboriginal women. The students then offered comments one at a time, each allowing the other a turn to speak. During this discussion, five themes similar to those distilled from discussions with Lorraine emerged as critical to the success of the programme: the support of family and community; the legitimization within their community of their learning experience; unlimited access to a study place; fast feedback from instructors; and a special facility for the adult learner.

Following the group interview, the instructor John (who was responsible for teaching the two courses) provided the following comments:

> *The students were keen and the local student co-ordinator was a great support to me, as a teacher, and to the students. I don't think they could have done it on their own. As you know, I used to work in the residential school system, so I have spent most of my working life with Aboriginal students. I think that was important – to have some experience with the culture – especially when you are teaching the first course. After all, I am the first contact these students will have with university learning. The majority of them had bad experiences in school systems so far, so I want to provide the best learning experience possible for them. I try to be around for the students in the evening. If they come for help, or just to talk, I think they need to know that the university is a friendly place. So much of their education has been unfriendly.*

Personal Interviews

The following is an account of the personal interviews that occurred following the group

meeting. As discussed in Chapter II, the intent was to conduct the personal interviews in the afternoon immediately following the group interviews. I selected this timing for the personal interviews to facilitate follow-up from the group interview, as well as to provide a vehicle for the interviewees to discuss issues that they were unwilling to raise in a group situation. Furthermore, the personal interviews provided a second source of information and validation of the comments within the group interviews.

Marie's Story. Marie was the oldest student in the programme. At age fifty-three, she had an intact marriage with both children and grandchildren living with her. Marie was originally from the community, but had attended residential school from ages 6 to 18 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She returned to the reserve upon graduation from grade 12, married, and began to raise a family.

When I first met with Marie, I told her a little about myself. I explained that I was starting a degree in Adult Education at the University of Kent in England, and that I wanted to write about women's experiences taking university courses in their home communities. I asked her if she would be willing to talk to me about herself. I also explained that the university would be starting another programme in a second Cree community, and would like to find out what we could change to improve Great River's programme as well as the new programme. The intent was to have a semi-structured interview in that several topics would be used as guidelines, and that there would be ample opportunity for the interviewee to ask questions. The interview with Marie was audio-taped augmented by hand-written notes.

I began the interview by asking Marie to talk about herself including where she was born, how long she had lived in the community, and a little bit about her personal life. Her comments included the following:

> *Well, I was born in this community. My father worked in the mine in Elk Island and I was born here in the nursing station. All my family lived here, they have always lived here. When I was six, I went to residential school in Winnipeg, 629 Academy Road.... the big school on the river near the park. I liked school. I liked reading and I always liked to write stories. I always read every day; since I*

have become Christian, I read the Bible every day. I wanted to be a teacher but I came home when I finished school. I hardly knew my parents... My husband noticed me and we got married in the United Church. I didn't learn how to live here, my mother-in-law helped me after I got married. Sometimes, I thought she was hard on me, but now I realize it was for my own good. She used to tell me to wash every day. I had babies right away and there were no diapers. We used clean moss for diapers. I used to go out on the trapline with my husband and my children until they had to start school. My mother-in-law taught me what to do with the animals when they were killed; she was always telling me for my own good. Now I know how to live this way. One summer, we lived across the lake at the mouth of the river in a summer fishing camp. After that, we came home and lived here in the same house we live today.

Our house is crowded; my two boys, my daughter and her two children and my husband and I all live together. I have eight children: five sons and three daughters. One of my sons ... he is in school here, is adopted, but I raised him like my own. He was the one that was just here to give me something. It is hard to study at home, it's too noisy and crowded so I come here to study. I don't drive a car or a skidoo so I have to get a ride with one of the students or my husband. My husband helps me a lot. He does all the cooking now ready for me to come home. My daughter helps me too when she can.

I am the oldest student here and I have to do well for the other students. If I don't come to class I feel bad; maybe they will stop coming to class if I do. They need someone to look to, so I try to talk to them and listen to them and help them. It's hard for some of the students. They have children and sometimes they don't have help at home like I do. Sometimes students don't get up and come to class so the local co-ordinator has to wake them up and make them come to class. That's her job. She also gets us together, sometimes even at her house, on Friday afternoon when we can talk about the week. This helps.

Marie's comments, which paralleled those provided by the Aboriginal educators in Chapter IV, reflect the important role of women as Cree teachers. It is also apparent that, as an elder student in the classroom, Marie believed it was important to act as a role model by succeeding and by offering support and encouragement to the younger students.

Although my questions had indicated that I wished to hear about Marie herself, it was interesting to note that her response was provided in the context of her family and her community. This format appeared to be the pattern when Aboriginal people told their stories. Their lives were always described within the larger context of their family and their community. It is important for researchers working with Aboriginal people to recognize this relationship between the individual and the community, and to allow their story to be told in that context.

When I asked Marie why she chose to enter university, she said:

I always wanted to be a teacher when I was in school. I tried before to take a substitute teacher's course in Brandon University 15 years ago. I went off the reserve by myself. I had to leave my son with my mother-in-law when he was six weeks old to take the one-month course. I finished the course, though, and came home. When I heard about the programme coming to the community, I was working in the school. I applied to the programme. I could take the courses here at home and I still want to be a teacher. It took me a long time, but I didn't forget what I wanted to do. My husband and my children, they want me to do it too.

Marie's comments reflected on two themes: her determination to become a teacher, and the importance of providing community-based education so she could maintain her family responsibilities. She had wanted to study education ever since she was a residential school student, but she was a product of a time and system that did not provide that choice to Aboriginal people. Marie's further comments focused on the course and the instructor, in particular his relationship with the students.

> *Yes, the programme is good. I like it. The teacher is nice. He talks to us and tries to help us. I like to read and write, so this course in Communications is not too hard. Sometimes, it's hard to take notes in English when he talks too fast. We are all Cree speakers here, you know, and English is our second language.*

From Marie's earlier comments about her crowded living conditions, I was interested to know when and how she managed to study.

> *I come to the classroom to study at night when I can get a ride. I can't study at home, but I need a ride to come to the class and sometimes I can't get one. I have a family so my studying has to work around my family so, when I study, I study alone and read my notes. If I don't understand something, I ask one of the other students who are there.*

Marie's comments echoed those of the group in expressing a preference to work on her studies alone rather than in a study group, as well as reinforcing the need for a place for the adult learner.

When I asked Marie if she had any ideas to improve the programme, her response of "*I don't know*" came after a long silence. I asked her if she had any questions for me; she responded with a simple "*no.*" During this initial interview, compared with later discussions, it is clear that Marie's comments provided only minimal information. Despite the information, such as her

background and reasons for entering university being necessary in the context of the entire study, the interview was definitely a question-and-answer session. I was not able to employ any of the principles of interview techniques developed within a feminist framework by Oakley (1981), who argued that interviews should be non-hierarchical, dialogical, and empowering processes. I attributed this failure, first, to my novice skills as an interviewer and, second, to the limited contact that Marie and I had had prior to the interview. However, this initial failure in the development of a dialogical and empathic interview is a critical part of the research process. I recognized that a relationship with the learners was critical to the development of a non-hierarchical interview, and the yearly visits would not provide the type of relationships needed. As a result, I kept in contact with the learners by telephone over the second year in an attempt to develop a sense of comfort with one another. I believed this telephone contact was helpful, as, in the second and third year of the programme, the interviews moved from a question and answer session to an opportunity for dialogue.

Joan's and Bernice's Stories. Students Joan and Bernice asked if they could do their interviews together and were interviewed together for the duration of the study. The following was prepared from hand-written notes. I began this second, personal interview much in the same way as the preceding interview. I began with asking Joan about herself. She provided the following comments and reinforced the importance of community-based education.

> *I am not from here; I am from Quebec River. Do you know where that is?* (I nod indicating yes.) *My husband is from here and has a job teaching at the school, so we live here now over in the teacherages. I finished grade 10 on my home reserve and then had a baby. I moved to Brandon and lived the next ten years on social assistance, just being a mother and looking after my son. I wanted to go back to school, but I didn't know how or where to go. There was nobody there to help me, so I just did nothing except stay home. I met my husband in Brandon when he was going to university taking his teaching. We have a little girl too, now in kindergarten, and my son is in grade 9. It was hard moving here at first. My community was different not so isolated, and I don't understand Cree that well and everyone speaks Cree here.* (Although Joan was from an Aboriginal community, their language was derived from both Cree and Ojibiway and is quite different from that northern Cree of Great River). *I am starting to feel at home here; my daughter is learning Cree at school.*
>
> *I always wanted to take something and when this full-time programme came here,*

I applied. I have to stay here right now to study because of the kids and my husband's job. I seem to be finally settled here. I have changed my band membership from my home band to Great River. I am in the Business Administration programme. I don't want to be a teacher. I want to do something in business. I always wanted to do something and now I can.

Although I had no response when I asked Marie about suggestions to improve the programme, I decided that this was a question that I would pose again to Joan. However, rather than asking for suggestions, I decided to ask Joan what she felt was important to succeed. Her response included the importance of family support and a place to study.

Both the group interview and Marie's comments had indicated that, although the women students needed a place to come together to study, most of their studying was done individually. However, I chose to ask this question one more time of Joan to determine if any different thoughts would ensue. Joan, as the others, chose to work on her own. She described her studying in the following manner:

I study best by myself. I go to the classroom and read the material over. If I get stuck, I can ask Bernice; she comes to the classroom to study herself lots of times. I don't like working with other people. I do better on my own.

The final question I asked Joan was to reflect on her experiences within the programme. I introduced this question by talking about the morning group session and highlighting some of students' comments.

I like it so far, although we have only taken one course. Time will tell. I know that I want a degree in Business and now I can get one. The room in the school is OK, but it would be better to have our own place for the course. Sometimes, it is hard for people to get into the school and study. The instructor is OK, he answers questions and tries to explain things. When he is not here, though, and I am working at night or on the weekend, I can get stuck on material. It would be great to have a way to keep in contact with them. We also have a local student co-ordinator from the band. If we need help, she is around to talk to. She also has a group meeting on Friday afternoons where we can get together and talk about the courses. Most of the people are coming and I think it is helping us keep going.

During Joan's comments, Bernice listened. She did not attempt to interrupt or make her own comments. This was the situation in all future interviews with Joan and Bernice. Neither

interrupted the other but, rather, listened and waited until their opinions were asked. Bernice responded to my question about the programme in this manner:

> *I like it, it's pretty good. The instructor is nice, not really like a professor or how I thought a professor should be. He lets us call him by his first name. He doesn't use high words and we can ask him questions. He has office hours after the class so, if we need help by ourselves, he is in the classroom at night. I have four children – two boys and two little girls – and I don't want to move to a city. I love this place. I just got divorced, but I have decided to stay here. It's home now. My boys will be going to school in Cranberry next year. I don't want them to go to school in Winnipeg; it's too hard to control them. In the residential school, they look after them and that's what I want. I can study here and get a degree in Business Administration. I like working with numbers. I want to start a business here or work for a business.*

Finally, Bernice and Joan were asked for suggestions for improvements to the programme. Their response was similar to Marie's; their only comment was the need for a better place to study.

In these first interviews, I was unable to explore areas such as curriculum and delivery of Eurocentric programmes to a First Nations community. There were several reasons why this was not possible. First, there were some very basic and logistical issues that must be dealt with, and which, as indicated, formed the crux of the discussion after the first year. Second, the students had limited interaction with academic culture on which to open discussion. And third, with my limited interview skills, I believed I needed to have more interaction with Aboriginal culture in order to open discussion on these matters. Nevertheless, initial interviews provided profiles of the learners and useful background information about their prior educational experience.

The final comments on the programme, at the close of the first year, came from discussions with the local student co-ordinator, Lorraine. I have chosen to call the section *Lorraine's Story*, although I recognized that, as Bruner (1990) says, there is a multitude of potential worlds in a story, and possible selves, and one cannot assume there is one single, simple story. Therefore, this is one of many stories about Lorraine.

Lorraine's Story. Although Lorraine was from the community, she had been away for most of her life for schooling and work, and did not know the students. However, family contacts

in the community provided her with a good understanding of the culture. Her role as student advisor included advocacy for the students as well as support and encouragement. On a more practical plane, her job required her to ensure that students attended classes and understood course objectives and their responsibilities as university students. Lorraine had found a balance between meeting university objectives and respecting the Aboriginal cultural ethic of non-interference, wherein individuals are loath to give advice or direction. This was a balance that neither of her successors was to achieve. She would visit students' houses each morning to see that they were up and then she would walk with them to class. She prefaced her arrival at their homes by explaining to the students that she was required by the university to see that they came to class, and that they could either come on their own or she could come and bring them to class. There were no attendance problems during the first year of the programme and, by the end of the year, few students needed her assistance to get up and come to class. She described her role as one of "*making education a priority for the students and the community.*"

Lorraine incorporated traditional Aboriginal ways into her role as local co-ordinator. During weekly sharing circles, wherein students reflected on the week, Lorraine would also share her experiences as co-ordinator over the week. This sharing circle, the students stated, was an important aspect of the students' support, allowing them to review their week in a supportive, non-judgemental manner, as well as bringing closure to the week of study. Lorraine provided support to the instructors as well; initially through an orientation to the community and, later, through ongoing discussions while courses were being taught. She often acted as the liaison between students and instructors as, in the early stages, many of the students did not wish to address issues directly with the instructors. It appeared that much of the success in the first year of the programme could be attributed to Lorraine, both in her support role to the students and as a bridge between two cultures.

Reflections on Year One

Upon completion of Year One, the programme was well underway. The Chief and

Council and the PAC had shown proactive and perceptive leadership in recognizing the need for university-educated community members, and the advantage of a community-based delivery mode over the relocation of students to urban centres. The Chief and Council's weekly visits and the ongoing dialogue with the PAC provided local support and a legitimization of the learning experience. The community-based programme would also expose other community members to the concept of a post-secondary education as a viable goal. Further, the post-secondary students within the community would provide much-needed role models.

From the comments from the Chief and Council, the instructor, the local co-ordinator and, most importantly, the group and personal interviews with the students, several themes emerged as central in the provision of education in Aboriginal communities. These themes provided the foundation for model for community-controlled education.

- access to education in the community
- local support of the community, family and a local co-ordinator
- the legitimization of the post-secondary learning in the community
- access to a study centre for adult learners
- a place for the adult learner
- presence of the instructors in the community
- additional faculty contact hours
- pre-teaching cultural orientation

1. <u>Access to education in the community</u>. All of the students stressed the importance of access to education in their home community, and stated that they would not be able to enter post-secondary study if they had to leave their families and community to study on-campus. With the exception of Marie, all students in the group and personal interviews had reflected on their previous unsuccessful schooling experiences. They had all been required to leave their community to study, and all had returned without completing the prescribed plan of study.

2. <u>Local support</u>. Students stressed the importance of support from spouses, children,

parents, the Chief and Council, and the community at large, and attributed it to their success as learners. They spoke of the Chief making visits to the classroom to provide his personal support as well as the support of his office.

Three types of support have been identified for a successful return to education for women in general: attitudinal, emotional, and functional (Lewis, 1988a). For the women learners in Great River, attitudinal support was received through the legitimization of university study by the Chief and Council, through locating the programme within the school system, and through ongoing visits to the centre. Emotional support was received from family, friends, and the local student co-ordinator. Functional support was received in a practical sense from spouses, parents, and older children, in terms of assistance with household tasks, childcare, and transportation to class and study sessions.

The role of the local co-ordinator was recognized as essential by all stakeholders. In the first year of the programme, she acted as a bridge between, and a resource for, the university and the community, through her understanding of both parties. She also provided much needed student support. This role was particularly crucial given that this was the students' first venture into the world of post-secondary study, and often after earlier negative school experiences. Of particular importance were the Friday afternoon sharing circles that all students attended. These sessions, they said, provided them with an opportunity to share thoughts about their experiences as students in a non-threatening, non-judgmental atmosphere, utilizing a traditional Aboriginal approach. The support received through the sharing circle could be called "traditional support" and could be considered the fourth type of support needed along with attitudinal, emotional and functional support.

3. <u>The legitimization of the learning experience</u>. The students stressed the need for the community members to recognize the community-based, post-secondary programme as an important part of their community structure, and the attendance at the programme as a legitimized contribution to the well-being of the community. These comments reflected the need for post-

secondary education to become a part of the culture of Great River. From an institutional perspective, this need could be met by the successful completion of a university degree by community members. However, to me as a researcher within this study, this posed a major question involving the exploration of what appropriate education might mean or, as Kirkness (1995) suggests, "the university must be able to present itself in ways that have instrumental value to Aboriginal students" (p. 33).

4. A place to study with unlimited access. Given their family responsibilities, many students scheduled study times late in the evenings and on weekends. In studying about the study habits of mature, female learners in rural and remote communities, Effeh (1992) found that these learners could not establish a study schedule; rather, they had to co-ordinate study times around the many variable tasks associated with home and family. The learners in Great River also spoke of working around existing obligations to meet study demands. They all identified difficulties in studying at home due to noise; lack of space; lack of access to computer, phone, and fax facilities; and constant interruptions. Although the classroom was used as a study centre by all students and was viewed as essential, some students expressed frustration around getting into the school after hours. In spite of the fact that all of the women reported attending the study centre, they all preferred to work independently though they were in close physical proximity with other learners. Although study groups had been set up by the instructor, none of the students had worked within these assigned groups. The study groups were discontinued due to lack of student response.

The choice by the students to work independently in the study centre appeared, at first, incongruent with my understanding of their culture, one stressing the importance of collectivity and co-operation. However, Kroskrity (1987), who has studied culturally-based, learning preferences for Aboriginal people, found that observation, followed by independent mastery of the skill or concept, followed by testing at a time selected by the learner, were traditional Aboriginal ways of learning. A similar description of Aboriginal learning was given, at length, by an Aboriginal colleague who described the acquisition of skills necessary for the trapline. She

identified a process wherein everyone, each of whom was responsible for a specific task, came together to observe the entire activity. Then each person worked independently until they felt competent in their particular skill, at which time they returned to the group.

5. A place for the adult learner. Students articulated that they needed a place for adult learning within the community, but separate from the local school. The local school, with its child-sized desks, grade-school mentality, and nine-to-four schedule, did not meet the needs of these adult learners. Further, as the majority of the students did not have fax or telephone services in their homes, these services needed to be made available, and the use of the public school did not provide for these services after hours. The women also found that being at the school with their children all day resulted in frequent interruptions. A telephone in the classroom, provided so that adult students could keep in close contact with their homes in case of emergencies, resulted in many telephone calls that were not emergencies. These frequent interruptions regarding mothering and family matters made it more difficult for the students to move from the role of mother to student. There was a sense that, having made the decision to study, they now needed their own space including a classroom, study hall, and lounge where they could go at any time of the day. Overcrowding at home was a reoccurring complaint, as was the need for a place in which to study. Roseanna, one student in the group, states:

> *We need a space. Our houses are crowded – there is just no room there. I have a phone, but when I can't pay the bill it gets cut off, so I can't phone the prof if I need help. I just need to get away from my place so I can get something done. I have to get into the place anytime, and it would be great to have a couple of chairs and some coffee, where we could talk*

6. The presence of the instructors in the community. The student comments reflected on the importance of instructors coming to their community to deliver courses. Their comments were reflective of ideas presented by Pringle (1997) whose findings indicated the importance of a personal relationship between the instructor and Aboriginal students.

7. Additional Faculty Contact Hours, access to instructors and fast feedback on questions, problems and concerns. *The importance of additional contact time with faculty members in the*

form of study halls was recognized as critical to the success of the programme. For the majority of the students, this was their first encounter with a university credit course, having limited academic preparation and being second language speakers of English, and the extra contact was critical.

Students relied on the study centre's fax and telephone facilities to contact instructors who had left the community for several days. The issue of availability of instructors remains an important one to address. Because students often studied at non-traditional times, they could not reach their instructor at the time when help was required. Students are aware that they cannot expect to reach instructors at midnight, but they would like some guarantee that, if they were to send a fax at midnight, they could receive a response the following day.

8. Pre-teaching cultural orientation. The importance of a pre-teaching cultural orientation was identified by the PAC at the onset of the programme. However, the orientation should include an understanding of Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning, as well as information specific to Great River. From my own perspective as a researcher searching for an appropriate methodology for research for and with Aboriginal women, I realized the need for a cultural orientation.

These eight themes focused on the logistical aspects of the programme. Comments on the suitability of instructors and relevancy of the curriculum were not mentioned. It appeared that, at this point in the programme, concerns centred around meeting the most basic of physical needs of the learners.

In my own personal reflections on Year One, I came to be painfully aware that my interviewing skills needed improvement: how could I create a situation in which open, reflexive and critical dialogue might be more possible? What would be the implications for my role, what I said and did? My experience with the first group interview led me to see the need for an evolving methodology suitable to the community and culture in which I was working. Solving these dilemmas was not easy. I had explored aspects of feminist research as well as the utilization of

oral history as a tool of feminist scholarship, only to find that certain techniques did not work within an Aboriginal setting. Minister (1991), in discussing a group interview with women, describes a situation where several women will take a turn speaking, while one women supposedly holds the floor. She considers this mode to be appropriate to women's communication patterns, and one that feminist researchers should encourage. In an Aboriginal community, this style would be most inappropriate, as one must always let another finish speaking. Interrupting a speaker is neither respectful nor acceptable in Aboriginal culture.

I believed that I was beginning to develop a personal relationship with the students. I sought to experiment with a more empathetic interview, including attempts to share my own personal and academic situation with them. I found that this was difficult – much more difficult than I imagined – as I, too, needed to feel comfortable with them. At the onset of this study, I noted that I did not feel comfortable with the students, although I did not understand why, and that my lack of comfort inhibited my ability to share my thoughts as openly as I had hoped. Because the literature did not appear to document any examples of the interviewer's discomfort with the participants, I was beginning to think that I was the only researcher with such feelings. In my case, I believe my discomfort was a product of my lack of experience in doing interviews, my ethnicity as a Euro-Canadian women doing research with Aboriginal women, and my constant struggle to balance my roles as university administrator and researcher. However, when I did try to share my personal thoughts with them, I noted the students listened, neither rushing me to finish speaking, nor interrupting me. This interaction provided a practical lesson in listening for me.

I was still concerned about the existence of a hierarchy between the students and myself, particularly given my position in the university, my race and my home in a southern urban centre. Minister (1991) argues that a hierarchical relationship between the interviewee and interviewer presents a methodological problem when trying to use a feminist frame for the interviews. She

states the importance of an initial meeting prior to the interview to develop a relationship other than that of a researcher and a researchee. A feminist frame also suggests the need for an empathic, dialogical, and egalitarian interview, and the need for both the interviewee and the interviewer to ask and respond to questions. Patai (1991) raises serious concerns about the ethics of white, middle-class, North American academics doing research with women from the developing world. She argues that it is the privileged existence of these academics that enables the research to take place, and that the purported solidarity of female identity is fraudulent in a world divided by race, ethnicity and class. I found many similarities to my situation with Aboriginal women. Was I doing this research to improve the education system for Aboriginal women, or merely to get a doctoral degree and improve my own situation? I chose to believe the former, although it was a matter about which I often thought.

Finally when Marie spoke of attending residential school, I feared that she was about to enter an area with which I could not deal. I believed very strongly, particularly after discussions with Aboriginal people involved in healing functions for former residential school students, that to open up some of these issues would, in itself, be abusive to the students. I decided, at the onset of the study, that if topics of abuse in residential school were opened, I would explain to the participants that, although I could sympathise with their experience, I did not have the skills to help them. I recognized this decision would affect the research for, in essence, I asked no questions about the residential school system; any such discussion was initiated by the students. However, Marie's comments about residential school were matter-of-fact, and made no reference to the abuse so often found in these schools. In the discussion about residential schools, I also discovered that the school she attended was within my home neighbourhood in Winnipeg. I silently remembered this school, driving past with my parents and observing the Indian children playing. During that time of my life, I had no idea of the conditions within that school and thought the residential school practice was perfectly acceptable. I never mentioned this to Marie at the initial interview, but I harboured much guilt as if my neighbours and family had, by their

silence, supported an unjust system. It was not until well into the study that I shared these thoughts with some former residential school students, including Marie, and my fears in telling them that I had stood outside their walls.

At the end of Year One, I knew the study had potential. The students had shared some valuable comments with me, and I looked forward, with both anticipation and apprehension, to an ongoing relationship.

CHAPTER VI: YEAR TWO

Introduction

The second year of the programme commenced in September 1993 with 14 students, all of whom were to remain in the programme for the duration of the study. During the second year, two significant events occurred that had an impact on the programme: a change in local government and the resignation of the local student co-ordinator. In early 1994, the Chief who had been responsible for the initiation of the university programme was defeated in an election by a community health worker. The new Chief's term continued until the spring of 1996. During his tenure as Chief, he visited neither the students nor the local co-ordinator, and, despite numerous attempts by myself and other university personnel, we were unable to meet with him to discuss any aspects of the programme. This lack of communication was a very different experience from the previous year, when the university administrators, myself included, had ongoing contact with the Chief, and the students met with him on a weekly basis. The new Chief had never left the community, had completed grade six in the local school, and possessed limited English skills. His lack of familiarity and comfort with the education system and the English language may have accounted for his lack of communication with the university and students.

I spoke with Daniel, the new local student co-ordinator, about the new Chief and his apparent lack of involvement with the post-secondary programme. He said that he had "*problems with the guy, too – never gets back to me.*" I also contacted Marie and Joan, two of the students. (I was beginning to learn the importance of the informal network when working in this border world.) Although Marie did not advise me (a typical Aboriginal response), she informed me that the new Chief was an uncle of one of the students, Lorne. I contacted Lorne and asked him if he had any suggestions about how I might make contact with his uncle. He said that he, too, was unable to make contact with the new Chief. Although these informal communications did not facilitate a meeting with the Chief, I felt better knowing that I was not the only person experiencing these problems with the new local administration. The new Chief assigned a

counsellor to oversee the local university programme and to attend the PAC. Generally, within Aboriginal communities, elected counsellors are assigned various portfolios by the Chief. Although a member of the PAC, this counsellor did not attend any of the meetings or make any written or personal contact with the PAC.

This situation with the new Chief and Council was also my first experience with the hierarchical power structure within a reserve and the insulation from the people that the Chief can develop within the community. It was virtually impossible for me or the students to meet with him or any of the band council members, and it became apparent that this programme was a project of the previous regime and a low priority of the present band council. This image of the Chief and Council that I encountered, in particular, the lack of connection with the community, is not new. It has been documented by Adams (1995) as a condition with the current Aboriginal neo-colonialist government system. This image also pervades modern Native literature, e.g., in Ian Ross's play *Farewell,* the comical depiction of the local government reflects this sentiment.

In addition to the change in local government, the local student co-ordinator had resigned from her position in October 1993, for personal reasons. Lorraine was replaced by Daniel, a man from the community who had been a student for one year in the BUNTEP programme, had attended Brandon University campus for one year, and had worked for the past ten years as a fishing guide. His own campus university experiences had not been successful, and he had chosen to return home. Although the university administrators were concerned that his education and experience were not sufficient for him to fill the role of local student co-ordinator, Daniel was the only person in the community who possessed any university experience. This situation presented, and continues to present, a dilemma for the university. As the university administrator responsible for the programme, I recognized that the student co-ordinator must be someone who was acceptable to the community and possessed an intimate understanding of its culture. However, I also recognized that the individual must understand the culture of the university and have the ability to act as a cultural translator between the worlds of the university and the

community.

In this study, I define an understanding of the culture of the university as the knowledge and the understanding of policies and procedures within a university system. For example, I do not suggest that the local student co-ordinator should be able to answer all questions about specific degree requirements, but, rather, that this individual should know how and whom to contact within the university system in order to locate answers to student questions.

In this particular situation in Great River, the university administration reluctantly accepted the recommendation of the community, believing that Daniel's university experience, although unsuccessful in academic terms, had provided him with a basic understanding of the academy. Furthermore, his long-time residency in the community, broken only by a sojourn to university, also provided a valuable community and cultural resource to the university and the instructors. The doubt and uncertainty that I experienced around the suitability of Daniel as a local student co-ordinator signalled to me a kind of breakdown of the partnership, a partnership in which the initial intent was that any individual appointed to the position be acceptable to both the community and the university. At this juncture, my own mixed feelings of administrator and researcher was again to the fore; in the need, as an administrator, to see the programme succeed and in the need, as a researcher, to observe events from which the story of the programme emerged.

Daniel expressed dissatisfaction with the provision of student support. Unlike Lorraine, he was inexperienced with the facilitation of traditional Aboriginal aspects of support such as the weekly sharing circle that he discontinued. He also expressed apprehension with other aspects of his work such as ensuring that students attended classes. Although Lorraine focused much of her time on personal support for the students, Daniel focused on the administrative aspects of the position: transporting instructors to and from the plane, submitting attendance reports, and opening and closing the centre at the appropriate times. Daniel's inability to provide student support was evident in the comments provided by the students in both group and personal

interviews.

Although I had reluctantly accepted Daniel as the local student co-ordinator, I was still concerned about his lack of strength in the provision of student support, as well as his lack of experience with the university system – both areas critical to the delivery of the programme. However, I was hesitant to raise these matters too loudly, for fear of being perceived as an authoritarian, university administrator and jeopardizing the relationships that I was beginning to develop within the border world. In retrospect, I recognize, I made a grave mistake. My acceptance of Daniel as the local student co-ordinator had resulted in the students receiving inadequate student support, both academically and personally.

Overview of Year Two

Although the first-year students had expressed a desire for a study place separate from the public school, the programme was still housed in the local school during its second year, moving to a separate location only in the third year of the programme. The PAC chose to locate the programme in the school for an additional year until classrooms within a trailer could be prepared for use. In the second year, the students began taking university courses on a full-time basis.

One area of concern to me was the selection of courses for the programme. Delivery of a community-based programme is costly, requiring sessional teaching stipends for each course as well as weekly return air travel, food, and housing for the travelling instructor. As a result, courses were selected to serve the maximum number of students rather than focusing on the interests of individuals. A selection of courses were proposed by the university administration and presented to the PAC for approval.

Course selection was based on two criteria identified by the PAC at the initial stage of the programme. First, courses should be common to both areas of study: education and business administration degrees. Courses were selected on the basis of meeting core requirements for one programme while satisfying the elective requirement of the other. Second, it was decided to offer some courses with Aboriginal content each year. Although it was recognized by the PAC and the

university administration that all courses delivered within the programme should have an appropriate cultural content, this was not always the situation that resulted, for some degree courses offered in Aboriginal communities were carbon copies of those delivered to an urban southern audience. It appeared that the incorporation of appropriate cultural content in university courses delivered in First Nations community was dependent upon the instructor. Some instructors did manage to adapt the course material to become more relevant for their Aboriginal, community-based students, while others lacked the skill, the experience, or the desire to do so. Therefore, the PAC determined that the selection of courses would include the areas of Native Studies and Canadian Literature, areas that, by their course titles and course calendar descriptions, would appear to present a content relevant to the Aboriginal, community-based students.

I maintained contact with the students during the second year of the programme, both directly and through the student co-ordinator. During the second year, I made three visits to the community. On the first visit, I attended a PAC meeting and made informal contacts with the students. On the second visit, I conducted both group and personal interviews with the students. The third visit involved a two-day visit to the community with my thesis supervisor, Linden West. During his visit, he met with students studying within the education degree stream, a community-based instructor teaching within the education degree, and with the local student co-ordinator. I observed and shared in the discussions he held with the students, the instructor, and the local student co-ordinator.

I had asked my supervisor, Linden West, to come to the community to experience the culture and meet with the students involved in the study. A summary and discussion of his visit to the community are included in the section *Linden's Visit.*

In Year One, the only university course offered had been a preparatory level course in Communications. The second year of the programme marked the introduction of a full complement of first-year university courses, and all but two students moved from mature student

status to regular student status through the successful completion of their first-year courses. The importance of this achievement to the students was reflected upon in students' comments in their group and personal interviews. Within Aboriginal culture, an accomplishment such as this should have resulted in a community feast or some other form of traditional celebration (Epstein, 1995). This celebration would have strengthened the bridge between the academy and the community, in a celebration of an academic success in a traditional Cree manner. However, the new Chief and Council did not maintain the previous regime's contact with the students and the centre, and the local student co-ordinator representing the university did not appear to recognize the necessity of a celebration to honour the students' achievements. The lack of recognition, a new student advisor with limited skills, and a disinterested Chief and Council, made the second year of the programme a difficult time for the students. Given these problems, it is surprising that the group did as well as they did in their academic studies.

During the fall term of 1993, students were involved in five courses: three English courses (including a course in Written Expression, English Literature, and Canadian Literature), one of two preparatory mathematics courses, and an introductory geography course. In addition, the English course was preceded by a preparatory course in literature. This preparatory course was delivered on the advice of the English instructor, Wesley, who was responsible for the teaching of these courses and who had previously taught for many years in the north. I found his experience and apparent understanding of Aboriginal students to be a valuable resource. I conducted a personal interview with him upon the completion of the three English courses. The following comments and quotations are drawn from this tape-recorded and transcribed personal interview. As with the students' interviews, the material and interpretation was provided and discussed with him prior to incorporation into the study.

Wesley explained that, as Aboriginal culture was rooted in the Oral Tradition, students had little exposure to reading and literature. He noted that few students read anything but the local band paper, and that the reading materials in most houses consisted of a few magazines.

None of the students in the programme owned a dictionary prior to beginning their studies, and there was no public library in the community. The preparatory course attempted to put reading into their culture by introducing students to use, in the instructor's description, "*the world of words*." He attempted this introduction by first reading aloud to the students and then by having students read aloud within the class setting. He attempted to select authors who wrote about Aboriginal people or retold traditional Aboriginal stories, so that the students' first exposure to literature might be through books with a relevant content. He provided the following comments:

> *In Great River, I didn't always find Aboriginal authors. I looked for stories that I thought would be relevant. Although the students didn't comment in a negative way about non-Native authors, I made the decision to locate and introduce Aboriginal authors when I offered this course in other Aboriginal communities. The students in Great River never mentioned the concept of appropriation of voice but, when I think about their limited previous academic experiences, I doubt they were even aware of the concept "appropriation of voice." But, the concept and criticism would eventually become apparent, and it was important that Native people told their own stories.*

One of the three English courses was a writing course, in which students wrote stories on topics of their choice. This course was selected in order to assist students in improving their writing skills and to provide an opportunity for students to express themselves in writing. This course was following by a traditional university English course providing a genre approach to modern literature and included a Dickens novel, a Shakespeare play, and selected poems. The course was selected because it was a requirement for graduation for both education and business administration. It was a difficult course for students, as only one of the 14 had ever heard of Charles Dickens and, even though all of the students had heard of Shakespeare, none had ever seen or read any of his plays.

It was in these situations that I again realized the great differences and gulf between the culture of the university and the culture of the community. The culture of the academy assumes that students entering first-year university would bring a specific "suitcase" of knowledge with them: knowledge that they had acquired within school and within their home and community. Bordieu (1977) described this knowledge as cultural capital, and defined it as:

> *The statistics of theatre, concert, and, above all, museum attendance (since in the last case, the effect of economic obstacles is more or less nil) are sufficient reminder that the inheritance of cultural wealth that has been accumulated and bequeathed by previous generations only really belongs (although it is theoretically offered to everyone) to those endowed with the means of appropriating it for themselves* (p. 488).

Bordieu argues that the presence of cultural capital in educational institutions does not promote equality, but rather functions to reproduce and sanction ascribed inequalities. Giroux (1983), building upon the work of Bordieu, provides the following understanding of cultural capital: "*a set of meanings, qualities of style, modes of thinking and types of dispositions that are accorded a certain social value and status…*" (p. 88).

Although these Aboriginal learners did not bring the expected suitcase of Eurocentric knowledge, they did bring a rich and diverse suitcase of Indigenous knowledge. Grant and Gillespie (1993) argue that mainstream education within the Canadian system does not recognize Aboriginal cultural capital, and the necessity to do so in the creation of an inclusive and appropriate learning experience for Aboriginal people. The problem of the "openness" of the academy to this Indigenous knowledge is discussed at length in Chapter VIII of this study. It appeared that Wesley, the English instructor, had an understanding of the students; where they were coming from, as well as the skill level that they would need to achieve in order to be successful within the academy. He believed in the need for the students to have exposure to, and knowledge of, English literature, as a part of their academic study, but recognized that English literature was not a part of their cultural heritage.

Wesley's approach is supported by Hampton (1995), who asserts that Inupiat children in Alaska are required to read books in English about trees, books written and developed for students residing in the southern United States. Hampton argues that it is not the information about trees that he objects to but, rather, the assumption that everyone has seen trees and that trees are common to their culture.

A final English course in Canadian literature was offered in the second year. The reading

materials in the course included two items that were selected to provide a cultural relevance to the course: a novel about an Aboriginal community written by a non-Native author, and a play about an Aboriginal community by a Northern Cree playwright, Thompson Highway. The students' response to the novel was positive. They expressed a sense of relief in having left the writings of Shakespeare and Dickens behind to study a novel that included references to Aboriginal life. The students did not make any reference to the author of the novel being a non-Aboriginal writer, writing about Aboriginal people. Although the students expressed positive comments about incorporation of the work of an Aboriginal playwright, they voiced negative concerns about the excessive use of profanity in the play, as well as the harsh depiction of reserve life. Despite these concerns about the Canadian literature course, and a lower overall class average than in the other English courses, the student evaluations revealed that it was in this course that they found the learning experience rewarding and relevant. I discussed these course comments with the Director of the local Education Authority who said that she had found that Aboriginal students often evaluated a course positively, regardless of their grades, if they believed they learned something. This phenomenon is not, however, unique to Aboriginal adult learners, but rather reflects a fundamental principle of adult learning, in that a relevant content with which the learners can engage and interact is more critical than their academic grade in their evaluation of their learning experience (Knowles, 1978).

The preparatory mathematics courses were well received by the students. There were two courses offered, and students' participation in either or both courses was dependent upon their entry-level skills in mathematics as well as the mathematical competency level they wished to attain. There was only one mathematics course in the original programme plan, but, when the instructor arrived and determined the wide range of mathematics entry skills, it was decided to offer both courses in order to accommodate all students. Students entering the courses had an opportunity to participate in a standardized competency test to determine their skill level in basic mathematics, and to begin at the level of study reflecting their competency. However,

participation in the entry-level test was not mandatory and students who did not wish to participate could begin at the level of their choice. Only one student did not participate in the competency tests and that was due to illness. Both courses were offered through a self-directed study mode, with the instructor providing formal instruction to small groups of students.

Groups were comprised of students who were all working on the same concept or unit. Although the language of formal instruction was English, students generally spoke Cree within their small groups and when explaining concepts to one another. As students mastered the concept in the group, they moved to the next unit, often joining a different group of students. This model was well accepted by the students, as it allowed them more control over their learning, along with the opportunity to progress at their own speed. Although the students were divided into groups according to their level of competency and for purposes of small group lectures, each student determined individually when they were ready for the unit tests.

My informal discussions with three students and the mathematics instructor in the second year of the programme indicated that all of the mathematics students reported unsuccessful experiences with mathematics courses in the school system. Many expressed fears about having to study mathematics – a subject that they said they "just couldn't do." Therefore, student success in these mathematics courses was two-fold. Academically, they had succeeded in achieving a grade 12 equivalency in mathematics and, personally, they had succeeded in an area of study that they had previously believed was impossible for them.

The other course delivered in the fall term of 1993 was a first-year human geography course. During my visit to the community to attend the PAC meeting, I had an initial opportunity to speak with the students informally after the class, as well as by telephone. I spoke to the instructor by telephone several times; she suggested that this survey course in geography, selected to provide students with an overview of the diverse cultures of the world and, as well, to serve elective requirements, was particularly difficult for the students. Throughout the course, student comments to the local student advisor reflected confusion and questions such as "*Why are we*

studying about this, it has nothing to do with us?"

Another area of concern in the delivery of this course involved the instructor who was Eastern European and herself a second-language speaker of English. The students had problems understanding even simple conversations with her. The instructor said that she had difficulty understanding the students, as she had never before been exposed to a Native Canadian accent, which is quite different from other Canadian accents. The instructor also expressed concerns to the university about the students' lack of general knowledge about continents, countries, and cultures of the world. She said that the classroom and community lacked simple resources for teaching geography such as a globe and atlases.

The instructor's comments suggest a clash of culture, whereby an instructor begins teaching a course with expectations that the students will bring the same suitcase of knowledge into the classroom that would be brought by an urban, Canadian student. This situation indicated the need for both a better instructor orientation and for greater imagination and empathy on the part of the instructor.

Weil (1989), in a study in which she asks adult learners to draw upon their own learning experiences and suggest ways that instructors might provide a more appropriate learning environment, finds that "*the notion of personal stance in teaching and learning*" is critical within an adult learning environment (p.166). Adult learners, she says, stress the need for instructors to position themselves towards their students, rather than solely towards their materials. In positioning herself towards the students, the geography instructor would have recognized that the knowledge base and profile of the learners within northern, Aboriginal communities is distinctly different from that of urban, Canadian students. In Great River, none of the 14 students had ever been out of the Province of Manitoba. They were unfamiliar with the geography of North America and were unaware of the capital cities of the other Canadian provinces. Six of the students had never seen a globe of the world, and not one of them had a globe or atlas at home. The only contacts the students had with people from non-Aboriginal culture had been with

Anglo-Canadian teachers and one teacher from the Caribbean. Although 12 of the 14 students passed the course, their comments indicated that they did not find this learning experience to be relevant to their lives. Relevancy, Weil suggests, is also a critical component in the delivery of appropriate adult learning experiences. She found that *"for many adults in the study, there seemed to be a vital need to make connections: with one's life, with other disciplines ..."* (p. 174).

During the second term of the 1993-94 school year (January to June 1994), courses were offered in biology, psychology, Native studies, economics, education and computer science. These courses, as were all others, were selected by the PAC from a list of courses provided by the university administrator, all of which served the degree requirements (outlined in the general university calendar) for students in either the business administration or education degree streams. At this point, I also want to stress that the basic degree requirements for students, whether they be studying on-campus or in a community-based programme, are identical. Any changes or modifications in degree requirements need the approval of the university senate. Because the students in Great River chose to participate in the business administration and education degree programmes, there was less flexibility in course selection than if students had selected a general studies degree programme, in which students chart their own stream of study without having to meet major and minor degree requirements. In Great River, this general studies option was presented to the students on several occasions, but all students chose to stay within the business administration and education degree programmes.

In addition to university credit offerings, students received a one-week personal awareness group-building session conducted by the Associate Director of Education from another Cree community that was also the site of a full-time university programme. The session had been offered the preceding fall in the neighbouring community and was offered at Great River at the request of the students. These sessions met with positive responses, particularly as the group facilitator was also a Cree speaker and much of the discussion could be done in their native language. The group-building sharing circle was particularly appropriate at this time in the

programme, as Daniel has just become the new student advisor and had discontinued the sharing circle. The one-week session was the only traditional Aboriginal student support offered within this term.

The biology course, a requirement for education students, was delivered by a Metis woman from Winnipeg. The instructor had recently completed graduate training in biology, entering university as a mature student and a single mother. The students found much of the terminology in the biology text difficult, and the insightful instructor identified this as a second-language issue. As the instructor was not a Cree speaker, she arranged for two students, whom she believed had academic strengths in biology, to discuss lecture concepts in Cree and to act as peer tutors. They turned out to be extremely helpful additions to the class. She also encouraged students to ask questions of these peer tutors in Cree at any time during the lecture. Sometimes the peer tutors could not answer the questions, but the group discussions that followed often provided the answers. The instructor also attempted to use community resources wherever possible. Field trips taken by snowmobile and boat utilized local examples of flora and fauna to replace indoor laboratory activities. All of the students enrolled in this course achieved a passing grade.

The psychology course was taken by all students and was a degree requirement for education and business administration students. Although this course was anticipated with pleasure, and all students completed it successfully, student evaluations were largely negative. The course was highly structured and the academic department requested that the on-campus multiple-choice tests and exams be used for the community-based programme as well. Despite requests by the instructor to be allowed to use alternate evaluation methods, because she considered the multiple-choice format to be an inappropriate evaluation technique for Aboriginal students, the department maintained its position in order to provide consistency and fairness in testing psychology students in various locations, and to provide the department with what they considered to be a reliable testing instrument.

The instructor's concern about the unsuitability of multiple-choice tests for Aboriginal students is supported by both Hampton (1993) and Kohl (1984). Hampton argues that Anglo-American children are told what moves to make, have their actions described to them as they do them, and then are questioned about their actions. Among his Aboriginal friends, he argues, children learn by observation and example rather than by telling and questioning. Hampton argues that the Anglo-American dialogue prepares one for multiple-choice tests, whereas the Aboriginal model of child rearing does not. He suggests that university administrators and faculty members should find more appropriate methods of evaluation when working with Aboriginal students, methods that are more congruent with the traditional Aboriginal ways of learning and teaching.

I believe that the academy failed the community in the delivery of this course. In spite of the members of the Psychology Department within the university having an opportunity to explore more compatible forms of evaluation, their intransigence pervaded the delivery of the course.

The use of this prescribed formulaic method of evaluation begs a much larger question about the role of evaluation in the design and delivery of university courses. Evaluation literature suggests the importance of incorporating assessment at the design stage of a university course and to state the level of skill, knowledge, and competencies that the students should have achieved upon completion of the course. The evaluation process should not be designed to restrict the academic faculty to the use of formulaic methods of evaluation such as multiple choice quizzes, but, rather, to allow the development of multiple methods of evaluation suitable to the students' learning styles and cultural background. It is also possible to argue that assessment and evaluation tools are used by the academy to construct knowledge, and to exclude certain types of knowledge; that the discourse of testing shapes how knowledge is understood, and determines what the academy considers to be valid knowledge (hooks, 1990; Grant and Gillespie, 1992). This situation can be disempowering to adult learners because what the individual learners may

themselves value as learning may not be recognized within the assessment process in the academy. The knowledge constructed by adult learners can be seen as a building upon and making sense of their experiences, and discounting this knowledge is disregarding the importance of their experiences (Wildermeersch, 1989).

Two courses in Native studies were offered in this term. One focused on the historical and the political aspects of Native people, and one on the cultures and traditions of Native people. Both courses were taught by a non-Aboriginal woman. Despite attempts to hire Aboriginal instructors, the decided lack of Aboriginal people holding post-graduate degrees made it difficult to find a Native person with appropriate academic qualifications who was available to teach in the north for a six-week period.

The Native studies courses were selected for delivery by the members of the PAC in an attempt to provide a culturally relevant learning experience. Aboriginal students have long experienced cultural discontinuity within the education system, and courses that seek to represent Aboriginal history, culture, and identity were often excluded from the Canadian mainstream system (Grant and Gillespie, 1992). Although the courses were supposed to be of cultural relevance to the students, there was little academic success. Some students did not register for the course, others withdrew prior to the date for academic penalty; only 5 completed the first course, and 2 completed the second. In addition, the local student co-ordinator informed me that attendance was becoming a problem and that many complained of a shortage of time to complete the required academic work. When I spoke to several students on the telephone about my concerns, their comments reflected a shortage of time and family commitments. When I made reference to the instructor, the students avoided the topic and their response cited a difficulty in completing work or accessing library materials. I was surprised at the reaction to the courses and by the responses I was receiving given my previous discussion with these students, in which comments about the instructor were always an important component. I wondered if this omission might be equated to dissatisfaction as First Nations people tend to be reluctant to criticize others,

and are more likely to escape from the situation, as they did in this case. I also recognized that I could not probe the situation further by telephone or through discussions with the local student co-ordinator, and chose to leave the matter until I interviewed the students for my research.

A computer course comprised of a broad overview of computing and the impact of computers on society was offered over the winter term. All but one student attained a passing grade in the course. Student evaluations were positive. The course included a hands-on component in which students received limited exposure to word processing. The learner feedback revealed that the students would have liked more hands-on time on the computers. The students also had an essay assignment dealing with computer applications such as band records in their own community. This assignment was also viewed by the learners as a relevant learning activity.

The business administration students were required to take an introductory economics course. A non-Native, urban male whose grandparents had worked in Cree communities and who had spent many summers on northern reserves taught this course. All students successfully completed this course. Students commented on the approachability of the instructor and on his involvement in the community including playing hockey in the evenings at the local rink. He was the first instructor who had been involved in the community in this manner and I believe that he added a positive dimension to the programme. When the students were asked about the course, they first described his personal involvement in the community, followed by comments about his teaching of the economics course.

This personal relationship with the instructor outside of the classroom appeared to be significant to the students, and a contributing factor to their academic success in the course. As Wilson (1994) has observed, many Aboriginal students rely heavily on the personal relationship that exists between themselves and the instructor, and this relationship is critical to their academic success. The importance of a relationship with the instructor is not particular, I believe, to Aboriginal students, but is relevant to all adult learners (Weil, 1989).

The students' comments about the economics curriculum indicated that the instructor tried to make the course relevant by introducing units on bartering systems, northern economic development, and poverty; none of which are usually a part of an on-campus economics course. The course evaluations all indicated that the students believed they had learned worthwhile information.

The final course, Introduction to Teaching, offered within the same academic year involved only education students. Harvey, the course instructor, was a retired school principal who had recently completed a doctoral dissertation in second-language teaching in a cross-cultural environment. He also had extensive experience providing teacher education programmes in former British colonies in the Caribbean in which many of his students were products of a colonial education. Thus, Harvey was an experienced cross-cultural communicator and was aware of the need for teachers to find culturally appropriate ways to transmit knowledge. He transferred these skills to the classroom in Great River, creating a learning situation in which the students felt free to offer opinions.

Group Interviews

In the group interview with Year-Two students, I established a better rapport with the students than had occurred in the initial interviews in the first year. I had been involved with the students throughout the year, many of whom had contacted me directly. I, in turn, had sometimes contacted them by telephone at the centre. I had also met informally with many of them on my previous visit when I attended the PAC meeting. Despite my initial feelings of discomfort dealing with the students by telephone, I did not detect any discomfort on their part. Instructors, teaching in the community-based programme, who were unable to fly into the community due to inclement weather conditions, have made the same observations. Several students informed me that, due to geographic isolation, they often dealt with lawyers, counselors, and others by telephone.

Present at the group meeting were six female students, three of whom were to be

involved in personal interviews following the group session. The group interview was held in the school classroom; the local student co-ordinator although present prior to the interview did not remain with the students. The group interviews with the students following the first year of the programme had focused mainly on the logistical aspects of a community-based programme. In the group interviews following the second year, I attempted to move beyond those areas, and to create a situation in which students might more openly and critically articulate some of their experiences and their possible implications surrounding curriculum and delivery. Hand-written notes were taken during the group interviews; in several cases quotes were recorded verbatim but generally notes were taken reflecting the sentiments of the students.

Several concerns emerged from the group interview, ranging from classroom location, course scheduling, to cultural relevancy of curriculum, selection of instructors, use of a tutor, and distance education.

In reference to classroom location, students expressed concerns about constant interruptions from their children in the current classroom within the school and although they appreciated the proximity to their children it was difficult to deal with the interruptions.

Student concerns were voiced around the scheduling of courses over six-week blocks, with each course immediately following the completion of the previous course. They said that this rigid schedule provided no opportunity for course extension, should a student experience family problems or should the group of students require additional time for their learning. This concern became apparent in the second year of the programme with the introduction of academic courses such a computers and psychology. Many students voiced difficulties in keeping up with the required reading and in understanding the textbook language. They recognized their difficulty in functioning within an academic, English-speaking environment.

The concern over course scheduling was one that plagued the programme. I understood the problems that the students encountered and their need for a slower-paced delivery. The students' difficulty with academic English, compounded by community and family

responsibilities, necessitated a change in the programme. Eventually, I was able to access some additional funding from the university that allowed us to provide some scheduling revisions for the third year of the programme.

In response to my questions around cultural relevancy and course curriculum, the students focussed on the Native Studies. Their experiences in the school system had not included any aspects of Native history or culture with the exception of brief statements such as "*Aboriginal people were the first residents of Canada.*" It was clear that students saw these two Native studies courses as the single cultural component within their year of study. They did not appear to see cultural content in other courses designed with this is mind (courses such as Canadian Literature which involved an Aboriginal playwright or the inclusion of units on poverty and bartering systems in economics). In a follow-up telephone discussion, which was taped and transcribed, the Canadian Literature instructor provided the following:

> *These students were almost conditioned to expect academic learning to be irrelevant to their lives. Furthermore, the play "Dry Lips You Oughtta to Move to Kapuskasing" provided a very harsh reality about reserve life. I think it was a painful and unsettling experience for the students to read or see that play. I felt that, in this community, there was an inherent self-consciousness that causes them not to want to face or discuss the problems brought out in the play. Any of the problems brought out in that play – either the institutionalized paternalism of the colonizing attitudes or the religious fundamentalism – the students didn't want to discuss these. I think the reason is because I was white and that these problems were just too close to them. I found that when I raised anything with the students about native problems such as a topic within a composition class, there was reluctance to talk. As a result, I moved away from social problems and more into economic and less personal areas for discussion, and tread very carefully. Although I wanted them to write in their own voices, I knew that there were only certain areas that they felt comfortable sharing with me. So I gave them that choice.*

Cultural content has been the topic of much discussion among Aboriginal educators who have criticized the restriction of Aboriginal content to Native Studies courses. According to one Aboriginal educator, a cultural component should be included in all university courses so that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can become aware of the Aboriginal world view in each discipline (Aboriginal educator, personal communication, 1994).

During the group discussion, the students raised the subject of the instructor's command of the English language. As second-language speakers, the students had concerns about their problems with the English language, a problem that they saw as compounded when the instructors were also second-language speakers of English. This concern proved difficult for the university administrators to address, for, although many faculty members were second-language speakers of English, we had not been aware of similar problems with on-campus students. I was also hesitant to raise this concern with the instructors themselves, because it could become a contentious issue of racism within the university's faculty association if it was suspected that particular "accents" were a barrier to hiring. This was an issue that I was unable to resolve within the programme, and it was an issue that re-occurred in other university programmes in Aboriginal communities. Once again, I sought assistance from one of the Aboriginal educators interviewed in Chapter IV. Sara shared these comments with me.

> *You have to remember that these students are very isolated. They haven't had the exposure to the Canadian mosaic that you or I have. They have not heard English spoken with different accents and it is really difficult for them to manage trying to understand an accent and the content of a course all at the same time. I do not hire teachers with accents in my programmes because it becomes another barrier for the students to contend with. I can do that because I justify putting the students' needs first. It is not racism; it is just good practice when delivering courses in our First Nations communities.*

To me, this language issue is reflective of a greater concern: "*How does one best select individuals to teach university courses in Aboriginal communities*?" The selection process to identify instructors to teach within Aboriginal communities suggests a need for distinctive criteria, criteria developed by the community education administrators and reflective of the needs of the students. Within a university system such as Brandon University, the selection of instructors to teach courses in an off-campus programme utilizes a process of peer evaluation to ensure appropriate academic knowledge of the discipline. However, academic knowledge, I believe, is only one dimension in considering an individual's suitability to teach in an Aboriginal community. As a result, a selection process was initiated in conjunction with the community. It

would be used in the third and following years of the programme and would become a template for selection procedures in other Aboriginal communities. This process is outlined in Chapter VII.

Within this selection process, the community took ownership in ensuring that the instructor possessed appropriate skills and knowledge to work with learners in their community, while the university maintained control of academic suitability. Although this process was well accepted and considered over-due by the Aboriginal community and by the majority of departments in the university, several departments within the academic community were critical of it and refused to be part of any selection interview in which the community representatives had decision-making power in the selection process.

The area of tutor support was also explored in the group discussion, during which it was determined that a tutor network had already been established in the community. Students who wanted a tutor were asked to contact the local co-ordinator who outlined the student's needs to the Director of Education. The Director of Education then provided the local co-ordinator with the name of a qualified teacher in the community. Although it was clear that many were experiencing difficulty with their course material, not one student had initiated a request for tutorial assistance. When I asked the group why they did not request a tutor, they said that they believed: a) it might be an inconvenience to the person who was already employed all day teaching in the local school, and b) that asking for assistance so early in the programme would reflect poorly on their student status.

Following the discussion on tutor support, I made a decision, as programme administrator, in conjunction with the PAC, to provide scheduled study hall/tutorial sessions in which students could come to the centre to work individually with a tutor. This decision was based on the assumption that tutorial sessions that were an integral part of the programme would not generate feelings of marginalization among students requesting tutorial assistance.

The final topic for group discussion was the introduction of distance education courses to

the community. I prefaced this discussion with concerns about the limited choice in course selection for students in the community-based programme in Great River, in which courses were selected to meet both business administration and education degree requirements. I explained that, through the use of distance education, students would have additional choices in course selection and opportunities to explore other disciplines. Furthermore, the use of distance education delivery would allow course time-tabling to be changed. Students could have courses offered over a longer period because travel costs for instructors would no longer be an issue. In my discussion, I focused on the use of distance education as a means that the university could use to increase access to post-secondary education for students. I explained that, with technologies such as audio- and computer-conferencing, videotape, audio-tape, and print material, the courses could allow for interaction with the instructors even if they did not visit the community.

The response from the group indicated a totally different perspective about distance education than I had anticipated. One of the students offered the following comments:

> *You mean the professors won't be coming here any more? That is really important to us. We are all just in the start of our degrees. We are doing well, but it really helps when the professor is here. We get to know them and we get to ask questions. I think this type of education is even better than being on-campus. When my sister went on-campus, she was in big classes and she never knew nobody, not even the professors. She couldn't even find their offices if she wanted to ask them a question. In this programme, we know our professors. They know our names. If we have a problem when they are not here, we can phone them and ask them a question. If the professors stop coming and send videos and audios and using the audio-conferencing stuff, we won't do as well. We are doing well now. This is the first time something like this has gone on in our community. We need to finish our degrees and we need the professors to come here, at least for now. Maybe when we are more experienced with university study, we can do some courses at a distance, but not now.*

Students saw distance education, not in terms of increased access, but in terms of increased marginalization. They perceived the use of technology as a means, initiated by the university, by which the instructor would no longer have to visit the community. These comments were illustrative to me of another clash of cultures. Within the Canadian university system, distance education was marketed as a viable device for providing education to isolated

communities. Within this Aboriginal community, distance education was perceived as a vehicle for further marginalization, a means by which instructors could avoid coming to the community for their weekly classes. Given this response, I discontinued the discussion. I hoped that, in the personal interviews to follow, I would be able to gain more insight and discuss distance education in greater depth. In the second year, I looked forward to the personal interviews; I no longer felt the uncertainty and trepidation that I experienced during the first year of the study. A sense of dialogue was beginning to emerge, a critical research tool when doing interpretive, feminist research (Oakley, 1981).

Personal Interviews

Marie's Story

Marie was one of the students with whom I had made contact several times during the year, as a result of the previous personal interview. Although she had never initiated any contact, she had always been willing to speak when I contacted her. I began the session with a review of our interview from the previous year. This review of the material was a critical component of the type of collaborative research I was attempting, as I tried to involve the participants in the research process in its entirety. After the review of the previous interview, I continued the session by asking Marie to tell me about her year of study, during which she reflected on her experiences in the various courses.

The following discussion was developed from hand-written notes that I read back to Marie to confirm their accuracy. I had suggested the use of a tape recorder, but Marie did not feel comfortable with it. "*Maybe next time* ...," she said. Marie responded to my question about her year of study after a pause of about two minutes:

> *Well, it's been good, and sometimes not so good (*punctuated by a laugh*). Sometimes, the students stay home instead of coming to class. I guess they have things to do at home. Lorraine, the student advisor, left, so we have Daniel now. He is just new so is learning what to do. I know sometimes he phones the students and they say they are coming, but don't get here. The students all have children and lots of things to do at home.*

Despite the absence of negative criticism, it was clear that the departure of the past student advisor had affected both attendance and student commitment to the programme. Her manner of speaking about Daniel and the other students reflected the culture in which she operates – a culture that does not condone criticism of another person. Rather than criticize Daniel for his lack of skills in the area of student counselling or criticize the students for poor attendance, she said, as I perceived it, that Daniel was learning and the students had many responsibilities. Marie was still strongly committed to the programme, planning to continue and to complete her degree.

She said:

> *Yes, I like the programme and I want to stay in it. I always wanted to be a teacher and this is the way I can do it. My family really helps me. I want to teach in the school here. I have some ideas about things I can do to help the students. I want to teach Cree, so we don't forget our language. I know how to do lots of things that my mother-in-law taught me and my children learned those things too. Children need to learn these things too, so they can live here if they want. We need to have more teachers from here; right now we have only two. The children need to see people from here teaching them.*

When she spoke of teaching, she referred to her own knowledge base in the areas of traditional life. She stressed the importance of incorporating aspects of Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning into the classroom. Her comments show that she had given a great deal of thought to her chosen vocation, to the need for students to see local people teaching, and to the need for preserving the language and culture of her community. Again, she referred to the critical role that her mother-in-law played in teaching her about the traditional ways and how she will continue this role as a teacher with the children of her community. The three English courses were a positive experience for Marie.

> *I like to read and write so I liked doing the courses. The professor was very helpful. He used to come to the study centre every night and do his own work. If we needed help he was there to help us. That's the way I like it. If we need help we can ask him in person. I don't like phoning the professor at home, so when he was at the study centre, I could ask him questions. He explained things to us. He never made you feel stupid. Sometimes he got mad when we didn't get our reading done, and made us stay and do the reading. I think many of the students had trouble with the reading. Lots of them are not readers at home. They end up watching television. Maybe it is because we were never read to when we were kids. Most of our parents didn't read or write. But they told wonderful stories.*

When Marie was asked about her psychology and biology courses, she said:

> *The psychology course was hard. I found the textbook hard to read and it had lots of material that I had to remember. Some of the things that the teacher talked about didn't make sense. The tests were all multiple choices and I would like to answer questions instead.*

Marie's comments were similar to those made by other students, in another Aboriginal community, who stated that the multiple-choice testing format was an inappropriate method of evaluation. They, too, would have preferred an opportunity to respond to short- and long-answer questions.[1] I explained to Marie that the instructor understood the language problems that the students had with the text material and that she wanted to develop her own tests. When she approached the department chair, she was told that, in order to maintain the standards necessary, the multiple-choice tests must be used. This situation, perhaps, again reflects the clash between two cultures and the intransigence and closedness of an academic department to explore alternate evaluation methods. This position also illustrates that even when a faculty member may recognize the need for alternative ways of teaching and learning, and may be willing to use new methods of evaluation; the academic department may not be willing to support this new direction.

Marie continued her discussion of the Psychology course by discussing its content, her comments providing a good example of how issues are seen differently in different cultures.

> *The course was interesting, but some of the topics didn't make a lot of sense to us. We were supposed to do a section on teenage pregnancy, but we didn't do it here – nobody wanted to talk about it. In the book, teenage pregnancy was a problem. Well, we don't see it as a problem here. No one could seem to understand what the book was talking about in this area.*

Marie also participated in two courses delivered by the Mathematics Department: a mathematics course and a computer science course.

> *They were good. The teacher in math was really good. She explained things well and was always in study hall with us when we had to do our assignments. She was easy to talk to; you could always ask her questions. She never got mad at people when they couldn't understand. Lots of us had trouble with math, but*

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[1] Discussions with Aboriginal students in a second community, 1993.

the way she had us divided into groups worked well and we could speak Cree. It sure helps when you can't understand something to have it explained in your own language. I haven't taken math for a long time and I felt good when I had finally passed. The computer course was good too. I didn't feel as comfortable talking to the professor; he wasn't as easy to approach as the math teacher. Computers are all new for me so I need a lot of help. The instructor was there, but always seemed to be in hurry to go back to the teachers' trailer. Sometimes, I felt like I was bothering him. I didn't do as well in the computer course as I did in math.

Marie's comments reinforced the importance of a comfort level with the instructor. She said she felt comfortable with the mathematics instructor, but not with the computer instructor, and the difference in level of comfort was reflected, I believe, in her academic performance. The comments appeared to support Wilson's (1994) findings, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

Marie's main concern about the geography course was the difficulty understanding the instructor who was a second-language speaker of English.

I had a hard time taking notes and understanding the course. We are second language speakers of English and so was the instructor, so we both seemed to have a problem understanding the accents. We haven't heard a lot of different accents speaking English yet, so it was a little difficult. Maybe once we get used to her accent we would do better, but she was only here six times, so it wasn't long enough.

I was particularly interested in hearing Marie's comments on the Native Studies courses. From her academic records, she had completed only one of the courses and had withdrawn from the other. Her comments did not reflect on the course, but rather on the events within her personal life during the time of the course.

I liked parts of the course and watching the videos. I used to take some of the videos home and my husband and children and grandchildren used to all watch them. They were interesting. The course was at a bad time for me. I lost several of my loved ones during the course and I wanted to stop coming to school. This was a hard time for me; I couldn't study then. My husband pushed me to keep going in the course, but I just couldn't finish the second one. This was a hard time for my sons, who were away in school when our loved ones died. They came home and stayed with us and won't go back to school until next year. They are going to go back to school next year.

At this time in the interview, I chose not to explore the subject further with her. Although she did not mention any problems with the course, I was still concerned about the significant number of students who dropped Native Studies. Her comments also reflected that

she liked parts of the course and took some of the videos home. Although she didn't criticize the course, decidedly absent in her discussion was any reference to the instructor teaching Native Studies. Silences in stories matter as much as what may actually be said (Randell, 1995; West, 1996), perhaps especially so in Aboriginal communities (Monture-Angus, 1995).

The final course I wanted to discuss with Marie was Introduction to Teaching. I sensed that she had developed a rapport with Harvey, who taught the course.

> *Harvey (*short laugh*) was really good. He knew what he was doing, and we knew what we were supposed to do. We went into the school and watched teachers teach. I had been a substitute (*teacher*) and worked in the school a lot so maybe some of this was easy for me. He had us write journals about what we did. I like keeping a journal. This was new for me, but it was good to put things down and have a kind of diary about what happened. Harvey was really nice; he always had time to answer questions. He asked us a lot of questions about the community here; he wanted to know about the place. He didn't just lecture, he talked to us. He asked me what I did when I was a substitute. He told us about when he was a teacher. He used to be a principal before he retired.*

Marie touched on three important areas that she found to be positive aspects of Harvey's teaching in the community. First, she reinforced the importance of knowing Harvey as a person. Second, she stressed the importance of instructors learning about the community in which they are teaching. Third, she appreciated that students were asked about their own experiences and that their knowledge was incorporated into classroom teachings. Marie's experience as a substitute teacher, augmented by her understanding of Cree culture and ways of learning and teaching, made her a valuable resource. By recognizing what Marie had to contribute, the instructor was able to integrate academic and traditional knowledge. As the interview moved to a close, I decided to broach the area of distance education as a means to provide access to a range of courses. Marie's comments, although reinforcing the need for the instructors to visit the community, also suggested adaptations of distance education technologies to the classroom, rather than the utilization of distance education as a mode of delivery.

> *Maybe we could make video tapes of the lecture when the professor was here. I know I have trouble keeping up with notes; I am not a fast writer and if we had video tapes of the lectures we could take them home and study from them. Also, with the new eight-week schedule, which will start next year, we will have two*

> *separate weeks of study week. We should use that audio-conferencing for that time, so the professor could answer questions or talk to us about a review. These might be good ideas, but the professors should still come. We like to see them.*

My final question was to ask Marie if she had any questions or suggestions for course or programme improvement. I was not anticipating a response to this question, given my experiences when I had posed this question in another Aboriginal community during a discussion with two students. My perception was incorrect, and Marie did have something to say:

> *Are we going to have a Cree course? We all speak Cree, but I want to learn syllabics so I can write* (in Cree). *I think people need to learn to write here, and then teach it in the school. I am trying to learn syllabics myself, but it would be better to learn through a course. So much of our culture is part of our language. If we lose our language, we won't remember who we are anymore. And we need to be able to write, to write things down. I know people say Cree is a spoken language; we always passed things down by talking, not writing. But the world is changing, things need to be written down, not just in English, but in Cree too, and the kids need to write in their own language.*

Marie also raised concerns around the course scheduling and the need to provide more time to access materials and complete prescribed readings. Marie found that the problem accelerated with the Native Studies course. In addition, her comments reflected a lack of rapport with the instructor.

> *We couldn't get the books fast enough and the prof didn't seem to understand this problem. She wanted everything in six weeks. It was hard. I think that is why some people just stopped coming. They just gave up. I don't think the prof understood that we are slow readers. I tried to tell her. Even though I like to read it takes me time. I don't know what all the words mean. With everything in a hurry, we couldn't even pick our own essay topics. The teacher did that for us. I ended up with a topic that I didn't know nothing about. I wanted to do something else, but I knew we would never have time to get the books, so I just did what she suggested and got a few books from her. I want to learn more about our history, Cree people, but I want to do it my way. But instead we had to do an assignment using the materials that the professor picked out and brings for us.*

In this second interview, Marie seemed more comfortable and was in no hurry to leave, remaining after the formal interview for tea. I realized that the research, too, had developed as a process; like learning, people are more able to take risks as well as challenge and contribute when feeling respected. Like Marie, I was learning.

Bernice and Joan's Stories

The following information was taken from hand-written notes, which I read back during the interview to ensure accuracy. I felt a sense of comfort with the students having maintained contact with these two students over the previous year, with Joan calling me on several occasions about courses.

The interview commenced with a review of the material from the previous interview, as was done with Marie. I then explained that I wanted to hear about their year in detail, both the positive and negative aspects of their studies. Bernice's response focussed on the concern about hiring second language speakers to teach, as well as the need for more time to complete the course work.

When Joan spoke about her interest in the business administration degree, her response focused much more on the importance of family support (a reoccurring theme that became apparent throughout the interviews):

Yes, I want to stay in this business degree. I want to continue in my degree and now I feel I have the family support to continue. You know I had to leave the community and move to Brandon for awhile. My husband wasn't very supportive. He was jealous of me going to school and kept on making more demands on me. So I left and moved to Brandon. I had to leave the community to change my relationship and, now, when I came back, I have good support from my husband. My husband is a teacher and has a university degree. He should be able to understand that it is hard to go to school and be a mother and a wife. He always said he understood and was supportive but, when it came to the action, he didn't help out. He told me to drop out, so I would have more time to do things at home. He didn't seem to want me to get ahead. So I had to leave. I planned to stay in Brandon and finish my degree. Now I knew I could do it, and I had lived in Brandon before, so it wasn't very hard for me. Well, things worked out, and now it's good, for now, anyways. Sometimes you have to do these things. I wasn't going to drop out of this programme for anything. I want this degree.

Bernice offered the following:

Yes, I want to stay in the courses.... I am looking forward to the accounting courses that are coming next year. I want to work with numbers and get a job here in the community. We have to take lots of other stuff before we get to take the things we want. What courses do you offer next fall? We would like to know what courses are coming up. Sometimes, we don't know what the course is until the instructor arrives. This happened several times this year, since we got the new student co-ordinator. Either he doesn't get the information or he is just too

lazy to let us know. I would like to know ahead what we get in the fall, wouldn't you Joan?

Bernice's comments supported the concerns that Marie raised, stressing the important role of the local student co-ordinator as a bridge between the students and the university. Bernice's comments about the problems the students experienced in receiving information from the university suggested that either the university administrator or the local student advisor was at fault, and was the first instance of open criticism. Joan concurred with Bernice's concerns that the students are usually the last ones to know about the course schedule and said, "*it would be nice to know what courses are going next fall and the timetable.*"

It was at this point in the interview that I experienced the dilemma of having two roles, as a researcher and a university programme administrator. As a researcher, I heard the student concerns; but, as a university administrator, I wanted to respond to those concerns by assuring the students that the course information would reach them in a timely manner in the future. I believed that my role as a programme administrator was critical to the study and that I needed to allow both my voices, of researcher and administrator, to be heard by the students. In fact, it was my dual role that allowed me to explore issues with the students, to seek answers, and then to initiate changes to the programme based on the conversations with the students. In this particular situation, I explained that we were just completing the course schedule for the next semester and this would be forwarded to Daniel. I also informed them that I would speak with Daniel about the importance of communication and that information forwarded to him should be shared with the students immediately.

When I asked Bernice and Joan if the university community-based programme met with their expectations, Bernice responded with these comments:

Probably harder than I had expected. But I didn't really know what to expect. I was the first person in my entire family to take any university courses. As you know, there are hardly any university graduates here, so there were not many people to talk to about what to expect. Maybe it was just the year with the school board starting up and everything else. I liked most of the courses, except the English courses; I hate writing and reading, that's why I want to do the

accounting areas. I am not a reader; I avoid reading everything except what I have to read. After all, aren't we from an oral tradition, talking about things not writing them down? The psychology course was not great, a lot of reading in a short time and multiple choice questions. Some of the topics were, you know, I couldn't see what they were getting at. Well, at least the prof left some of them out when no one seemed to know what she was talking about. When we finally could understand the prof, I mean get used to her accent, she did say that she didn't agree with the way psychologists looked at some things. That wasn't the way she looked at the same things in her culture. Maybe that is why some of the stuff didn't make sense to us, we don't look at things that way in our culture. Geography could have been better if we could understand the professor. I could hardly understand a word she said, so I read the book, that wasn't much better. It was all about cultures I had never heard of, nothing about Cree culture. The math course was good; April explained everything well and you could work away at your own pace. She was always available to help us out at night, and you could always call her when she got home to Brandon. I did well in the course, and I never did well in math at school. I felt good about that. That makes a lot of difference when you feel that you can talk to the professor and they don't mind you calling them.

Joan added to Bernice's comments with the following:

Yes, the courses were pretty good. I wasn't really happy with the psychology course; as Bernice said, lots of the stuff didn't make sense to me and I have never done multiple choice tests. But the prof did try to help us through the material. She didn't agree with the testing, but she couldn't do anything about it.

*The English courses were OK; it took me a lot of time to get through the reading, but I can write a lot better now. The Prof tried to find books that we would like, but it is hard to pick out for other people. He did give us a chance to write about what we wanted to in part of the course, so we had some choices. I guess learning to write is just something we have to do. No one in the class except Marie is really good at it. We have to write this TWEP (*Test in Written English Proficiency*) test, you know, to test us how well we write English, so the course helped us get ready for this test. I liked the computer course, but most of it was lectures; I would like to have more hands-on. I want to learn more about using computers, but we could never get time in the school. We need a computer for our students. When we finish the degree, we should know how to use computers. I think if we want jobs here or anywhere else, for that matter, we should be able to do our work and send messages on computers. That's really important. On campus, I think students have that chance and I don't want to learn less here than on-campus. Sometimes, I am afraid that could happen if you don't check everything well.*

This was the first time a comment concerning quality and equity of off-campus programmes was brought to my attention, either as a researcher or as an administrator. Prior group and personal discussions with students focused on the importance of community-based education because it enabled them to remain in their community while studying. University administrators may need to explore ways in which community-based programmes can assume

more of their own identity, while seeking to maintain standards of the on-campus course delivery to ensure that learning at the same level is accomplished. Bearing this in mind, one challenge for the university administrators and instructors may be to find ways to design and deliver high quality, appropriate, learning experiences (both academic and holistic) to learners in the community. The availability of learning technologies may provide the university with new ways of delivering these learning experiences.

In response to a question around the role of the local co-ordinator, Joan said:

> *Yes, after Lorraine left, things were a little different. Lorraine used to keep us going. Like when Sidney used to sleep in, she would go and get him up and get him to class. I think we needed that. People just weren't used to getting up and getting to a place on time. There has been nothing to do here for so long, I think everyone just got used to sitting around, and didn't have to be anywhere at any special time. When Lorraine left, Daniel didn't do that. So some of us come, and sometimes people don't show up, but no one seems to find out what is wrong. Now with the new Chief, I feel as though everyone forgot about us. No one seems to know what we are doing. When Paul was Chief, he used to talk about us to the teachers and people in the band office. Now some people ask me if the programme is still going. No one seems to know what is going on.*

These comments underline the ongoing need for student support, both personal and academic. The number of times these issues were raised in interviews indicated their importance to the students. The workshop provided by the co-ordinator from another Cree community was identified as one of the few positive student support activities that took place that year.

At this time, I believed I was moving away from being a conventional interviewer to being more of a participant in the conversation. Both Bernice and Joan were willing to speak freely about the programme and did not have to be asked direct questions. The format had changed to a conversation and a sharing of information. I was changing and so, too, was the research.

When distance education was discussed, the responses were similar to those within the group discussions. Joan said:

> *If you mean the professors are going to stop coming here, I don't think I would like it. One of the reasons I come to class is because there is a professor here. If we just had correspondence courses, we might as well stay home and do it. And that way everyone would stop coming, and the programme would fail. When we*

started the programme, we were told that the professors would come here for a few days each week and run classes like they did on campus. That's why I signed up.

I realized that the students' concepts of distance education were limited to first- and second-generation distance education models; that is, print-based correspondence models and one-way video (Moore, 1988). From their comments, it became apparent that a mixed-mode of delivery might be appropriate where distance technology would enhance communication with visiting professors when they were not in the community.

Joan and Bernice were both willing to experiment with a computer-mediated communication, but raised the concern that there must be a dedicated computer for the adult students and a separate place for their classes. They also said that they needed more experience as university learners prior to becoming involved in distance delivery.

Daniel's Story

The following discussion draws on personal communication with Daniel, the newly appointed student advisor who replaced Lorraine upon her resignation.

Daniel was a single male around forty years of age and was a member of the community. He had participated in one year of a community-based teaching training programme and had attended university for another year in Brandon. He described his on-campus university experience as "*too many parties,*" resulting in academic failure and suspension from university. He explained that this was over ten years ago and that, if he were to return to study now, he would be able to succeed. After his unsuccessful university experience, Daniel returned to the community, where he took up seasonal work as a fishing guide and at other odd jobs throughout the winter. When Daniel was first hired as the local student co-ordinator, he spent a day at Brandon University visiting our student services area. This was my only meeting with him prior to my visits to the community. I met with him briefly when I attended the PAC meeting that he also attended in the community, and I maintained contact with him by telephone for the duration of the academic year. My contacts with him were limited to matters such as instructors' schedules

and shipping of books and materials. He never initiated contact with me on behalf of the students; nor did he seem willing to discuss any areas of student concern. His main concern appeared to be the management of the centre, including transporting instructors to and from the plane, making coffee, and ensuring that books and supplies were available.

In one instance, when a student had expressed a concern to him and requested that he speak to me, he contacted a male staff member of IUN and asked him to talk to me. When I called Daniel about the student's concern, he asked Joan, the student, to come and discuss it with me. The problem was resolved between Joan and me directly. I was concerned about Daniel's reluctance to speak with me and discussed it with a non-Aboriginal educator who had worked in Aboriginal communities for over 20 years. She explained:

> *Cree culture is much more strictly defined in terms of relationships between members of the opposite sex. It would not be appropriate for men to have women as friends or vice versa, as one has in our culture. Rather, as a male, your relationship with females would be limited to your wife and your relations. Probably Daniel just didn't feel comfortable talking to you, and I would say that it was more an issue of gender than culture. Men and women just don't interact the way we do. It's a good thing you did your study about women, you probably wouldn't get any men to show up to personal interviews with you* (J. Mason, personal communication, 1994).

Toward the end of my second visit to the community, during which the group and personal interviews were conducted, Daniel appeared to be more comfortable with me. It was during the last afternoon of my visit that he told me the story of his university years as recounted above.

After my return to the university, Daniel maintained regular contact with me, albeit mostly at my initiation. Daniel continued to see his function as administrative rather than student counselling and support despite my suggestions for him provide the latter. He did express discomfort dealing with students' personal problems and also the lack of general community support for the programme. He explained:

> *Maybe if you could send me to some training, I could do more with the students. Now, I don't know what to do if they come to me. Before the election, band members used to come and talk to the students and that seemed to be what they*

needed to keep them going. Well, no one comes from the band office anymore so the students feel kind of on their own. But, there is not much I can do about that from my end here.

Daniel's comments showed his frustration with the lack of community support, but also showed his hesitancy to address these problems at the community level. During my second visit to the community that year (discussed in the next section entitled *Linden's Visit*), I had another opportunity to talk with Daniel in some depth. Perhaps the presence of Linden and a male instructor helped Daniel feel a little more comfortable.

Linden's Visit

The second year of the programme culminated with the visit of my doctoral thesis supervisor, Linden West, from the University of Kent, at Canterbury. Linden was a lecturer in the School of Adult and Continuing Education, with a specific area of interest in life history research. He was interested in visiting the community to meet with the students. Following his visit and interaction with the students, he also wrote and published a paper in the United Kingdom in 1994 (West, 1994).

Although I was happy that he was able to visit the community in which I was doing my research, I faced his visit with some trepidation. I was concerned about the students' feelings towards his impending visit, particularly as he was an unknown individual coming from a great distance. Despite my discussion with them prior to his visit, they were still certain that he was "*coming to study us*." In this context, I am reminded of a discussion with one council member in another Cree community who showed me a series of markings on the band office wall. When I asked him the significance of these markings he answered: "*These are the number of you guys who have been here to study us and learn us to do things better*." The comment was made in a straightforward manner, neither accusing nor criticizing anyone of anything. Throughout my research, I have often reflected on this comment and, at times, felt a little guilty about being one of these individuals who was studying Native people. As a non-Native person in an Aboriginal community, I was conscious of my different cultural background and was always on guard

against doing something that was culturally inappropriate.

We managed to reach Great River late in the afternoon, amid fog and sleet. We invited both Daniel and Harvey (the university instructor currently teaching in the community) to join us for supper at the lodge. The next day, Linden and I visited the classroom and spoke with the students.

The dinner meeting was the first opportunity for Linden to meet a Northern Cree person – the local student co-ordinator, Daniel. The other individual at the dinner was Harvey, the instructor teaching education courses, who was a Caucasian male from Brandon. The meeting was relaxed. Daniel appeared to be much more comfortable than I had ever observed him in previous meetings. Daniel and Harvey had been working together at the centre for the past six weeks and had become good friends. During the meal, Daniel talked freely about himself. He talked openly with both Linden and Harvey, not simply answering questions as he had in earlier meetings with me. When Linden asked him questions about the community, he responded freely, although he said that he didn't know much about the traditional Aboriginal culture. When we asked him about the traditional beliefs and culture in the community, his response was that these things must have been lost, and people had become Christians. When asked about the role of the elders in the community, he did not respond. He simply shrugged. It appeared to me that he had little interest in exploring his past and an acceptance of where his culture was at this point in time. From his previous level of comfort at the dinner, I did not believe that he was avoiding the questions, and that he would have answered them if he had the knowledge.

Daniel's response also triggered a memory from a previous visit to Great River at the time of a community member's death. When I turned on the local radio station, I heard only gospel music until the funeral was over. When I asked community members, they informed me this was the practice at the time of death. When I visited another Aboriginal community during a funeral, I observed a blend of both traditional Aboriginal and Catholic rites; a cross, sweet grass, and tobacco all accompanied the body on its journey beyond. A traditional wake was observed,

followed by a Catholic funeral. A member of this other Cree community saw no conflict between the two spiritualities, responding "*I am a Catholic, but I practice traditional spirituality as do we all here.*" This blend and acceptance of both traditions was very different from the discussion with Daniel in Great River.

The session the following morning involved six students taking the education degree. As a researcher in life history, Linden wanted to hear their stories and to share his story with them. He began by telling the students a bit about himself. He had come from a working-class family in the pottery trade, had attended grammar school and university, and currently was working in the university as a lecturer. The blank looks on their faces made him realize that these terms were not part of the students' reality. He began again, explaining slowly and in great detail, often pausing to allow the students a moment to think. He spoke in a personal sense about going from a local school within a working-class neighbourhood to grammar school, leaving behind many of his childhood friends. He compared this experience to their experiences of entering a university programme when most of their friends had not even completed high school, and how this process of setting yourself apart from others can be painful (West, 1996).

The students listened quietly, not offering comments except when they were spoken to directly. Linden seemed to feel the rhythm of the culture. When he spoke, he always paused, allowing time for reflection. When he posed a question, he always provided a time of silence before the response. His willingness to create an empathetic interview situation, where he shared his own difficulties with university learning and responded to questions from the interviewees, validated the importance of two-way dialogue characteristic of the feminist methodology suggested by Oakley (1981) when doing this type of research.

My role during this meeting was that of an observer. I took extensive written notes of the discussion. The following information emanates from these notes, as well as from follow-up, informal discussions that same day with individual students.

The students informed Linden that they had entered the degree programme in education

in order to improve the education of Native peoples. They said that they did not believe education had served them well, and that by becoming teachers themselves, they could "*right former wrongs*" and provide an appropriate learning environment for their children and community members. As Lorne said:

> *I want to make a system that works for us. I want the children to feel good about who they are and have some role models in our community. We are planning to have a high school here, so my children won't have to leave to go away to school. They can stay here with their family.*

The female students saw their studies as a way to help their own children at the present time and, upon graduation, to help the community by becoming teachers in the local school. Their discussions of employment did not include a focus on remuneration, or a need to help the family by making money. Their goal to become teachers seemed to be personal, rather than monetary – an attempt to provide local role models within the school. Their comments were reflective of discussions in Chapter IV, in the section entitled *Women and Learning in Northern Cree Culture*, in which women identified the similar educational roles. The women in Great River were adamant about their commitment to the community. They did not plan to move either to study or to work, but saw their vocation as teaching within their home community. This situation is similar to the life stories of Athapaskan women described by Cruikshank (1994), in that she describes women staying in the community, juggling the roles of raising a family and working at a job, while engaging in a range of social and political activities. Elaine's experience mirrors their experiences:

> *I can't leave the community to study, so this is my only chance to become a teacher. I am a student now and some of my children are going to school. I can help them more now. I am glad about that. I want them to do good at school. There was no one to help me, but I want to be there to help them. My family is settled here.*

Lorne further described his study at university as an attempt to make sense of his life and his identity as a Native person. His comments reflected a lack of knowledge about his own culture and traditions that had never been explored in his early, formal education. He stressed the

importance of reconnecting with his roots and the need to include Aboriginal culture in education curriculum, thereby enabling Native students to know who they are. According to Lorne, the education system in which he was forced to participate was a contributing factor to the fate of the Native population today.

> *Education for me has not been great. As you know, I didn't finish high school. I have been at home in the community since that time and I want to do something now. I used to do seasonal work, so now this is different for me, being a student. Some of the guys I hung around with wonder how I can stand it ... sitting in class all day.*
>
> *A lot of us who went through the school system didn't learn about who we were. The books we used in history didn't talk about our culture. Everything was supposed to start with the Europeans arriving, so we didn't learn nothing about Native culture. It didn't seem to be important. A lot of us don't know about our history and don't know who we are. This was what the education system did wrong – it didn't teach us about who we were. In fact, they almost taught us to forget our culture. I want to know more about my own people. We need to know our own history and ways, and to feel good about ourselves. We never thought our history was important when we were in school because we never learned it. I liked the courses in Native Studies; we should have courses like this. We are going to be teaching and we should know about our own history to communicate this to the students and our own children. When I think back on what we did in school, sometimes I feel angry that we had to go through that system. I think if I learn more about our history, I can get over all this being mad and I will know who I am. We used this textbook in Harvey's course about teaching Native students, and one of the authors was a Cree lady. It was right on. There was a section about school experiences for Native kids. We had to do an assignment on some part of the book. Everyone in the class picked that part, because it was something we knew about. We had those same things happen to us in school. I don't think a white person could understand this, it took a Native to write it in a book, to put those feelings down.*

Following the discussions with the students, Linden commented on a textbook on the instructor's desk in the education classroom. It was a large, glossy, American textbook introducing teaching and classroom management techniques. The front cover depicted several groups of Caucasian students in obviously urban settings. The classrooms depicted in the book were well equipped with learning resources, books, and computers. Linden saw the presence of the textbook as a statement of contradiction. For students sitting in the sparse classroom of Great River with no maps, pictures, books, or computers, Linden commented "*what were students going to learn from this book*?" As he flipped through it, he noticed more of the same, pictures

and content for urban, mainstream America, depicting schools that the students had never attended and would never teach within.

On the instructor's desk, beside this large textbook, was a thin paperback called *Joining the Circle* (Grant & Gillespie, 1993). It was written by two women, one Cree and one Caucasian, on the subject of Native Education. It was in this book that the students saw their own experiences mirrored. The large American textbook was the required text for all Brandon University students taking the Introduction to Teaching course, and had been used on campus and off campus for the last few years. The paperback was neither required nor listed as optional reading. I had received a copy from one of the authors who was a Brandon University graduate in education, a Manitoba Cree, and one of the three women interviewed in the chapter "Women and Cree Culture." I had loaned a copy of the book to Harvey as a suggested resource for the course in Great River. After reading the book, Harvey was anxious to use this text, and was able to convince the department to sanction its use as a secondary text within the course, provided that the required text is used. Harvey ordered both books, but based the course on *Joining the Circle*.

Although Harvey was able to incorporate culturally relevant material, I was concerned that the American textbook had been used for several years in other northern Aboriginal communities as the sole textbook for this course. In discussions with the Faculty of Education, I was informed that the American textbook had never been questioned prior to Harvey's comments. None of the Faculty of Education members with whom I spoke were familiar with *Joining the Circle* (Grant & Gillespie, 1993). This situation was similar to the findings of Grant (1995), in which she argues that education faculties showed little interest in educational approaches not validated by the literature of their own cultural and socio-economic group. In the delivery of programmes in cross-cultural settings, it appears that university administrators and faculty members need to explore and develop culturally relevant curriculum, including content and delivery mode. Teachers who are preparing to work with Aboriginal students would benefit from exploration of Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning in addition to the Eurocentric approaches

inherent to the academy.

This concern about the use of an American textbook in Great River is also reflective of a bigger problem within Canadian institutions, in which limited Canadian resources often result in faculty members using American textbooks. For the Canadian academy, the presence of a large neighbour to the south has, in itself, been seen as an act of colonization of the Canadian academy.

However, despite this concern, few faculty would argue that we should eliminate core texts in introductory courses, simply because they are American. Core texts are essential to provide a broad perspective on the course. Rather, they supplement the texts with Canadian materials replacing whole chapters, if possible, as Harvey had done.

Linden saw parallels between comments made by mature learners in Great River and access learners in the United Kingdom (West, 1994). He noted that the majority of access learners had unsuccessful school experiences and came from communities where formal, university education was not held in high regard. Female access learners in the United Kingdom had to juggle many of the same types of family and community responsibilities as the female students in Great River. Female learners from both the United Kingdom and Great River often wanted to improve their education levels in order to help their children do better in school. The move from working class to middle class, often an issue for access learners in the United Kingdom, was not found within Aboriginal culture. However, the students in Great River did comment about the changes in their lives that occurred when they became university students, and a sense of leaving community friends who chose not to pursue a university education.

Reflections on Year Two

From the group and personal interviews, several common concerns emerged around classroom space, course scheduling, curriculum and pedagogy, methods of evaluation, student support, relationship with the instructors, methods of course delivery and issues as second language speakers of English.

1. The ongoing need for a *separate physical location in the community for the adult*

learners was critical. The students said that their study schedules also required unlimited access to this location.

2. A more *flexible schedule* for academic course delivery must be adapted. The students continually expressed concerns about family and community responsibilities and recommended that universities be sensitive to these. They explained that an event such as a death causes the entire community to grind to a halt. All activities including classes are cancelled the day of the funeral. The participation in a community event was critical to the holistic healing of themselves and the community. Perhaps universities must recognize the importance to the students of participation in rituals such as wakes and funerals, and courses may need to be rescheduled in order to accommodate temporary absences. Furthermore, older learners who have been away from formal learning for some time, particularly second-language speakers of English, should be allowed extended class time. The students were extremely uncomfortable with the six-week block format for course completion and expressed the need, in some subject areas, for additional time to complete the course. Although summer-school classes within the Canadian university system are as short as three weeks, and it is possible to absorb the content in that time frame, the twelve-week model of on-campus learning allows time for students to go beyond the basic content and see the big picture. This compression of course length in Great River is, I believe, problematic.

3. The students' comments reflected the need for a *curriculum* with which they could have some connection, along with a *pedagogy that encouraged them to express Aboriginal world views.* Although they expressed the need to know their own history and identity through Native Studies courses, it appeared more important to have a professor that incorporated a pedagogy that allowed an Indigenous perspective to be incorporated into the body of knowledge that they were presenting.

4. The students expressed the need to explore *alternative methods of evaluation.* They

began to question certain methods of evaluation such as multiple-choice tests. Often, the students' evaluations of learning experiences in a course were not reflected in their grades, leading to the question of whether the learning expectations of the students are at odds with the learning expectations of the university.

5. Although the students had achieved academic success in this year of the course by moving from mature to regular status, they all expressed the need for *ongoing support of both a personal and academic nature.* Students missed the sharing circle. They felt a lack of recognition when they had achieved the rite of passage from mature to regular status. They had heard that in a similar programme in another community students who achieved regular status were honoured at a community feast, and they questioned the importance of their academic success to their own community.

6. The students' comments about distance education reflected a completely different perception of *distance education* than that of the university. While the university envisioned distance education as a means to increase access to more post-secondary education, the students saw it as a means to further marginalization, creating a situation where teachers would no longer be required to come to their community. Although the students saw some ways that technology could provide linkages with instructors when they were not in the community, they stated that, at this stage of their learning experience, it was critical that the instructors deliver the courses on site.

7. Throughout the students' comments, *the relationship with the instructor* emerged as a common theme. In their discussion of each course, comments about the instructor were a central component. Their comments reflected the importance of knowing these instructors both personally and academically. It seemed difficult for the students to separate these two types of relationships for, when students spoke of instructors, they spoke in both personal and academic terms. Their relationship and comfort with the instructor appeared to play a significant role in their academic success.

8. Students' comments reflected the importance of *being able to use their Native language within the classroom.* While the students recognized that the courses must be taught in English, they found being able to discuss concepts with one another in Cree was invaluable. This also reinforces the importance of local tutors who can explain difficult concepts in Cree.

From the discussion with the instructors, common concerns emerged around the need for relevant content, preparedness of the students, and methods of evaluation.

1. The instructors recognized the need to make the content relevant, although it became apparent that what they, as instructors, perceived as relevant may not be seen as relevant by the students. This concern by the instructors for an appropriate content begs a need to include Indigenous knowledge within the academy.

2. The preparedness of the students was an area of ongoing concern with the instructors. Their comments reinforced the need for a comprehensive orientation for instructors teaching in Aboriginal communities, as well as the development of a learner profile. The instructors' comments revealed an expectation that these students would have a similar knowledge base as their urban counterparts, which was not the case. Instructors need to understand the different knowledge base that the Northern Aboriginal student brings to the classroom and to incorporate this Indigenous knowledge into the classroom.

3. The instructors recognized the need for alternate methods of evaluation and this concern requires the academy to explore alternatives to ensure methods that, while appropriate to diverse learners, are not deleterious to university standards.

Some final comments derived from Linden's session with the students provided further insight into the negative elementary and high school experiences that most of the students had had, and the need to provide a positive school system for future generations of Aboriginal learners. The need to "right former wrongs" in the education system was suggested by some students as their impetus for further study. Linden also commented on the area of cultural

relevancy, in particular citing a large American textbook for an education course, a textbook that he suggested had little relevancy to the teaching in Great River.

My study was developing, and I was beginning to identify themes within the student conversations reflecting curriculum, supports, and delivery mode. I was becoming aware of some practical changes within the programme suggested by the students that I believed would enable the university to better serve the community, and was excited that I might be able to initiate and evaluate some of these changes within the third year of the programme. These changes would include a new proposed course-delivery schedule and the involvement of community administrators in the selection of faculty. On the other hand, I was becoming more aware of a potential clash of cultures between the university and the community, and a need for the academy to address this clash by posing questions about its policies and procedures, particularly around curriculum and evaluation. However, the students' stories still presented many questions and concerns for me, and resulted in continual revisiting and revising of my ideas. I became cognizant of my tendency to "jump to conclusions" and the need to suggest my ideas within a tentative framework, necessary when doing hermeneutic and dynamic research.

In my own personal reflections over the year, I believed that I was developing a closer relationship with the students. It appeared that my research was beginning to evolve into a non-hierarchical, feminist-inspired type of research, the type of research I had wanted to do. Furthermore, my two roles as researcher and university administrator were becoming a necessary and integral part of the study. My role as researcher enabled me to attempt to engage in discussions with the learners, and my role as a programme administrator allowed me to initiate proactive changes within the programme based upon the students recommendations. My ability to facilitate student-initiated change in the programme provided an empowering dynamic to the study; for, not only were the students partners in the research, they witnessed the incorporation of their ideas into the programme. The incorporation of their recommendations for programme improvement is of critical importance to the participants given the historical legacy of silencing

the voices of Aboriginal peoples.

I also noted that, on several occasions over the year, the students had initiated contact with me to discuss course concerns. Further, when I initiated contact with the students, they appeared willing to talk to me with a new honesty and openness. During the interview, I also found that I was willing to share more of my own story with the students, particularly our similar concerns of juggling family, community, and academic life. However, in spite of a conversation in which Marie again mentioned her residential school experience, I was still not able to share with her my experiences as a child living outside a residential school. Perhaps, I, like Kleinman & Copp (1994), did not discuss certain topics for fear of being called a racist or for fear of these topics jeopardizing the completion of the study.

CHAPTER VII: YEAR THREE

Introduction

The third year of the programme commenced in September 1994 with a group of 13 students, consisting of four students in the education degree and nine students in the business administration degree; one student had left the programme to attend on-campus where his wife was also studying.

During the third year of the programme, several significant changes were made in response to student requests. The programme was moved from the local school to a trailer housing two classrooms, an office, and a student lounge. This location would comprise the adult learning centre within the community. The move was made upon recommendations from the students who wanted a self-contained location to which they would have unlimited access, as discussed in Chapters V and VI. Many of the students found it difficult to study at home and needed a quiet, dedicated area to which they could go at any time. The two classrooms facilitated the simultaneous delivery of courses to education and business administration students, and served as study rooms when classes were not in session. One classroom was equipped with an incoming telephone line and the university technology for audio-conferencing.

The office for the local programme co-ordinator included a telephone, fax, photocopier, and computer on-line access to the Brandon University Library. The Brandon University Library also arranged for a small collection of appropriate library materials to be sent to the community for the duration of the term, comprising the first on-site library for university students. Although this did not meet all the students' needs, the university librarians believed that it was critical for students to have some books available in their community for initial research, to be followed up by library requests. The additional materials that the student would need could be requested from the Brandon University off-campus library services. Students had access to the on-line Brandon University library catalogue, and could locate and request any of the materials within the library. These requested books and articles were then shipped by air to the students. The students could

also contact the librarian if they were having difficulties locating materials through the on-line catalogue, and she would attempt to locate and ship materials to them. In addition, the local Director of Education, at the request of the students, also provided the centre with maps, dictionaries, and atlases, as well as some art for the walls.

This move to the new location marked a transition within the programme, and was considered a milestone by the students, a validation by the community of a belief in the importance of a place where adults within the community could learn. For the past two years, students had articulated the need for a separate place for the adult learners, but had received neither support nor acknowledgement of this request. In late August 1994, the PAC accepted the students' recommendations and informed the community that the university programme would be housed in a separate facility. This allocation of a separate place was interpreted by the students as recognition of the post-secondary programme by the Chief and Council and the community. The development of a library, and the presence of atlases, dictionaries, and art on the wall were all indicative of the changes within the community. The new location was beginning to look like a learning centre, something that had not been in existence since the closure of the BUNTEP Centre over ten years earlier.

The centre was open for classes and study from 9:00 a.m. until midnight, seven days a week. A monitoring system for evening use was initiated whereby students were responsible for opening and closing the facility. As our earlier experiences with student-initiated, tutorial requests had been dismal failures, all courses in the third year had a scheduled evening tutorial/study hall session. These tutorial sessions always took place in one classroom, with the other classroom available for individual study. Learning from our previous mistakes, the programme administrator did not set up any study groups, but encouraged the students to use the centre as required for their individual learning.

Another significant change in the programme was a formalized process involving community representation in the hiring of instructors in Great River. In this process, all potential

candidates are first reviewed by the respective academic department to ensure that the prospective instructors possess the required academic qualifications; in this case, a graduate degree in the discipline. The department then forwarded the list of approved candidates in each area to me. These "academically" acceptable candidates were then required to participate in an interview involving representative(s) from the academic department and community representative(s). I acted as a non-voting chair of the interview committee, to provide logistical information about salary and expenses, and to provide a written report of the session. I might add that my role as the chair was purely facilitative. I did not have any input in the decision, but was merely responsible for ensuring that the housekeeping aspects of the committee were completed. The academic department member was there to provide course content and textbook information. The final decision at this interview would be the responsibility of the community representative(s) to determine the candidate most suitable to teach within their community. This process, initiated within the full-time programme at Great River, has formed the basis for all hiring within First Nations communities.

The interview process for teaching in Great River commenced with the community member providing a description of their community and an opportunity for the candidate to ask questions. Wherever possible, photographs of the community, the programme centre, and faculty accommodation were also available. In Great River, Aboriginal community representatives asked questions about how the prospective teacher would become involved in the community, how the instructor would deal with classroom conflicts between students, and what resources, if any, they would call upon within the community. Following the interview, the committee met to share their thoughts, and the community representative made his/her recommendation.

Both the community representative and I were pleased with the interview process. In two cases, candidates withdrew their application upon receiving information about the community, stating that they did not feel comfortable teaching in these settings. The academic representatives on the interview committee provided mixed comments. Some academics considered it a waste of

time to participate in an interview in which they did not make the final decision, whereas others thought it was a valuable experience that provided an opportunity to meet the candidates and learn from the Aboriginal representatives about the types of teaching skills needed in their community.

The final change in the programme in the third year involved the release of Daniel, the local student co-ordinator, and the hiring of Sam who was to remain in the position for the duration of the programme. The release of Daniel by the Chief and Council was initiated by the local Director of Education who observed that Daniel was seldom at the centre except when he was required to transport the instructors to or from the airport. The students had complained about Daniel's ongoing absence from work and the fact that he missed most appointments with them. Daniel was given the opportunity to resign and was replaced by Sam in September 1994.

Sam, a former assistant at the airport, was the only applicant for Daniel's position. He had completed high school, but had no post-secondary education. His lack of university experience required that the job description for the local co-ordinator be modified to involve primarily administrative functions such as keeping attendance, transporting instructors, and all janitorial and custodial duties associated with the centre and the teacherage. His appointment was reluctantly accepted by the university and, as a result of his limited skills in student support and academic matters, IUN hired an itinerant student counsellor to provide student support.

The decision to accept the appointment of Sam was a difficult one for me, as overall administrator. I wanted a local co-ordinator from the community, but I also wanted that individual to have experiences with the university. This was not possible within this community, as there were only three university graduates in the entire population. In retrospect, I believe I should have explored other options with the Director of Education; perhaps, someone from another Northern Cree community, with the appropriate skills, would be willing to relocate to Great River. I chose to support the appointment of Sam given the recommendation of the local Director of Education. Although Sam had good skills in the physical management of the centre,

his lack of student support skills was an impediment, both to him and to the programme. Despite attempting to compensate for Sam's lack of expertise through additional training and by providing the services of the itinerant student advisor, there were serious problems with student support. Although the cohort all had successful academic records to that point, they were entering more difficult courses. Given the struggles they had had since the resignation of Lorraine, there was potential for them to give up.

Overview of the Third Year of the Programme

During the third year, I kept in close contact with the students through weekly, and sometimes daily, telephone calls and fax messages. I made four visits to the community during the year. Two of the four visits were to attend meetings with the PAC in my official capacity with the university. During those two visits, I met with the students, both in a group and individually, but did not conduct formal interviews. My third visit, in May 1995, involved group interviews. I was not able to conduct the personal interviews at that time and, so, the personal interviews were conducted in July 1995. This situation was a change in the interviewing schedule as, in the two previous years, group interviews were immediately followed by personal interviews. In this particular situation, the students were not available after the group interviews due to a local band meeting, and my other responsibilities at the university did not allow me to stay in the community an additional day. As a result, I decided to go back to the community and conduct the personal interviews. The following information is distilled from discussions with the students throughout the year, ongoing field notes, and a personal journal.

The third year of the programme was a year of many changes. Although the second year of the programme marked the introduction of academic courses, the third year involved the introduction of courses specific to the students' disciplines (i.e., accounting and statistics for business administration, and Teaching Methods for education, in addition to arts and science electives). The courses were offered over an eight-week block, in order to address the students' criticism of six-week blocks. Courses such as accounting, that required a great deal of

assignment work, were extended to a twelve-week period. The new eight-week format included two weeks of study time during which the instructors were not in the community, but could be reached by the students by telephone or fax. Scheduled audio-conferencing sessions were also arranged as part of the two study weeks within the eight-week sessions.

Group Interviews

Although the final group interview was conducted in May of the third year, I had contacts with the group on two prior occasions when I attended the PAC meetings. I had also met with faculty members while in the community, and their comments, which I believe to be critical to the data, are interspersed with the group comments. The information from the group interview was reviewed by the students prior to inclusion in the study. The information from the interviews with the faculty members was reviewed by the respective individuals prior to inclusion. The group interview and faculty interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

The education students had positive comments about the mathematics course and the instructor. The instructor, Edward, was a Nigerian visiting professor who, in Nigeria, was responsible for a large field-based upgrading programme for Nigerian primary school teachers. He noticed many similarities between the Aboriginal community and Nigeria:

> *I felt a deja-vous experience in Great River, there were so many similarities between my upgrading students and these mature students completing their Education degrees. All of the students have busy lives, and classes and study time has to be squeezed in between family and community work. That is the same in Nigeria, particularly for the women, for our culture still presumes that women take on the lion's share in the area of child-rearing. The logistical problems are also similar, the living conditions crowded, you have to haul water, cut wood, hunt or fish, and be involved in subsistence farming. Studying is hard for these people, both in Nigeria and Great River, as with few conveniences, simple tasks take a long time.*
>
> *These students have very different lives than mature learners at the Adult Learning Centre in Winnipeg. In fact, the students in Great River are closer to my mature teachers in northern Nigeria in terms of lifestyles. The teachers in rural Nigeria have numerous skills, but not necessarily skills recognized by the Ministry of Education. Sometimes they lack confidence; most of them have only taken one year of teacher training college in a rural setting, so textbook knowledge and reading skills are limited. But they know a great deal about teaching these children in remote areas, some of whom are nomadic. The*

teachers in northern Nigeria have an understanding of how their students learn, about traditional ways of learning and teaching within Nigerian culture. This is something that has been lost to the academy which, for so long, has mirrored the British system of education. The education faculties in the southern cities of Nigeria don't know half of what these seasoned teachers know about dealing with northern rural children in some of the most impoverished areas. That's why these teachers are a valuable resource, and the best way for the Nigerian Ministry of Education to improve education in these rural areas is to work with local teachers and provide on-site courses. These local teachers understand the students and can make a difference in the development of our country.

This is similar to what is happening in Great River. These education students have a great deal to offer the community. Why, Marie has years of experience as a mother, she knows traditional ways of learning and teaching, and she speaks Cree well. Language is a vital part of African culture and reconnecting with who we are. The same can be said for the people in Great River. These people are resources to the community and to the university.

I don't know if the university recognizes the importance of these people in the whole scheme of appropriate education. In northern Nigeria, we developed a science curriculum in collaboration with our rural teachers. We knew that we had to explain concepts like kinetic energy, but we needed some local input. Our hunters in this part of Nigeria still utilize the bow and arrow, so we explained energy in terms of the bow and arrow in the vernacular. This could only be developed by working with the local teachers. This is what we need to do when we develop curriculum-- tie it to something in these teachers' and students' reality. Science education is a challenge but, with the bow and arrow, we can explain all the types of energy and the teachers can understand it this way and then transmit their understanding to the students. However, universities cannot change the curriculum alone, we must involve the practitioners. With this approach to curriculum, we can make changes that create positive differences. This is something that transcends borders, the need for education to be grounded in the reality and life experiences of the students.

Nigerians, like Aboriginal people, were colonized by the British. Despite emancipation, African nations are still bound by British systems and traditions in education. Not all of these traditions are bad, but we need to take this colonial system and make changes suitable to our population. Certainly, the British system works for some of us, we all went through private school where we learned more about England than Nigeria. This is what happened to the students here in Great River. They learned more about British and mainstream Canadian culture than they did their own. This is a symptom of colonization. For Africans, we are no longer a colony but, Aboriginal people, in my eyes, they still seem like a colony of southern Canada. I don't know if the people at the university see this but maybe, because I was part of colonized people, I can see something of this in Great River. I haven't talked to the students about these ideas at the present time. I am not sure if they would relate to these ideas. As I get to know them better, I am sure we will talk about it. In the other community, Rocky Bay, where I have been working on science curriculum, the Aboriginal teachers and I have discussed this whole concept of colonization and education.

The students expressed comfort with Edward and commented about his interest in the community and his questions about their language and traditional culture. To me, both as a researcher and programme administrator, Edward's comments encompassed much of what education within a First Nations community should involve – a relevant curriculum, and a respect and integration of Aboriginal knowledge in the classroom.

One of the students offered the following remarks:

Math was always a hard subject to me, but this course wasn't bad. Can you believe it; I got a B in the course. I always had trouble with Math, but Edward explained things so well. He was a good teacher; he made us work hard, but he always had time to explain things to us. We had to make up word problems and he asked us to think of problems that, how do you say, made sense to us like the distance between ourselves and the river and how long it would take to travel. He told us these are the kind of problems we should give our students, use words they know about, not just high words. Sometimes, he told us to make a problem in Cree for the other students. That was different. When someone couldn't understand a concept, Len explained it to them in Cree and now they understand it. He says that is the way you have to teach. Find ways to get the information across. Use your own language when you need to. That is the good thing for all of us, we can explain things in English or Cree, most of the teachers here can't. I never thought about explaining Math in Cree, but it helps when you can't get it in English.

The second course involving the education students was taught by Harvey. The appointment of Harvey to teach additional courses was at the request of the students and the community. The education students all had positive comments about his class and his teaching style. In academic terms, all the education students successfully completed this course. Harvey expressed concerns that he did not want students to develop a teaching style based only on his presented techniques. He stated that they must be exposed to other styles of teaching, so agreed to teach only two more courses in the community. Harvey provided some creative ways to expose the students in this isolated community to other classroom situations throughout Manitoba. He arranged with several schools to videotape classroom activities in order to allow the students to observe different situations across the province. He selected several schools in Brandon, one of which had a large number of Aboriginal students. He also provided a videotape segment on an Aboriginal school in Winnipeg. The tape showed Aboriginal teachers and

traditional ways of teaching and learning, including a sharing circle and traditional prayers at the commencement of classes each day. Harvey, although recognizing the need for community-based education, voiced the following concerns:

> *I tried to find classes that had Aboriginal students in the classroom, or an Aboriginal focus such as the Children of the Earth School. This provided the students with both cultures of education – mainstream Canadian as well as the Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning which are found in the Children of the Earth School. I guess you know that the Children of the Earth School is the first Aboriginal school within a school division in Winnipeg. This school was developed to support urban Aboriginal people, many of whom had to relocate from the north. The standard school system wasn't working for all of them, illustrated by high attrition and non-completion rates. After the students have a chance to view these different schools and classrooms, and we have discussed various philosophies of education, it's up to them to chose what will best work for them as teachers and for their students here in the community. That decision is up to them. They need to adapt what will work for them and redevelop what doesn't work.*

The final course taken in the fall term by the education students was a Canadian History course that was offered over the entire fall term. This course was offered because it was a degree requirement at Brandon University for all education students, and there was no option for negotiation if students wanted to graduate in teacher-training. The Education faculty explained that the provincial school curriculum that education graduates would be required to teach necessitated a knowledge of Canadian history. Although this condition was not necessarily the most appropriate for Aboriginal students, teaching within an Aboriginal community, the university academic governance did not allow other options. All students completed the course, but their comments indicated that they found it similar to the Canadian History courses they had taken at school, provided them with limited information about Aboriginal peoples of Canada, and reminded them of Canadian history courses they had been exposed to in their own school experiences.

The business administration students were involved in three course offerings in the fall term. Two courses, Organizational Psychology and Introduction to Statistics, were offered in eight-week blocks, whereas Computer-Assisted Bookkeeping was offered over the entire

semester. A student offered the following comments on Organizational Psychology:

> *This course was a lot better than the Intro Psychology; we actually got to do something instead of sitting and listening and writing multiple- choice tests. Shahroon, the instructor, had us work in groups and discuss situations, and how we would deal with a particular problem.*

The instructor, Shahroon, who had lived most of her life in Bangladesh, recognized the different ways people relate to each other in Canada and Asia and the struggles she had when taking courses in human resource management in Canada. Her exposure to Aboriginal culture was limited to this course in Great River, and she expressed her feelings of ineptitude in designing learning experiences that would benefit the students. When she approached the Business Administration and Psychology departments for case studies suitable for northern Aboriginal students, they were not able to provide her with any resources. This situation raises some big issues for the university administrators and the need to dedicate funding to the development of resources to enhance the delivery of courses in Aboriginal communities. If the university administration believes that the serving of Aboriginal clientele is critical to its mission, policies and practices must be reflective of this commitment. Shahroon provided the following comments on her experiences:

> *I didn't have any experience with Native students before this, so this was a learning time for myself also. I tried to get them used to doing presentations. All of the students seemed very shy of speaking in front of each other. Perhaps my course was the first one where they had to do this. I let them speak Cree to each other. We used to do the same back home. We always talked Bengali except to the professor or when doing seminars or exams. We had all our textbooks in English so, like these students, we were always operating in two languages. I tried to make the content relevant to them, but I had not much experience with Native people. Psychology and Management are very western-based areas of scholarship, but I think they learned something and enjoyed the course.*

The business administration students also participated in an introductory statistics course. This was taught by Edward, the Nigerian visiting professor, who also taught the mathematics course to the education students. The students' comments about Edward mirrored those provided by the education students. They said that his lectures were well organized and that his expectations were explained clearly. The students also agreed with

the education students that he tried to make the content relevant to their lives.

Edward's comments, I believed, displayed both his understanding of appropriate content and a learner-centered teaching model. He appeared to be aware of the "suitcase of knowledge" that the students brought to his course and drew upon this knowledge base in the delivery of the course.

> *I had to step back and remember that none of these students had ever been exposed to the concepts in statistics before. Most of them had no idea how this field would be relevant to them in their Business degree. As a result, I spent a good deal of time providing this background information to them. I believe that if students, particularly adult students such as these, don't realize some applications of their learning to their lives, you are not succeeding as a teacher. I think with the whole area of science education, we forget that it can be relevant, but professors need to work a little harder than if they are in an on-campus situation.*

The final course of the fall term was Computer-Assisted Bookkeeping, offered over the duration of the term. This was a course that the business administration students looked forward to, as it represented the core of their area of study. The course met with mixed responses, partly due to an unexpected heavy workload and partly due to communication problems between the students and the instructor. Bernice said:

> *I was waiting for this course, 'cause I like to work with numbers. I don't like all this reading and writing stuff and thought this course would be different. Well, it was! There was so much work. Not just accounting, but we had to use the computers and learn how to do the accounting stuff on the computer. The computers weren't available during the day, so we had to go over to the school at night to get that part of the course done. The instructor was hard to understand, not just for me, but for all of us. She was good and she was always there, every night with us, but she talked so fast and loud. We got a headache listening to her. I am sure she knew the stuff, but she didn't seem to be able to explain it to us all the time. She was different from Edward; he knew how to teach, he went slower so we had time to write things down and ask questions. Well, we got used to her, and I guess she got used to us, so by the end things were going OK, and we did learn a lot about accounting. One thing she did was get us all calculators. No one here had a calculator, and they are so expensive to buy here. Well, she bought eight of them for us in Winnipeg and brought them up and taught us how to use them. That was a good idea. It took us the whole term to do the work. We had assignments every week. We could never have completed the course in less time.*

Ping, the instructor for Computer-Assisted Bookkeeping, explained that she found the

teaching a challenge. She said that the students had difficulty understanding her, even though she said things two or three times. She enjoyed the experience, but said that the students had a hard time with the course, and she had to take extra time explaining things that she had assumed (although incorrectly) that the students knew. Her comments reflected her lack of understanding of the students' background and knowledge base. Her comments also suggested the need for a better teacher orientation and induction, which should have included an initial meeting with the students to discuss the course.

> *I enjoyed teaching in Great River, but it was very different from any courses I had ever taught before. Only two of the students had ever had bank accounts, some had never been in a bank (*there were no banks in Great River*), so I had to explain the whole banking procedure, deposits, withdrawals, before I could explain the bank reconciliation, which was the first concept in Chapter One. This was just one situation, but things that I thought adults would know had to be explained all over again, like charge accounts, and interest payments. People going to teach in Great River need to know these things, otherwise, we take many things for granted. These students have very different experiences than a southern adult.*

The initial offerings in January 1995 included a geography course entitled Weather and Climate, and two courses in Aboriginal Art. The students found Weather and Climate difficult, and struggled with the required reading material. They found the professor unapproachable and, as a result, seldom asked for extra help. Attendance was a problem in this course with students missing classes on a regular basis. The professor, a former one-year term appointment within the Department of Geography at Brandon University, was disappointed with his teaching experience in Great River. The geography professor said that the students could not keep up with the note-taking, didn't ask questions, and were not the type of university students that he was accustomed to working with. He informed the university that he would not wish to return to this community to teach any other courses. The hiring of this instructor was a poor decision for it was not a positive experience for either the learners or the instructor. However, his hiring had been a result of the community decision process, and, of course, had the university's support. It was obvious we made a mistake.

The two courses in Aboriginal Art focussed on the history of Native Art in the Americas from prehistoric to contemporary times. In addition to a written assignment, the students had to complete their own Native art projects, one using traditional art forms and the second utilizing contemporary styles. The instructor was a Metis artist from a northern urban centre in Manitoba, who had started her university studies in a community-based programme. Although the students provided positive comments about the course, the content was not what they had anticipated.

Emily stated:

> *The courses were interesting, but not what we expected. There was a lot of history about Indians in Mexico and South America. I guess we thought that it would be about our art, but it was about all the Native art. The course was more like a history course and about stuff I never heard about before like the Maya and the Aztec. We looked at tons of slides of all this type of art, which we had never seen before. When we got to the later part of the course, she showed us slides of some paintings from northern Manitoba like Jackson Beardy. We did two projects, which were hard to do, but we had fun doing them. I liked the course, but I would have liked to spend more time on our art. Sometimes, when we are going to take a course, we expect one thing but then the course turns out to be different. I don't know how to solve this problem because there is no one here in the community who took courses who can give us this information.*

Gabrielle, the instructor, also commented on the students' surprise with the course content. Her comments also reflected what she saw as the students' initial inability to view Native art in its entirety, and to see connections between Cree and other Aboriginal cultures.

> *I was surprised when I arrived at Great River. The community was very remote and I don't think the students expected the types of courses I was giving. The course was an art history course and involved an overview of Native art from pre-colonial until present time. This was much more than a drawing course. The students are required to view slides and are provided with a comprehensive overview of Aboriginal art. I had the impression that these students in Great River did not identify with the concept of Aboriginal art in its entirety, nor had they ever been exposed to Aztec or Maya civilizations. They all thought that these cultures, such as the Aztec and the Maya, which are essentially viewed as the mother culture of Aboriginal people in North America, had no connection with them as Native people. When they finally realized that they, as Northern Cree, are a part of this evolution of Aboriginal art, it is a discovery, an awakening, sort of like discovering that the world is round. I think an instructor can sometimes forget the point at which many of these students are starting, and the limited exposure they have to things outside their community. Communities such as Great River had been isolated and are just coming out of poverty. However, it is critical that, as Native people, they see that they are a part of a much greater civilization than just Northern Cree. This course provides*

knowledge for a degree, but a greater sense of personal knowledge and connectivity to their own culture.

The students participated in two Native Studies courses taught by a Native man, a graduate of Brandon University, with a post-graduate degree from Harvard University. Dustin, the instructor, had a positive experience in the community both within and outside the classroom situation. Although his teaching involved three days per week in the community, he spent several weekends there visiting students in their homes and becoming involved in community activities. He also developed assignments for the students that reflected local situations and which required students to attend band meetings and interview members of Chief and Council. Louise provided the following comments about the courses:

I liked the Native Studies courses; the instructor, Dustin, was really good. He was an Indian guy, the first one that ever taught a course for us. He told us about his own life; he had trouble in school himself because he had that problem where you see words backwards. I can't remember the name of it. He went to the army after high school and was there for ten years. Then, he decided that he wanted to go to university himself and went back to school when he was twenty-eight years old. He said it was hard going back to school and can see how it is hard for us because we are all older students. He finished his degree and went to Harvard University and did his Master's degree. He told us that there were lots of Indians doing degrees at Harvard and there were Indian professors there too. That's different; we only have two Indian teachers here in the whole school. Dustin tried to find out about the community. He stayed here on the weekend and told us to come over and see him. I didn't go over, but the guys in our class did and they went fishing and skidooing. He told us he really liked being here and he learned things about the community. He got involved in the community too. There was a Hydro meeting here with the band and we all went as part of the course. He told us that was our assignment. Some of the councillors were mad at him for that because he was not from the community, so he should mind his own business. But he was the first instructor that really stayed here and got involved, really involved, I mean. I think that was good. He also pushed us to get involved in things. He said that was a part of being a student. He wasn't from here, but he understood what it was like to be an Indian. That was good.

Dustin offered the following comments about his experience:

The experience in Great River was good for me. This was one of the first courses that I had to teach, so I had to learn some things about teaching. Harvey was teaching here so he helped me with some of the things in putting together my lesson plans, and explaining the assignments. I found that helpful. He even sat in on one of my classes to give me some ideas.

I had a chance to get to know the students in Great River. I spent a weekend here

as well as in the other community in which I taught, and did some things with the guys in the class. I don't think the students here realize what the community has. I told them that scholars from Harvard would come here and would find so much to study and to learn. The community is isolated, but the students still know the language well, not like in some other communities. I think it was important for them to have a Native professor to tell them these things. It is different when you take courses from a Native person; there is a different world view, but I learned after Harvard that this world view is OK.

I was a Native student at Brandon University. I took Native Studies courses, but I never had the exposure to Native professors teaching their discipline from an Aboriginal perspective. When I went to Harvard, this was different. There was an academic community of Aboriginal scholars, an arts community of Aboriginal painters, writers, and dramatists. I gained a different perspective, but more important was that I learned that it was OK to have an Aboriginal perspective. I learned that it was OK to be radical within a discipline and challenge the academic knowledge in light of Aboriginal world views. That didn't happen for me in Brandon, but it happened in Harvard. Native students need to gain the perspective in their education, a perspective that I tried to give them. They need to know who they are and feel proud of their culture and ways of knowing. Studies in Harvard have shown that Native students with a strong traditional upbringing and a sense of their own culture do much better within the American education system. They are able to succeed in Eurocentric education because they know who they are; know many of the traditions which they study are not their own. This is exactly the opposite of the entire 'Indian Act' and residential school system when the dominant culture sought to eradicate Native cultures and values.

Dustin's comments reinforced the need for Aboriginal students to connect with their culture and develop a strong sense of identity. In doing so, he believed they become more confident and successful within a Eurocentric mainstream institution. Dustin's comments stressed the importance of Aboriginal instructors and the recognition of an Aboriginal perspective in the classroom.

Reference Sources was the final course offered for the four education students, all of who successfully completed the course. The students had positive comments about the course and the instructor, Harvey. Reference Sources was designed to provide potential teachers with an overview of the use of library resources in the classroom. This was a difficult course to offer in an off-campus situation, particularly given that the community had only a small school library. Harvey reflected on the course:

This was a difficult course to teach off-campus, again because of the lack of resources

and the students' lack of knowledge in the entire area of libraries. The four Education students in the course had never visited a public library. Only one of them had been in the school library, and they only used the Brandon University on-line catalogue when they needed to do a specific assignment.

The students were interested in visiting the university library and school libraries in Brandon, but the band was unable to fund the travel. This budget-driven decision was a concern for Harvey who believed the students did not receive the exposure to library resources that on-campus urban students would have. This raises a legitimate concern that resources are limited in an off-campus programme, despite electronic library catalogues, electronic mail, and technological advances. The maintaining of the high standards of quality education is an ongoing challenge in the delivery of community-based programmes. However, in order to ensure an appropriate learning situation, there is a critical need for rigorous prior planning in programme development and an understanding of the community, including the resources that would be available for course delivery. Moreover, perhaps one of the solutions is to recognize that community-based programmes are not carbon copies of on-campus offerings, but must maintain the learning objectives within any university course. As one community-based educator said, "*The end results of an education are the same. In a community programme, how you get there is different*" (J. Little, Personal Communication, 1995).

Personal Interviews

The following personal interviews were conducted first with Marie, then with Bernice and Joan. Bernice and Joan continued to be interviewed together as in previous interviews. All interviews were taped and transcribed. As in the previous interviews, Marie, Bernice, and Joan all had an opportunity to review the comments and interpretations from the previous interviews and provide comments.

Marie's Story

Discussions with Marie were becoming more comfortable, as were all meetings with the students. We shared stories about our children and often spoke of our families throughout the

interview. I began by asking Marie to reflect on her year at school.

> *I did well in all my courses except that geography course - the Weather and Climate. I just couldn't understand the lecture or the textbooks. I have a hard time in science courses. When we were in school, in the residential school, we didn't get a good background in Math and Science, so it has been difficult for me. When we took Biology I had some help from Oliver, but he didn't take this course. The words are all so different for me from anything I ever knew. When I heard the title I thought the course would be good. The weather is really important to us. My husband always knows when it is going to rain, when the water is too rough to cross to the river. When we stayed at the fishing or hunting camp, we always could tell what the day would be like from the way the wind was blowing, from the type of sky. After all, if you lived this way, you had to understand the weather. Well, this course was just all notes and formulas and more notes, and a professor talking too fast. Maybe if he tried to find out a little bit about how we lived with the weather, and how we manage such a cold climate, and then tried to relate the material somehow, then it would be better.*

Marie's comments focused on the importance of relevant content and the need for the academic world to make connections with the world of Great River. In discussions during the first year of the programme, Marie seemed to accept the course content from the academy as given. In this final interview, she provided a critical analysis of the courses in light of their relevancy to her life experiences and her culture. Her comments also reflected her background in education as she spoke about presentation in class, style of teaching, and ways that she would integrate this academic content into her teaching of students. She continued:

> *The first part of the Aboriginal Art course was not at all what we thought it would be. The other students probably told you that. It was all about art in Mexico and the Aztec and the Maya. But I thought it was interesting to learn about other Native people. We never learned anything like that before. All we ever heard about was the Cree people like ourselves. We were always kind of isolated from the other Native communities. My parents never left this community and the only time I left was to go to residential school. So we are kind of to ourselves here. We had to do projects in the course, both the first and second part of the course. I did a project for the first course of a mask, like the South American Indians did. In the second part of the course, we did art from Canada and some of the Cree artists like Jackson Beardy who was from the north. My project for this course was photos of some special rocks on the other side of the lake. The instructor made us work hard and look at lots of slides, but when we had to do the project, she helped us find something to do; she wanted us to do something from here. That was good for all of us. I had to go by skidoo to get there and took pictures of them. These are really special rocks and there are all kinds of stories about them. I should bring my project for you to see. I kept it. If we ever have an open house, I would like to put my project for display. I don't think the people here know how special these rocks are. My father used to talk*

about them, they have been here forever. I will use this project in school too.

Marie felt she had developed a good rapport with the instructor, Harvey. It was clear from her statements that she found him to be an excellent instructor in terms of teaching style, as well as an individual who paid heed to the importance of relevant content. Marie's comments reinforced Harvey's ability to integrate the culture and traditions of the community with academic knowledge.

Marie, however, raised concerns about her experience with her cooperating teacher in her two-week classroom experience. Unlike her experience with Harvey in which she openly shared her ideas, she found her classroom placement a restrictive and silencing experience. She commented.

> *If you want to hear from the other students, you will have to ask them, I can only tell you how I felt about the course. I was disappointed with my results from the field experience. Although I passed the course, all of my areas dealt with by the co-operating teacher stated "needs improvement." I know I am not perfect in my teaching, and have lots to learn, but I have been working in the school in various roles for over twenty years, and there was no recognition of this. At the end when we actually had to teach, all my report said was "needs improvement". The teacher never commented on anything that I might have done right. This was totally different from the way Harvey did things. He always told us ways to improve, but he also told us what we did right. He explained that, in teaching, this should happen in the classroom. It is not a good idea to always say negative things to a student. You need to find the strengths of the student and then use those to mention improvement in the other areas. Our culture is not one of constant criticism; we try to accept each other with their faults. I felt the co-operating teacher didn't even try to find out about me and what I might have done in the classroom. She didn't want to hear my ideas. She just wanted to run the classroom the way she always did, and wanted me to do the same as her. Well I can't. For one thing, I come from a completely different culture, and my life experiences are totally different. Those things play a role in what kind of teacher I will become. I can't help it, but we are different, and we need to know that. Maybe I could also help her with some things. I am from here and know a little about the kids here. She never asked me. She always treated me like I knew nothing. That was hard. I don't have a problem with white teachers here, there are not enough people in our band with the qualifications, but it is good for our students to see some people from this band who became teachers and are role models for them. I think I have some good ideas for teachers to use in the classroom but, in this experience, I didn't have a chance to even talk about them. From Harvey's class, that is what I thought teaching was all about, particularly after reading Joining the Circle. We need to listen to each other to provide a good system for our children. This didn't happen in field experience. That was a disappointment for me for it was our first chance to teach and I hoped for more.*

Similar experiences to Marie's are discussed in Grant (1995) where she describes the case of "Mary," who had been teaching for many years but lacked formal qualifications. Mary wanted to learn more about teaching, but would not change her teaching style because she felt that would be inappropriate for the children. Mary, like many other individuals involved in teacher-training in their home communities, articulated a clash of cultures between mainline institutions and local schools seeking to provide culturally relevant schooling for Aboriginal children. Grant (1995) states:

> *There is no doubt universities must maintain standards of training, but they also must change and learn about new things if present practices do not meet their clients' needs. Faculties of Education show remarkably little interest in learning about educational approaches that are not validated by the literature of their own narrow cultural and socio-economic group ... What becomes important then, is how mainline institutions adapt to this aspect of First Nations self-determination while retaining university standards and expectations* (p. 212).

Although Marie recognized the need for culturally relevant schooling, she did not want to graduate with a teaching degree that did not meet provincial standards:

I don't think any of us want an easy degree. We want to be teachers, and we know that our children need good and qualified teachers. I know it will be hard work and I am committed to working hard. I don't want an A unless I deserve it. But we need more teachers like Harvey who listen to us and help us make sense of things in our own culture. We learned so much with Harvey, and stuff I will use in the class, because it made sense to me.

Marie also commented on the Native Studies courses and instructor:

> *I know it was nice to have an Indian man teach us, and the course was interesting. He got really involved with the students – the men in the class – and spent the weekend here. He was quite smart and he tried to encourage all of us to do well. That was good. He also went to the band meeting about the Hydro plan here and gave a speech. I don't think he should have done that. He is not from here and that meeting was for the band members. I know he was trying to help, but I didn't agree with him doing that. Some of the things in the course I didn't agree with too.*

Marie's comments were not what I expected or hoped to hear. As a university administrator, I was expecting validation of the hiring of an Aboriginal person to teach in a First Nation's community. Although Marie did concur with the importance of Aboriginal instructors,

her reaction to this instructor was quite different from what I had heard from the students in the group meeting. Upon further questioning, Marie continued:

> *Well, the course was good, but I am a Christian and the things he talked about in Native Spirituality were not my way. Some of the students agree with the instructor, but I have my own beliefs and, as a Christian, my life is so good. I don't want to go to pow-wows or ceremonies, although others might. I have found my way in Christianity. But he was a good teacher and we learned a lot.*

Although I had been aware of Marie's involvement with Christianity, I anticipated that she would support a faith including both pow-wows and church as was found in other communities. However, in her acceptance of Christianity, she did not find a place for Aboriginal spirituality and, although she did not criticize others for their beliefs, she was adamant about her own. Marie's comments had a profound affect on me, as a researcher, causing me to look in-depth at my own perceptions about people's stories. My impressions of Marie were of a traditional woman who had a good knowledge of both her language and culture. I expected, and even hoped, that her views on spirituality would include an acceptance of Aboriginal spirituality. Her comments negated my views. Upon further reflection, I realized that what I had done, in this situation, was to view Marie in the way I thought an Aboriginal woman should be, rather than listen to her own story. I had, in effect, appropriated her voice to validate my own assumptions and research, instead of listening to, and hearing, what she had to say. I had mentally stereotyped her in a way that I found appropriate, in a kind of colonizing, silencing way. I had, in essence, reinforced a patriarchal model. I believed that, in order to heal, Aboriginal people needed to follow Native Spirituality and abhor a fundamentalist approach to Christianity. These comments suggested two important value considerations for the future, as a researcher and an educator – the importance of listening to stories, and the differences between Aboriginal people within a community. Further, in my construction of Marie in a particular way, as a traditional Aboriginal women, was I not trying to construct the "other" in a way I wished, and I speculated that this construction might be a type of colonization. At this juncture, I am reminded of comments by Georgia, one of the three, Aboriginal women interviewed, who stated that Euro-Canadians tend to

see Aboriginal people in two ways, as "spiritual warriors of the plains, or as drunks in downtown hotels."

Bernice and Joan's Stories

I asked Bernice and Joan to reflect on their year at school. Joan began:

> *Well, I feel I am actually getting somewhere now. We are finally taking courses in the areas that we want. I never expected, in a university degree, that I would have to take so many other courses like all those English courses. Now, these are finally behind us and we are doing courses about business like the Organizational Psychology, bookkeeping and the statistics course. I am noticing now what makes a good teacher - that is - let us know what is expected and give us examples that make sense to us.*

Joan's comments, like Marie's, showed discernment of good pedagogy, involving both teaching style and relevant content. When asked about the Weather and Climate course, Bernice suggested that:

> *In this course, all I seem to remember is doing a lot of writing and reading a textbook that I had problems understanding. The professor stood at the front of the classroom and he seemed so distant from us. He just went on and on with his lecture. He didn't want us to ask questions. He kept telling us this course was difficult and we would have to work hard. It seemed like he valued himself as a teacher in how hard the course was. He didn't want to know us at all. We were students that he talked at and that was all.*

Again the students comments focussed on the instructor as a theme central to any discussion. The need for personal contact with the instructor appeared to be a major contributing factor to success within post-secondary study for Aboriginal students. Wilson (1994) quotes a student, upon successful completion of a course, speaking of her instructor, "*she made us feel like valuable human beings, that we had ideas and opinions besides what we're learning in university*" (p. 313).

I asked Joan and Bernice about their experiences in the Native Studies courses.

Joan said:

> *Oh yes, the Indian dude. Those were good courses and I liked Dustin, the instructor. He told us about his own problems when he went back to school, that he had dyslexia, and how school had always been hard for him. Well, now he has a degree from Harvard University. He got involved in the community, spent a weekend here, and went to the band meeting when they were discussing the*

Hydro settlement here. In fact, all of us went to that band meeting as a part of our class. He spoke in the meeting and said his opinion. He wasn't afraid to get involved.

I know it is probably hard for you to understand, but I don't think anyone can teach Native Studies except a Native person. You can't know what it is like to be an Indian and that is really important when you teach Native Studies courses. The way that Dustin thought and taught the course was different from the other white instructors who taught Native Studies, because he was an Indian. He talked to us about who we were and the stories he told in the class were our stories - his and ours - a white person couldn't do that. I don't know anything about my culture. I would like to know more, but I want to learn from a Native person, to find out about our old ways and our traditions. The men in our class really liked him. They seemed to relate to him. We have white men teaching, but this was different for the guys in our class. They always stayed after and talked to him and came back in the evening. He was a good role model for them. We don't have many guys in classes here and I don't think the ones in the class get a lot of support from other guys in the community. Dustin gave them support.

Bernice added:

Yes, these were the best courses this year. Partly because of the content and also because Dustin was a comfortable kind of guy. He knew what we were going through, both as students and as Indians. That made the difference. He really cared and wanted to help us. I don't know much about our traditional ways and beliefs but, after the course with Dustin, I want to know more.

The two Aboriginal Art courses were also taught by an Aboriginal, but neither Bernice nor Joan seemed to relate to her very well. Bernice provided the following:

Well it was OK; the instructor was OK. I know she was supposed to be a Native person, but we just couldn't seem to connect with her at first the way we did with Dustin. For instance, when she first arrived in the community, she didn't think to bring any food with her. What did she expect - McDonald's and Superstore? So, we had to get a ride over the lake again to the Northern Store to pick up supplies. Someone who was a Native person from the north should have known better. Of course, she did leave the north when she was a baby and grew up in Winnipeg. But, she moved back to the north to a hydro-electric community to work and that was where she started taking university courses. Her background was Metis, so I don't think she had much contact with Northern Cree before coming here. The cultures are very different you know.

Joan added:

Yes, it took her awhile to fit in, whereas Dustin fit in right away. But the course was good and, as we got to know her better and she us, things worked out. She was always trying to stress to us that we here in Great River were just a part of a bigger culture of Aboriginal peoples throughout the Americas and, although the cultures were different, there were similarities. She told us the reason we look at the art of Aztec and the other guys was to see where our cultures might have

come from. It makes sense to see us as a part of something bigger than just Cree, but it was really hard to see things in this way, when we don't know our own culture that well. Why, most of us have never left Manitoba or even gone to a pow wow. She has been to these places, so for her, it is easy, but she needs to think about her students here and our lives, and where we are at.

Obviously, the simple fact of being Aboriginal does not ensure that instructors and students will share the same world view. Prior to closing the interview, I wanted to ask these students about their new local student support person, and the kinds of support they would suggest to best assist them in degree completion. Joan responded in the following way:

Well, Sam is our third local student co-ordinator. I guess he is OK. I never go to see him. I never went to see Daniel either. After Lorraine left, I didn't feel like I could talk to the student advisor. Sam is like Daniel. He picks up the professor and takes attendance. He hasn't been to university himself and I don't think he knows anything about personal counselling, which is what the students need.

Bernice added:

Yes, Joan is right. Everyone seemed to forget about us once it looked like everyone was doing OK.

In closing, I asked Bernice and Joan for any further suggestions; Bernice responded:

Well I think I said it all. It's good to finally have our own place to study and be able to get in when we want. That sure helps. It's hard to do everything at the same time. We have lives too, and our study schedule has to fit with the rest of our lives, often around it. Even though we are halfway through, we still need to be encouraged. It would be good if the community could do something for the students and let us know they are still behind us.

Joan added:

Yes, the new space is great. I usually study late at night after the kids are in bed. We have to work our study around our stuff at home. Otherwise, as I said before, someone to talk to would be good. Problems at home can get in the way of our studies and if we could talk about it, that would help. Don't forget about us, we still need some help. I really want this degree.

The issues raised by the students in the third year provided critical questions for the university administration to explore – the need for relevant curriculum; the need for appropriate methods of evaluation; the recognition and integration of Aboriginal knowledge; the importance of instructor orientation; and the need for strong, local, personal, and academic support. It is these concepts that form the framework for the operational model for Community-Controlled

Education introduced in Chapter VIII.

Reflections on Year Three

Epilogue

The study of Great River concluded in the fall of 1995. The programme continued for the 1995-96 academic year. In the spring of 1996, the newly elected Chief and Council and the Tribal Council decided not to continue funding for the community-based programme, but rather relocated students to Brandon for the final year of their degree. The students made a strong presentation to the Chief and Council and the Tribal Council. The skills and confidence gained by these students within the academic programme made the presentation possible. As a result, the programme continued in the community for the 1996-97 year. The result was eight graduates, four in education and four in business administration. The remaining six students did not complete their studies by 1997. To an observer, a success rate of 8 students out of 25 – 32 percent completion rate in the required five years – may seem low. However, for a community with only three university graduates from its entire population, this number indicated a great step forward. Students who participated in part of the programme became one of the few members of their community who had the opportunity to sit in a university class. In Chapter IV, I quoted an Aboriginal educator who expressed the importance of putting education back into the culture. I believed that this process was beginning in Great River. Pursuit of education was starting to become part of the culture and community and, thus, the programme affected the community in two ways. First, there were soon to be eight more university graduates. Second, university study was now seen as a possible road to travel. The role of a post-secondary student had come to be seen as a positive and respected role in the community.

Upon reflection of the students' and instructors' comments following the third year of study, it appeared that common themes surrounding the clash of cultures between the community and the university, the need for systemic change within the academy, as well as suggestions for

practical solutions, were continuing to emerge. It became evident that, in order to provide an interactive learning experience for Aboriginal students, there was a need for university administrators to develop a greater understanding of the communities and the learners, a kind of prior ethnography. There was also a need to enhance curriculum to include materials relevant to Aboriginal learners, materials that could be available to instructors teaching in these programmes, and the exploration of alternate methods of teaching and evaluation.

However, the comments provided by the students in this final year of the study showed greater sophistication and well-articulated comments and criticisms around their university experience. Students were becoming confident in their abilities to express themselves and to negotiate within the post-secondary system. Their comments ranged from the questioning of what is appropriate content to what is an appropriate delivery method. These comments were very different from the initial comments about physical needs, such as a study room, a telephone and a fax machine.

The students recognized the existence of two world views and the importance of learning situations congruent with Aboriginal ways of knowing. They were able to articulate ways that they would integrate their own cultural orientation and world view within a classroom situation. They were also realizing that it was acceptable to challenge the Eurocentric views of the academy and the validity of their traditional knowledge. They were beginning to feel, in knowing and understanding their own culture, as equal but different from that of the academy. In their comments surrounding the Native Art course, it was also clear that they were beginning to consider themselves as part of a global Aboriginal community, rather than an isolated Cree community.

On a personal level, my relationship with the students had become comfortable. I believed that the student interviews, both group and personal, had become empathic and empowering. I sensed that the students felt that their opinions were respected and valued, particularly since they were beginning to see some of their suggestions incorporated into the

programme. Although the focus of the discussions still remained around post-secondary education, the students often dropped in to visit me when I was in the community, in addition to participating in formal interviews. During one of these visits, Joan shared her discovery that her teenage son had been abused by a family member when he was younger, and how this had affected her ability to concentrate on school work for several months. She explained that they were both attending counselling in an attempt to heal and to put the past behind them. Marie spoke of her deep faith on a much more personal level and how this had helped her through difficult times. Although the study was near completion, I knew that I would maintain contact with the students on both a professional and personal level.

CHAPTER VIII: REVISITING THE PROPOSITIONS

Introduction

This concluding chapter provides a final reflection upon the three evolving propositions introduced at the onset of the study. Although discussion and analysis are included throughout the study, this final chapter attempts to draw the interpretation together and examine the data from a more theoretical perspective, drawing upon, in the main, a feminist and Aboriginal literature. It is an attempt to understand the relationship between the academy and the community over the last three years and to examine the presence or absence of certain events or behaviours.

Although the chapter presents a conclusion for this particular study, it must also be seen as a part of an ongoing journey to understand and reconcile two very diverse worlds, that of the Aboriginal people and that of the academy. Thus, while the conclusion provides recommendations for the university in the provision of an inclusive educational environment, it does not intend to mitigate both the need for, and the importance of, ongoing dynamic research.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge, within the two communities: Brandon University and Great River, the presence of diversity. At the onset of my study I spoke of two communities, which I, to some extent, viewed from a distance. As I became more intimately and critically involved with these two communities within the study, I recognized diversity – not only between, but also within. In this sense I was a learner as much as a researcher in this project.

Proposition 1

1. The traditional roles of women within Cree culture might be an important element in facilitating their entrance into, and completion of, post-secondary study.

As explained in Chapter IV, in the section entitled *Women and Learning in Cree Culture,* this proposition developed initially from the personal interviews with the three female Aboriginal educators, ongoing discussions with the women learners over the three years of the study, and literature about the roles of Aboriginal women in traditional society. At this point, I again refer to

Stevenson (1995) who says that one cannot discuss the roles of Aboriginal women independent of their community. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (1996, Volume 4, p. 95), in its discussion of Aboriginal women, notes their greatest commonality to be a paramount concern to improve the quality of life within their families, communities and nations. In this final revisiting of the first proposition, I sought to go beyond the data and literature on the entry and success of this group of women in post-secondary study. Rather, I wanted to explore if these traditional roles assisted Aboriginal women in becoming successful candidates and negotiators of the post-secondary system. To repeat, were there aspects of their traditional roles that made these women particularly suitable candidates for higher education; or was their entry facilitated by aspects of the micro-cultures of the educational setting, such as small group work, that were similar to ways in which women existed in their Indigenous culture that facilitated their entry? These were big questions that I sought to address by constantly revisiting the data and the feminist and Aboriginal literature, and by sharing my ideas and interpretations on a longitudinal basis with Aboriginal women.

The quantitative data on Aboriginal student participation indicated that Aboriginal women did comprise a significant proportion of the student body in community-based, post-secondary study. It was evident, from my initial interviews with the three Aboriginal women educators, that their discussion of traditional roles of women in Cree culture reflected not only a diverse set of duties, but roles that were critical and central to the Aboriginal community – roles of teachers and advisors with strong linkages to traditional education. I also sought to explore feminist literature for, although the writings, as I came to realize, were essentially from a Eurocentric point of view, I believed that there were similarities: women within all cultures are required to assume diverse roles. This multiplicity of roles was evident in my own life as mother, researcher, and university administrator.

Both Afro-American and Euro-American women have likened their lives to that of a patchwork quilt in which the patches represent their varied roles, both personal and public

(Sellars, 1994). Sagaria (1989) argues that the use of the quilt metaphor in describing women's lives adds a further dimension as a way to validate aspects of women's work that may not be recognized in a more traditional representation of one's life.

Aptheker (1989) believes that the use of a quilt as a metaphor assists women in making meaning of their lives through the piecing together of their varied roles and experiences. Sellers (1994) draws upon the quilt metaphor and carries it into the creation of visual thematic representations of women's career patterns. This visualization reflects women's paths as non-linear, moving up, down, and sideways in order to accommodate the diverse roles that women assume in society. West (1996), in drawing on the quilt metaphor, argues that the patch-working (comprised of the diverse public and private roles) inherent in women's lives facilitates their adaptability and flexibility in times of change. Much of West's research has dealt with British communities undergoing significant economic upheaval and vast unemployment in traditional industries. He argues, from the perspective of "cultural psychology," that women have developed patch-working skills – skills that he suggests are culturally constructed. Adaptation has been a constant feature in women's lives: they have had to negotiate spaces between the work economy and the domestic economy; they have had less status and less investment in their identity and in old structures of paid work. Thus, it was easier for women to seek a variety of means to sustain themselves and their families.

I would suggest that, on the basis of the analysis, there are some parallels in the lives of Cree women for, in their varied and diverse roles, their lives were also reflective of a patch-worked existence. Further, there seemed to be parallels between the adaptability and flexibility exhibited by women in European cultures to that exhibited by Cree women, whose society has been in transition since the arrival of the Europeans over 400 hundred years ago.

The Role of Cree Women

At this point, I think it is important to reconsider, in depth, and as a part of drawing the thesis to a conclusion, the role of Cree women, in an attempt to understand more fully if and why

these traditional roles facilitated their entry and success in post-secondary study. In this reflection I have chosen to discuss the role of Cree women under the following three headings:

a) Transmission of Skills and Knowledge

b) Adaptability

c) Leadership

Transmission of Skills and Knowledge. Skills, in this context are defined as the practical expertise required for making fishing nets, snaring rabbits, and making moccasins – abilities that Cree women possessed and passed on within their community. Knowledge is defined here as an understanding of the Cree world that is maintained and transmitted by the oral tradition, including the cultural knowledge and the collective history of the community. In this sense, women are the academics and archivists of traditional Cree society. The transmission of knowledge in an oral culture, such as that of the Northern Cree, relies heavily upon storytelling for teaching history, as well as abstract concepts such as respect, honestly, loyalty, and morality. Georgia, one Aboriginal educator who has successfully completed post-secondary study, stresses this important role of women as storytellers and states, "*it was my mother, my aunt, my grandmother who told us the stories that I still remember today.*" This important role of Aboriginal women as "Keeper of the Culture" as nourisher and as educator is apparent throughout the women's comments in the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996, Volume 4, p. 18).

Marie, a student in Great River, corroborated these comments. She described her mother-in-law as her mentor, teaching her and other young women how to live in the community after absences at residential school. She also spoke of her roles as a teacher at home and as a substitute teacher in the school, and of the importance of imparting the skills she had learned from elder females to the community. She says, "*I tried to teach the things my mother-in-law taught me.*" A recurrent theme in Marie's discussion was her need to ensure the transmission of the Cree language to the youth of her community. She reinforced the comments made by Gillespie (1994) who argued that the loss of language would mean a loss of history, teachings, and traditional

knowledge in Cree culture. Marie plans to teach Cree in the school system, something that she had done informally for many years.

The three Aboriginal women educators interviewed in Chapter IV all described women as the caregivers and nurturers of their community, roles that were particularly visible at times of birth and death. Cathy describes women as fulfilling the roles of midwife and mortician in their communities and teaching other women to carry on these skills. Cathy also comments that it is women who lead the grieving and healing process necessary for the community to return to equilibrium. All the women interviewed, whether Aboriginal educators or students, indicated that they entered post-secondary education to improve the lives of their children, their families, and the people in their communities. As mothers responsible for child-rearing, they were also responsible for assisting their children with schoolwork. Although the three women recognized the economic benefits of post-secondary education, they stated that the monetary benefits were secondary to them. Each woman saw the most important value of her education, and as a women who had completed a post-secondary credential as being a role model for her children and her community, and in being able to better help her own children achieve their educational goals.

The research and educational relationships that I developed with the Cree women in the study also reflected their role as transmitters of knowledge. Both within the formal interview sessions and during informal discussions, these women shared information about their community, their culture, and the role of women within Cree culture. They provided me with valuable insight about the appropriate ways to conduct research in a Cree community, knowledge that guided me throughout my research journey. These women remained a valuable resource to me throughout my study, both through friendship and through scholarship. They were always willing to discuss my study, read my manuscript, and help me try to understand an Aboriginal world view.

Adaptability. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) states that "Throughout history, Aboriginal women have made many adjustments to cope with the

circumstances facing them, and they continue to do so" (Volume 4, p. 7). The revisiting of the studies of Fiske (1996) and Blythe and McGuire (1996) also attest to the adaptability of Aboriginal women. Fiske's study described how a group of Aboriginal women drew upon skills acquired in residential school, and then used those skills to lobby for positive change in their community. Blythe and McGuire, in profiling a range of women of different age groups in a Northern Cree community, illustrated how they have adapted to the changes in their community over the last decades.

The data and the literature appear to attest to the adaptability, flexibility, and ingenuity of Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women appeared to be more able than Aboriginal men to adapt to the dominant white culture, providing the necessary stability and continuity in their communities. Although the qualities exhibited by Aboriginal women have sustained First Nations communities, Billson (1992) raises the concern that the erosion of the Aboriginal male role as the provider created dissonance and a double burden for the women. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996, Volume 4, p. 19-20), in drawing on a study around Inuit women, suggests that the adaptability of women often results in the women becoming the main provider in the family causing the man to lose status in the family and the community. This loss of status, the researchers contend, often results in spousal abuse and family breakdown.

Leadership and Power. In this concluding discussion about leadership and power, it is helpful to reflect on the concept of leadership within an Aboriginal culture. Ross (1996) attempts to provide non-Aboriginal readers with an understanding of leadership, drawing upon his experiences and observations within Aboriginal communities. He observes that an Aboriginal leader is not viewed as an individual who holds authority over people, but rather as a facilitator who brings about collective, positive change for the community. He further suggests that Aboriginal leadership is non-hierarchical and that leaders will often lead those who wish to follow until the result or place is reached, and then the group will disband.

There is a considerable body of literature that points to the leadership roles that

Aboriginal women played in traditional society, as did the findings in my study. These findings within my study are also corroborated in the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996), which states that European settlers observed the "power that Aboriginal women enjoyed in the areas of family life and marriage, and decision making and the ceremonial life of their people" (Volume 4, p.18). Of particular importance was the role of Aboriginal women in decision-making, specifically the role of women in the selection of the leader and as ongoing advisors to leadership. This leadership role occupied by Aboriginal women in traditional society broke down with the imposition of Eurocentric models of government which, at time of colonization, solely involved men. The Royal Commission, in recognizing women's traditional leadership role and its breakdown due to colonization, further recommends that funding be provided to Aboriginal women to enable them to regain their rightful role in the design and development of self-government.

The comments of the women interviewed in this study supported the ongoing leadership role of women in Northern Cree communities. In describing life in her community over the last 50 years, Georgia spoke of the management role of women in the fishing industry, facilitating the shipping and marketing of the products. Women also managed the local radio stations and coordinated all the important traditional and religious celebrations in the community. A final comment made by Georgia attests to the central role of women in describing men as being completely dependent upon women's management.

Sara describes the role of women in her northern Cree community as being advisory to the clan leader. With the establishment of the reserve system, the clan system was almost eradicated, but women continued in their leadership role as advisors to local Chiefs and Council members. In the last ten years, there has been a revival of the clan system and the resurgence of this traditional infrastructure initiated by female elders.

All three of the Aboriginal educators who were interviewed for this study spoke of the advisory role of women in their communities, as well as their central role as change agents.

Cathy said that women were not afraid to open up and deal with difficult issues, whereas men appeared to want to please others rather than seeking solutions to problems. Cathy's comments are reflective of West (1996) who suggests that women within a European context are able to relate to one another more openly, more honestly, and less defensively through a more feminized form of relationship. Cathy sees the role of women elders as the force behind the community, the force that speaks clearly against injustice and ensures change. The three Aboriginal educators spoke of the role of women in traditional society and the belief that Aboriginal women always held more power than men. Cathy explained that, as a child, she was taught never to step over a man's shotgun in case her power affected the hunt.

Marie, the oldest female student, spoke about her position as a role model and support for other students in the class. If she missed classes or did not complete her assignments, she would provide a poor role model for the other students. Yet, Marie never used the word "leadership" in our discussions; rather, she used words such as "elder" and "role model." To me, this reinforced the ideas introduced by Ross (1996) that Aboriginal leadership is facilitative and non-hierarchical.

I also believed that Lorraine, the local student coordinator, held a key leadership role in the programme. She acted as a bridge between the university and the students, provided personal and academic counselling to students, and facilitated weekly sharing circles with the students. Like Marie, Lorraine never referred to her role as that of a leader. Rather, she called herself a facilitator, helping the students to reach a comfortable academic and personal space. Lorraine's leadership role included guiding the university administrators and faculty within the community. John, one university instructor, spoke of the importance of this role for himself and the students. All the students stressed the importance of the sharing circle initiated and led by Lorraine, and the role that this traditional support played in ensuring that they remained in the programme.

Finally, I argue that it is important to recognize the apparent absence of leadership when Lorraine resigned from her position as local student coordinator. She was replaced by Daniel,

and subsequently by Sam. When Lorraine left, Marie explained, the sharing circle and student support stopped. The university instructors also said that, while their physical needs like their transportation to and from the plane were taken care of, neither Daniel nor Sam acted as a cultural guide within the community. It appeared that her successors did not maintain the facilitative leadership role that Lorraine had initiated, but focused their attention on maintaining attendance records, ensuring that the physical space was maintained, and transporting teaching faculty. It is possible that this is an attempt to do what they thought white leadership meant.

It became clear to me, as an observer, that Lorraine's leadership role was critical to the initial success of the programme. In my role as programme coordinator and as a researcher, I had ample opportunity to observe her leadership in contexts such as student support and ongoing liaison with the university. As mentioned in Chapter V, the prime example was the initiation of the sharing circle as an essential part of student support. She assisted me in my role as a researcher by setting up group and personal interviews.

It is important to note that I failed to recognize, well into the programme and the research, the relationships of some of the leadership roles of the female students. I believe it was because I was operating from a set of assumptions, a discourse of leadership, which was hierarchical and Eurocentric rather than Aboriginal. The third year of the programme marked the movement of the classroom into the adult learning facility. The need for an accessible facility for the adult learners had been articulated by the female learners for the previous two years, in their group and personal interviews. However, it was the female students who finally presented their concerns to the Director of Education and Chief and Council, and who were instrumental in the acquisition of an adult learning centre. It was also interesting to note that these women never mentioned their leadership in the development of the adult learning centre. It was only after the move, in speaking with the former Director of Education, that this information came to light.

Although all three Aboriginal educators spoke of the leadership roles of Aboriginal women in their communities, they also spoke of the abdication of power among Aboriginal men,

and the need for Aboriginal women to help men to regain their traditional power. Cathy posed the question, "*How do we give them back their power*?"

It is evident from the study, and from the supporting literature, that the traditional hunting and providing roles of men are no longer a part of the Aboriginal infrastructure. With a move to the reserve system and particular model of governance, men took on the roles of Chief and Council member. However, literacy, education, and full-time employment are much higher among women on reserves than they are among men; the number of Aboriginal females in post-secondary study is three to four times that of males. Men continue to do seasonal work and are generally unemployed for part of the year. In reflecting on the group discussion with Aboriginal students (presented in Chapter IV), of which only five were male, it was suggested that men did not see education as an extension of their natural role of hunter and provider and feared that failure and loss of status as "head" of the household would result when they became students. Furthermore, they said that they had not received support from other men in the community and had often been ridiculed as men who went to school with a group of women. These comments posed challenges for both the community and the university for, if Aboriginal men are to secure employment and participate in their changing communities, post-secondary education is required. Furthermore, as women take on increasing roles of leadership in the communities, stress between women and men is evident. In many cases, men have become the disempowered and unemployed in their communities, and the onus is on women, as leaders, to find ways to re-empower them (Blythe and McGuire, 1996).

The contemporary leadership role of Aboriginal women may be attributed as a continuity of their traditional roles and, as a result, Aboriginal men's inability to deal with the effects of colonization and change. Aboriginal women sought to further bring proactive changes within their community in pursuing education and employment. Now, one of their greatest challenges is to restore equilibrium to the community and ensure empowerment of Aboriginal men.

Aboriginal women, like women in European societies, have managed a diverse number of public and private roles. Aboriginal women seem to have been able to move freely between these roles, roles that included raising and teaching children, as well as hunting and trapping when their male counterparts were away for periods of time. This patch-working illustrated that Aboriginal women were less tied to particular roles than were their male counterparts, whose traditional roles involved hunting, trapping, fishing, and warfare. With the advent of the reserve system, women appeared more able than men to adjust to this result of colonization and, in addition to their traditional roles, began to find ways to utilize their skills to supplement their income. In addition to their diverse roles, Aboriginal women also maintained central roles in their community as teachers, nurturers, and leaders. It is this diversity, or patch-working, of women's roles in traditional Aboriginal society, coupled with their central roles as teachers, nurturers, and leaders, that appears to facilitate their entry into, and completion of, particular areas of post-secondary study. In essence, Aboriginal women, like women in other cultures, have to carry large and inequitable burdens ranging from the caring and nurturing role to basic labour for family survival, while men tend to be absent.

I believe that it is necessary to specify certain disciplines of post-secondary education in this discussion, for this study was limited to the experiences of women in education and business administration programmes. Teacher training and education programmes appear to be natural extensions of the traditional role of Aboriginal women, but business administration programmes are also consistent with this role. As Georgina, one of the Aboriginal educators interviewed, indicated, the central role of women in the fishing industry in her community included the marketing and transportation of the fish. The role of women in business is also corroborated by Van Kirk (1980) in her discussions of the Aboriginal women in the fur trade. In her research, Van Kirk describes the role of women in the fur-trade as that of a business women; negotiating and facilitating trade between Aboriginal peoples and her fur-trader husband. Essentially, the fur-trade was dependent upon these women.

The second question posed at the beginning of this chapter suggested that the micro-cultures of educational institutions, such as working in small study groups, might be more appropriate to the ways in which women function within traditional Aboriginal culture. This idea also appears to be valid, as the conversations with the Aboriginal educators indicated that women, collectively, were responsible for certain tasks such as community functions at times of birth, death, and illness. Women also worked together in the management of the fishing industry in their communities. Men, it appeared, were involved in more individualized tasks such as hunting, trapping, and fishing, coming together as a group only after the event for the sharing and distribution of the products (Frideres, 1998).

The above discussion begs a final, more theoretical question: "Why?" It appears that the lives of women in traditional Aboriginal culture involve the patch-working of a variety of roles, ranging from leaders and advisors to teachers and nurturers. Why are Aboriginal women able to assume such a wide variety of roles? Once again, I return to a Eurocentric backcloth. If one assumes a constructivist position, the roles and behaviours of Aboriginal women are seen as a product of their culture and socialization. Further, a constructivist position suggests that the roles of Aboriginal women are historically particular; that is, Aboriginal women in the nineteenth century would behave differently than Aboriginal women in the twentieth century. If one assumes an essentialist position, the roles and behaviour of Aboriginal women are seen as a product of their uniqueness as women.

One possible answer was suggested when I approached an Aboriginal colleague, in reference to the above. Her response was, "*There you go again, putting us in a Eurocentric box; but, if you must, suggest essentialist constructivist.*" She further explained that, yes, she believed that certain behaviours and roles of Aboriginal women were a product of their womaness, something that the Creator had given them. However, she explained these roles and behaviours were also a product of the transitions and changes in Aboriginal society, and their traditional diverse roles enabled them to respond to these changes. Although Aboriginal women in the

twentieth century were different from their grandmothers in the fur-trade, she saw their new roles as an extension of their traditional roles (Personal communication, 1998). Moreover, although her comments provide an interesting perception, it is critical that they be understood as one Aboriginal woman's perspective and the need to recognize, once again, the diversity among Aboriginal women.

Propositions 2 and 3

These two propositions are so intrinsically linked, as are the emergent themes, that it would not be possible to discuss either in isolation.

2. There may be a clash of cultures between the academy and the Aboriginal learners.

The idea of the second proposition evolved from initial discussions with the three Aboriginal female educators. At the onset of the study, these educators agreed that they had succeeded in their post-secondary study in spite of the university. These comments indicated that there might be policies and practices within the academy obstructing the learning process for this group of students. From the students' comments, indications of a clash of culture between the academy and the learners evolved, a clash of cultures that was experienced by both the students and the faculty. This clash of cultures suggested that:

3. There might be a need for systemic changes within the university culture in order to provide an inclusive learning experience for First Nations peoples: a systemic change that might involve changes in the policies and procedures across the academy.

The possible requirement for systemic changes suggested that there might be a need for members of the academy to explore and examine the values that comprise the very heart of their institution. This examination may require academics to consider a wide range of areas including: the composition and construction of valid knowledge within the academy, curriculum and evaluation, and policies and practices of hiring and peer evaluation. These systemic changes within the academy would also have practical implications.

In practice this would involve the development and delivery of an inclusive curriculum encompassing Eurocentric and Aboriginal world views, and the exploration of alternative ways of teaching and learning. These practices would lead to the creation of an institution in which Aboriginal students would feel comfortable. In order to create such an institution, it is critical to reflect upon the differences between the Eurocentric and Aboriginal cultures.

In a broad societal sense, scholars have had much to say about the differences between Eurocentric and Aboriginal cultures, not the least of which is the legacy of Eurocentrism that has historically discounted the values, knowledge, and cultures of North American Aboriginal peoples.

Ermine (1995), in his discussion of an Aboriginal epistemology, argues that the arrival of Columbus in 1492 marked the initial meeting of two cultures possessing two disparate world views, each on its distinct course of exploration for the discovery of purposeful knowledge. He describes the Eurocentric quest for knowledge as an exploration of outer space or the physical. This Aboriginal quest for knowledge is the basis for an Aboriginal epistemology, an exploration of inner space, or the metaphysical, allowing them to arrive at insights about their very existence. He argues that the Eurocentric-based exploration and discovery of knowledge in North America continued unabated for five centuries, and that the acquired knowledge and information from these explorations were disseminated as the only valid sources of knowing. The knowledge derived from Aboriginal-based exploration, he states, was ignored and discounted.

Ross (1995) argues that it would be naïve to expect anything except a clash of cultures between the Eurocentric world view inherent in our institutions and the Aboriginal world view. He reinforces his argument by outlining the differing evolution of the two world views – of Eurocentric thought emanating from Greco-Roman societies and evolving through De Cartes and Bacon, and of Aboriginal thought emanating from a migratory culture, likely originating in central Asia. A further difference is that the European perspective focussed on mastery over

nature, while the Aboriginal perspective focussed on a relationship based on a connectedness to nature.

Jonasson (1993) argues that the Europeans brought with them to the Americas a very different understanding of the relationship of humans with each other and with the physical and spiritual world, one that was oppositional to the understanding shared by Aboriginal peoples. The value system of most Aboriginal societies holds in high esteem a) the interrelated principles of individual autonomy and freedom consistent with the preservation of relationships and harmony in the community; and b) respect for other human and non-human beings, reluctance to criticize or interfere with others, and avoidance of confrontation of adversarial positions (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991).

Dumont (1992) believes that Aboriginal wisdom involves the valuing of the contributions of knowledge by others, as well as the valuing of personal knowledge and learning derived from experience. Aboriginal elders are respected for the understanding of life that they have acquired through introspection of their own life experiences, coupled with the traditional knowledge of their elders. Elders teach through the oral tradition, Dumont says, and almost unanimously preface their teaching with the words, "*This is how I understood what was told to me.*" Ross (1996) makes a similar observation using the words of a Cree elder: "*You cannot pass along what another person 'really' told you; you can only pass along what you heard.*" Ross agues that this perspective is in direct contrast to Euro-Canadian scholarship, which attributes words with great precision to its speakers.

Weatherford (1987) argues that, when the Europeans first arrived in North America, they saw what was not there rather than what was, and so did not recognize the presence of a rich Aboriginal culture. This perspective initiated and perpetuated a legacy of Eurocentrism in North America, inherent in governments and institutions. Thus, most North Americans tend to see the continent through the "eyes of Columbus" by seeing not what is there, but what is not.

As one Aboriginal educator said:

> *To put it rather simply, a basic difference between the Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal world view, is that Euro-Canadians see humans situated at the top, in control of the balance of nature, whereas we Aboriginal people see humans at the bottom, as highly dependent upon the balance of nature, and our role is to maintain harmony, not control* (Native educator, personal communication, 1997).

This study involved a growing relationship between two very different communities: the academic community of Brandon University, built upon Eurocentric culture and values, and the community of learners of Great River, instilled with Aboriginal cultures and values. This relationship evolved from the time I hesitantly entered the community of Great River with my "Columbus eyes," my Eurocentric world view, and my dual role as researcher and programme administrator, to the point where, I believe, I engaged with the learners, in dialogical and empowering interviews. Within this section of the chapter, I will draw upon the stories of education and learning within the border world. It is these border-world stories that suggest possibilities for a dialogical and inclusive learning experience for Aboriginal students, and it is these possibilities that lie at the heart of the thesis.

When I embarked on my research journey, I did so with a set of assumptions, not the least of which was an adversarial relationship between the academy and Aboriginal learners and a need for systemic change within the academy. Although my study does not negate the existence of a cultural clash between the Eurocentric and Aboriginal worlds, as well as a need for the academy to explore and adapt policies and practices to create an inclusive learning environment, the experiences within the border world showed me the possibilities that exist when two communities are willing to engage in open and honest dialogue. Finally, these stories gave birth to themes that lay at the heart of appropriate inclusive education, themes that encompassed issues such as the need for a relevant curriculum, learner and instructor expectations, methods of assessment, the facilitation of learner connections, the construction of knowledge, and course delivery.

About a Relevant Curriculum

In their degree studies, the students in Great River participated in a diverse spectrum of courses with a wide range of content. Their courses of study included the disciplines of biology,

business administration, education, English, computer science, mathematics, geography, statistics, psychology, and Native studies courses that included Aboriginal Art. It is evident from the preceding three chapters that both the students and the faculty articulated the critical need for a relevant curriculum as reflected in the following stories.

When teaching courses in literature and composition, the English instructor told a story of his attempts to create an inclusive classroom in which an Aboriginal perspective was both voiced and respected. He articulated the need for relevant content and the need to allow the students to incorporate their own voices and an Aboriginal world view in their work. Although English literature courses required the teaching of content such as Chaucer and Shakespeare, he recognized that the presentation of the content must not presuppose that that literature is part of the heritage or reality of Aboriginal students: "*I began my lectures by explaining that literature within this course was representative of my culture which is British Canadian, and that I understand that this was not a part of the students' culture.*"

Further, when teaching composition, he moved away from essay and composition topics that were suggested in the traditional, rhetoric course outline and allowed students to select their own topics:

> *When you are writing, everyone will provide a better article when the text has some relevancy to their lives. We have to remember that these students come from a totally different life history than an urban, on-campus sequential student. I needed to let them identify topics of interest to them that they were willing to write about and share with the class.*

He also asked the students to read their materials aloud. He suggested an oral presentation in order to alleviate what he considered to be the problems that are inherent when someone from an oral culture is required to write. He strongly believed that individuals who came from oral cultures, such as the Northern Cree, need to retain orality in their writing:

> *It is always a challenge to write, even for those students who grow up in a mainstream Euro-Canadian culture where books and reading are just a part of their life. When we teach in Northern communities, we have to remember that these cultures were oral, and writing was non-existent. When we teach writing in Aboriginal communities we need to draw upon that orality in the culture.*

LaRocque (1996) highlights the importance of Aboriginal women writing in their own voice. An Aboriginal scholar and writer, she pursues and expresses scholarship quite differently from non-Native academics. She includes orality in her writing, and openly refers to voice in her academic work. She does not use voice merely as a personal statement dichotomized from academic studies, but as a statement of cultural integrity and an attempt to balance the dehumanization and bias entrenched in Canadian studies about Aboriginal people. LaRocque argues that, as the body of international post-colonial academics grows, Aboriginal people must recognize that they, too, are a part of this growing academic community. As post-colonial scholars from outside a Eurocentric tradition, Aboriginal academics must challenge the universities to re-evaluate their colonial frameworks of interpretation.

The English instructor also speaks of his attempt to select reading materials that he believed would be relevant to the students' lives. In the Canadian literature course, he included Aboriginal writers whenever possible. In Great River, he introduced a Thompson Highway play that met with mixed responses from the students. Some students said that the play contained excessive profanity and depicted Aboriginal people in a negative light; other students thought that this Northern Cree playwright provided a realistic and sensitive look at an Aboriginal community. These two responses reflected the diversity within the Aboriginal population, and again stressed the importance of members of the dominant society not constructing the "other" as a homogenous society.

Despite attempts to select relevant literature that he hoped would initiate topical discussion, the English instructor noted that the students were often uncomfortable discussing the issues that emerged in the Thompson Highway play, either with him individually or within a class situation: "*Any of the problems brought out in that play – either the institutionalized paternalism or the colonizing attitudes or the religious fundamentalism – the students didn't want to discuss these.*"

This part of the story confused me, and I needed to explore further. Why did these critical topics within the Thompson Highway play not evoke discussion? Once again, I turned to Sara, one of three Aboriginal educators interviewed in Chapter IV. Throughout my research journey, she and the two other interviewees continued to act as both resources and cultural translators for me. Sara explained: "*You have to remember that these things that Thompson Highway talks about are pretty close to the students, and many have experienced them. It might be painful for them to talk about certain things.*"

Sara's comments made sense to me, and I recognized that many of the issues that Thompson Highway had dramatized could have been real-life experiences for some of these students. However, I wondered if there were also issues of power and situatedness within general society involved. I thought of individuals within the Canadian context from European backgrounds who occupied a comfortable position in Canadian society. I thought of myself, and how comfortable I would feel discussing a similar critique of aspects of my culture. It appeared to me that it might be easier for people in a comfortable position in the Canadian hierarchy to deal with critical topics than it would be for individuals who were located within the margins, particularly when these individuals were so often stereotyped and criticized.

The definition of relevant content differed between the students and the instructor teaching a geography course dealing with weather and climate. The instructor essentially saw relevant content as the incorporation of local examples, such as the mean temperature or the average precipitation in Great River, whereas the students perceived relevant content to be the relationship between weather, climate, and the community. Marie says:

> *The weather is much more than just temperatures for us – it affected our whole life, it was a central part of our community. Well, this course was just all notes and formulas and more notes, ... Sure, he told us about the temperature range for our community, but he never asked us to tell him anything and we lived here for generations.*

Marie's comments indicated that, although the geography instructor had attempted to put what he believed were relevant examples in the course, he had not provided a forum for an

Aboriginal perspective in the classroom. A similar situation was a recent topic of discussion on CBC Radio. In a scientific study about whaling in the Northern Arctic, an Inuit whaler was being interviewed. He said that he had no problem with a scientific study being conducted, but that his traditional Inuit knowledge, based upon thousands of years of survival within the region, should also be an integral part of the study (CBC Radio, October 29, 1998).

The biology instructor recognized that the textbook examples of an ecosystem were not relevant to the isolated north, and sought local examples relevant to the students. She also realized that the students had difficulties understanding scientific terms and concepts and encouraged them to ask questions of each other in Cree within the lecture sessions.

The instructor teaching the mathematics course noted that the examples in a standard mathematics text authored in Toronto used urban examples of distance and speed, and described travel between major cities in eastern Canada. She was able to develop more appropriate local examples for her classes. She also believed that a lecture method was inappropriate, particularly given the different levels of mathematics readiness that the students possessed, and moved from a lecture format to having students work at a variety of levels within small-group situations. She also encouraged the use of Cree within these group settings. After numerous attempts to explain the mathematical concept of slope to a student in English, for example, an explanation in Cree made the concept understandable to the student. The instructor moved from group to group to explain concepts. Students also moved within the groups as they acquired greater competency. Furthermore, all testing was done on a student-initiated basis, with students determining their readiness for testing.

I want to add, at this juncture, that when I explored the use of small groups and self-initiated testing, the instructor explained that this was done solely to meet the different competencies of the students. However, she said, in reflection, that it was an appropriate way for the students to learn, as revealed by the student comments and also by the literature on Aboriginal learning (Kroskrity, 1987).

In her story about teaching in the border world, the psychology instructor, an East Indian woman, found that the content of the textbook was not only exclusive of relevant examples, but also was sometimes in direct conflict with a non-Eurocentric world view:

> *Psychology is a western science and as a non-western academic myself I, too, find many of the assumptions about interactions in conflict with my world view. Although I am, too, a part of the colonized people, I also studied in the academies of the colonizer, so my situation is a little different. However, coming from a non-western perspective, I could empathize with the students' feelings and often explained to them that the content evolved from European culture and realities.*

The students' comments also echoed a clash of cultures and an inability to relate to much of the material: "... *some of the topics didn't make a lot of sense to us. We were supposed to do a section on teenage pregnancy, as a problem. Well, we don't see it as a problem here, and the prof said we would leave it out.*"

The business administration instructor, also from the Indian sub-continent, raised similar concerns about the case studies that were required for the organizational psychology course. Coming from a non-Eurocentric perspective herself, she can understand the different ways of doing business in Bangladesh and urban Canada, and the need for a course reflecting doing business in an Aboriginal community: "*I tried to make the content relevant, but I didn't have any experience with Native students, so this was a learning experience for myself also. Psychology and management are very western-based areas of scholarship.*

The students provided these comments about the organizational psychology course:

> *Some of the situations in the book didn't make sense, but Shahroon tried to make up situations dealing with the Northern Store and the Band Office ... She told us there were different ways to deal with problems and she wanted to know how we would do it here.*

It was clear that both these instructors, originally from the Indian sub-continent, had personally experienced a clash of cultures in their own disciplines and recognized the need for an inclusive perspective in the classroom. The acquisition and substitution of appropriate content was also recognized and initiated by Harvey, an instructor in education. However, the inclusion

of an Aboriginal perspective provided a greater challenge for him, perhaps because he himself came form a Eurocentric tradition. As he said: "*As a mainstream, Canadian educator myself, I cannot bring an Aboriginal perspective to the classroom. However, what I can do is create a classroom in which the Aboriginal perspective is heard, respected, and incorporated.*"

Marie, one of his students, provided the following comments:

> *Harvey asked me how I would do things and how I would teach a lesson. I have been a substitute (*teacher*) before, so I had experience in the classroom. Harvey let me talk about the ways I would teach. This didn't happen in some of my practical field experiences, we had to do it the way the cooperating teacher wanted it. She didn't seem to think that we had any of our own ideas or knew anything. Harvey was a good teacher. I felt I learned things from him and he said he learned things from me also.*

As Sara, one of the three Cree women in *Women and Learning* and now an Aboriginal educator, stated:

> *Relevancy is not just talking about things that are relevant to us; it is speaking about them in the way we do or allowing us to speak about them in our own voice and listening to our view. We recognize that a non-Aboriginal academic can't bring an Aboriginal perspective to a classroom of Aboriginal students, but, too often, they silence the students bringing this view forth when they could learn something by hearing a different voice.*

Edward, a Nigerian academic with experience training teachers in rural Africa, taught a statistics course and an education course involving computers in the classroom. He recognized the need to create examples and activities relevant to the students' lives. He also argued that there was a need for the traditional ways of teaching and learning to be included in any education curriculum. He raised the concerns that, if the university were to train teachers to work with Aboriginal students, the programme should provide them with the skills to meet these challenges rather than replicate mainstream education practices: "*I don't know if the people at the University see this, but, maybe because I was a part of a colonized people, I can see something of this in Great River.*"

The discussion surrounding content in the Native studies courses is a complex one, as it illustrates the fact that there was no single content suitable for all Aboriginal communities or

students. In the case of Great River, as reflected in student and faculty comments, there was a need for content relative to Northern Cree and delivered from an Aboriginal perspective.

Dustin, an instructor who was responsible for teaching two of the Native studies courses, was an Aboriginal man who had begun university study at age 30 and had completed a graduate degree. All the students agreed that his own educational difficulties allowed him to empathize with their situations. Bernice and Joan saw the presentation of the content from a Native world view as being critical, and argued that such a perspective could not be presented as effectively by a non-Aboriginal instructor. They stressed the fact that he included the reality of the local community within the course content and encouraged the students to incorporate local, traditional knowledge in their assignments. Bernice and Joan also commented on his involvement in the community – attending band meetings and assisting students in making submissions to Chief and Council – as being a positive factor in the course delivery. Marie provided a different perspective. Even though she believed that there should be more Aboriginal people teaching in First Nations communities, she said that much of the material he presented on Native spirituality was in conflict with her own Christian beliefs, and made her uncomfortable. She also said he should not have attended band meetings or become involved in the politics of the community, as he was "*not from here*."

Dustin stressed the need for relevant, local content and the necessity of teaching Native studies from an Aboriginal perspective. He refers to his own dilemma as a Native undergraduate student at Brandon University, when Native studies courses were taught from a Eurocentric perspective. When he attended Harvard, he had the opportunity to experience the content expressed from an Aboriginal perspective, through interaction with Aboriginal academics. This experience had a profound effect on him, and it appeared to have enabled him to find his own voice:

> *This is where I learned it was OK to be radical, to challenge Eurocentric ideas in the academy. This Aboriginal perspective is what I want to give the students in*

Great River, plus a validation that it is OK to challenge and to ask for your world view to be part of the academy.

Dustin's concern about the need for an Aboriginal perspective within the Canadian academy is supported by the research of Ermine (1995), Grant (1995), and Paterson and Hart-Wasakeeskow (1994). Ermine argues that there is a need for an Aboriginal epistemology. Grant, who has worked for over 25 years in community-based teaching education programmes, recognizes the need to combine traditional Aboriginal and academic Eurocentric knowledge. Paterson and Hart-Wasakeeskow believe that Aboriginal people find their world view to be incongruent with the Eurocentric patriarchal system characterizing education. They argue that the academics assume that truth can be lectured and, therefore, learned – a view that is inconsistent with the Native tradition. Native traditions see learning as a journey unique to each individual, and that no one person can tell others exactly how and what they should learn.

It was evident from the above stories that, on the whole, the faculty recognized the need for relevant curriculum, and that the duplication of on-campus courses in a community-based Aboriginal setting did not constitute an appropriate learning environment for this particular group of learners. However, in spite of the faculty wishing to accommodate the learners with the integration of appropriate examples, the on-campus departments were not always able to respond with resources. This inability is a problem that remains to be solved. In later interviews, the campus faculty admitted that many of them had little or no experience within a northern Aboriginal setting, and did not feel competent to develop resources in this area; nor could they expend the funds to acquire these resources in a time of shrinking departmental budgets. They suggested that the off-campus programme administrators should investigate the possibility of locating and purchasing these resources from other universities. This problem begs a larger question for the university administrators, who, at a time of financial restraint and

decreasing amounts of government funding, are required to develop a more inclusive curriculum, serving a more diverse clientele.

About Learner and Teacher Expectations:

The instructors from the university and the students from the community come from diverse backgrounds and realities, often with different expectations of one another. Although the students found the courses in the area of Aboriginal art to be interesting, for instance, the content was not what they anticipated. The course focused on the history of North and South American Aboriginal art from pre-colonial times to the present. However, the students' comments indicated that they had equated the term "Aboriginal" solely with Northern Cree and had never been exposed to other Aboriginal artists. The course objective was to provide an overall view of Aboriginal art, so that the students would recognize the connectivity of Indigenous forms of expression. But, for the students in Great River, the course was exclusive rather than inclusive and they could see no relationship to their Northern Cree community. Moreover, the instructor, Gabrielle, was not prepared for this situation; she had expected that the students would be aware of the fact that they were a part of a much larger Aboriginal community. At the conclusion of these courses, the students did envision themselves as part of a larger Aboriginal community, but their isolation and lack of information about other communities made these courses a struggle for both the learners and the instructor. Gabrielle provided the following comments after the course was completed:

> *I had the impression that the students in Great River did not identify with Aboriginal art in its entirety, nor had they ever been exposed to Aztec or Maya civilizations. When they finally did realize that they, as Northern Cree, are a part of this evolution of Aboriginal art, it is a discovery, an awakening, sort of like discovering the world is round. I think an instructor can sometimes forget, or be unaware, as I was, of the point at which many of these students are starting, and the limited exposure they have to things outside their community. But, it is critical that, as Native people, they see they are a part of a much greater civilization than just Northern Cree.*

Expectations were also an issue for the geography instructor, an Eastern European. She raised concerns about the lack of atlases, globes, and general course materials that she would

expect to find in the homes of urban students, and that the content in the first-year Human Geography course assumed exposure to, and availability of, these items. This was not the case in Great River where students had little exposure to the outside world, and limited general knowledge of other continents and countries.

The accounting instructor expected the students to have a basic knowledge of banking, finding that only two students had ever had bank accounts and that there was no bank functioning in the community. She states that the content in the accounting course designed for southern students assumes a certain level of comfort with topics such as banking, loans, and interest, prior to commencing the course. The students in Great River did not meet this expectation.

About Assessment

The area of assessment was also a topic of discussion by both the students and the faculty in the border world. Specifically, the students commented on their discomfort with multiple-choice tests as forms of evaluation in the first-year psychology course, and requested a change in the evaluative procedures and the move to a long-answer test format, a position, I believe, that the instructor supported. However, the on-campus, academic department members maintained that the use of multiple-choice tests was the only suitable form of evaluation for first-year psychology. The department supported the use of multiple-choice as a standard and reliable measure, but, as Hampton (1995) suggests, it is not a valid measurement of learning for Aboriginal students. The unsuitability of multiple-choice testing for Aboriginal students is supported by findings of Hampton (1995) and Kohl (1984), both of whom argue that the traditional styles of child-rearing and learning in Aboriginal cultures, based on observation and example, do not prepare individuals for multiple-choice testing.

The assessment procedures in the teacher education field experience were also discussed by the students. Marie, an education student who had many years of substitute teaching experience, expressed concern with the evaluation process initiated by her non-Aboriginal, cooperating teacher. "*While I passed the course, all my areas dealt with by the cooperating*

teacher stated 'needs improvement' ... The teacher never commented on anything I might have done right ... She treated me like I knew nothing."

Marie's comments reflected a need for the acknowledgement of her traditional, Aboriginal teaching skills and recognition that her ways of transmitting knowledge are different but equally valid. The need to acknowledge and validate different methods of evaluation is supported by the research of Redekopp (1989) and Grant (1995). Redekopp provides a model for the evaluation of student teaching that, Grant argues, has a great potential for evaluation of Aboriginal students across university disciplines. Redekopp stresses the importance of a safe environment within which the student teacher can operate, an environment in which student teachers can make decisions without fear and receive feedback from the supervisor. Central to this model is the ability of the student teacher to self-initiate and self-analyze, and, although the student teacher receives feedback from the supervisor, the supervisor is also obligated to listen to the self-analysis presented by the student teacher. Within this model, Redekopp reports, student teachers have the freedom to develop the talents and skills most suited to the "self," and their teaching skills are enhanced. Within an Aboriginal setting, this model could encourage the student teachers to develop teaching skills grounded in their traditional ways of learning and teaching.

In Redekopp's model, respect is a central focus – respect for the teacher by the learner, and respect for the learner by the teacher. Redekopp's model does not violate traditional, Native cultural practices, as did the form of evaluation that Marie described. Grant supports this model, suggesting that Redekopp's methods should be revisited by university faculty, and that an attempt be made to incorporate methods of evaluation incorporating traditional Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning without being deleterious to university standards.

In a project initiated by Grant in BUNTEP for a three-credit-hour course in outdoor education, she involved Cree elders in the course design, teaching of traditional skills, and evaluation. One interesting finding emerged. When the elders began the process of evaluation

and the assignment of grades, they explained that students entered with varying competencies. They argued that the course grade should be determined by the progress that the students had made from their initial level of competency, rather than from the final level achieved. Thus, if someone already knew how to paddle a canoe, then that person must paddle better than someone who had never been in a canoe in order to receive an "A".

The use of this type of assessment, although suitable for certain forms of adult education in which the differing starting points and distance traveled by learners is recognized and celebrated, is problematic for an academic credit-granting institution. In the first session of any academic course, objectives and course requirements must be articulated, and students who attain a certain level of proficiency must be able to anticipate the receipt of a grade based upon that learning contract. Although there is often latitude and negotiation in the setting of the learning contract for students in an academic course, once the contract has been established, each student has an equal responsibility to fulfill the criteria. Thus, students who are less accomplished in the discipline at the point of entry are required to "catch-up" if they are to meet the exit level of competency articulated at the onset of the course. This problem may be greater for mature learners entering access institutions such as Brandon University without the academic background required of regular sequential students. Unfortunately, this problem can be compounded in northern communities where many students leave school without a solid university preparation. Moreover, most of them come from a completely different cultural and linguistic orientation than do most southern students. One solution to this problem is the provision of additional student support and preparatory-level courses, such as were offered in Great River.

About Course Delivery

Although the university saw the use of distance delivery as a means of increasing access and the spectrum of course offerings, students saw that form of delivery as exclusion and further marginalization because the instructors would no longer visit the community. Joan commented:

If you mean the professors are going to stop coming here, I don't think I would like it. One of the reasons I come to class is because there is a professor here.

Distance education has long been heralded by the university as a vehicle for access, in which students who are unable to attend a campus programme can participate in post-secondary study. However, when one looks at the demographic data on distance students in major Canadian universities, one finds the majority of distance learners are living within an urban centre and have already completed, or are simultaneously completing, post-secondary study, generally in an on-campus situation. For this group of urban-based students, distance education is proving attractive for, in spite of work commitments and course scheduling problems; students can often pick up an additional course via distance delivery. These students are by no means marginalized, many being a part of the campus community and having experience in the university milieu. For these students, the opportunity to take one course without driving to campus is a convenience (Wallace, 1996). These two perceptions regarding distance education – that of the university and that of Aboriginal students – are reflective of the two world views, and of the need for the academy to recognize the differing needs of its diverse population of learners.

The student population in Great River, also consumers for distance education in the eyes of the academy, is very different from the current population of distance education students described above. The students in the community of Great River are geographically and culturally marginalized from the academy. They have not had previous interaction with the university system, nor are they currently a part of the campus community. For these students, the presence of the instructor in their community was critical to the programme, and they interpreted the introduction of distance education and the absence of instructional visits as their further marginalization as learners. It is important for administrators and faculty to recognize the differences between these two groups of learners and to use distance technology creatively in order to enhance face-to-face delivery, rather than obliterating learning opportunities.

Although the students did not agree with a traditional distance-education model, they saw components of a distance-education programme that would benefit and augment the community-based programme. They suggested that the video-taping of lectures would provide them with better opportunities for course review and note-taking, and that electronic mail and teleconferencing would allow them to interact with faculty when they were away from the community.

These data support the findings of Spronk (1995) who suggests the use of a combination of face-to-face delivery with technological enhancements and self-study print materials to be used when the instructor is no longer in the community. She says that the traditional distance-education, home-study model does not work for Aboriginal learners because of the learner's need for co-presence and group cohesion. This need for group solidarity and group-learning situations for Aboriginal learners is reminiscent of the comments presented by Paquette-Frenette and LaRoque (1995) in their discussion of the needs of specialized groups of learners with linguistic and cultural differences, "*learners who are defined by their deep links to their community, who identify with a group, and who learn best when learning situations flow from these social and cultural connections*" (p. 156).

About Making Connections

Learning is about making connections with the material and with the teacher and about feeling like a part of the educational process. For Aboriginal students of discontinuity, this continuity or making connections is particularly critical given their previous experiences with educational systems. The education students in Great River commented on their sense of discontinuity in their own school experiences, their academic failure, and their wish to be involved in a new system that would not create the same sense of discontinuity for future generations. In describing experiences in the school system, one student said: " *...but it didn't work for most of us. We ended up coming home without our high school diplomas. The curriculum didn't teach us about ourselves, our history, and our lives.*"

A negative school experience is not uncommon for Aboriginal students. Grant and Gillespie (1993) argue that the culture of schools have overwhelmingly reflected the norms of middle-class European-Americans, and, for too long, curriculum and methods have not acknowledged the presence and contributions made by Aboriginal peoples in North America. They argue that success within this school system was determined largely by the students' ability to cope within this alien culture. Failure to adapt is often translated into such terms as "handicapped," "learning disabled," or, in the worst of damaging labels, "uneducable."

Giroux (1983) is critical of theorists for their failure to examine the creation and sustaining of culture in schooling. A serious oversight in this perspective, Giroux argues, is the failure to recognize educational institutions as cultural and political sites. He suggests that members of minority cultures do not succeed in the mainstream education system because they resist the dominant culture and the institutions that render them invisible or devalue their heritage. He believes that this resistance, which is manifested in failure, is a necessary and integral part of change. He challenges educators to become cultural workers, to critically examine the culture of the mainstream educational systems and to lobby for changes that would result in a system that incorporates the needs of minority learners. Like Giroux, Grant and Gillespie (1993) challenge educators and administrators to provide First Nations communities with educational offerings that recognize and respect, rather than discount traditional Aboriginal ways of knowing. In such a world, educators would be encouraged to recognize Aboriginal cultural capital in the classroom as being different from, but equally valid to, the Eurocentric culture and values within the educational system.

The education students in Great River saw their vocation as teachers as a way to "right former wrongs" and to create an appropriate learning environment for future generations of Aboriginal children. However, their need begs the larger question of how the university might provide this experience for its Aboriginal teacher-training clientele.

King (1995) has challenged the educators and administrators involved in Native Teacher Education Programmes (TEPs) to examine their programmes and to determine if the curriculum is adequately preparing Aboriginal teachers to teach in Aboriginal schools. TEPs have been in existence for over 20 years in Canada, and were established in response to the overall failure within the education system to meet the needs of Aboriginal children. The graduates of these programmes have made a great impact on Aboriginal education. Locally controlled schools are now the norm in reserve communities, and many of the teachers are graduates of a TEP.

Grant (1995) argues that, although TEPs were successful in their initial goal of getting Aboriginal teachers into the classroom, universities still have much to do in order to become responsive, inclusive places for Aboriginal learners. Although the TEP administrators and instructors tried to accommodate Aboriginal students, it was not considered to be a problem that universities continued to act as agents of colonialism and privilege for a narrow segment of society. She argues that the attitudes toward the "correctness" of Eurocentric educational systems still exist and that Aboriginal sources of knowledge are discounted. Other educators have echoed Grant's concerns. McAlpine, Cross, Whiteduck, and Wolforth (1990) raised concerns about the TEP at their university, a programme that was modelled after mainstream teacher education. They argued that the programme was merely reflecting Euro-Canadian culture and that it created a personal and cultural discontinuity for Aboriginal teacher-training students, just as the school system creates the same problems for public school children. Goulet (1995) stresses the need for TEP administrators and faculties to listen to the concerns and recommendations made by their students, and to respond to their concerns with proactive changes.

The success of the TEPs also provided the universities with a growing group of Aboriginal teachers who sought to enter graduate programmes in Native education. The presence of these students, who had completed teacher training augmented by teaching experience within the locally controlled band schools, provided some problematic dynamics for the university graduate studies programme. She argues that the absence of an Aboriginal faculty, and the

presence of an academic culture that is exclusive to, and constructed upon, a Eurocentric world view, is detrimental to these students. She draws upon a specific example of a Cree graduate student who included comments by Native elders as sources for her study on traditional Native education. Her thesis committee did not recognize these comments as being valid sources of knowledge for a scholarly study and negated the oral tradition as a source of valid knowledge.

Grant (1995) believes that systemic change within the universities must occur: that universities must recognize, legitimize, and incorporate traditional, Aboriginal knowledge within their traditional knowledge base and that it must be seen as equal to, but different from, Eurocentric knowledge. Such a perspective, Grant argues, requires the hiring of scholars in traditional Aboriginal knowledge – people who may not possess the formal academic qualifications normally required within a academic institution, but who, within their own cultures, are recognized as being comparable to academics and archivists (Gillespie, 1994). The incorporation of these individuals within the academy would require change on behalf of university administrators and faculty members, as they must recognize and legitimize knowledge and qualifications outside those normally prescribed for the academic world. The next section addresses the problems inherent in such an approach within higher education system in Canada.

About Knowledge

The inclusion of traditional Aboriginal knowledge in the academy is a difficult issue for the university administration and faculty members to address. The present Canadian university system is built upon scholarship and knowledge reflective of a Eurocentric world view. The inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge requires the academic community to accept knowledge that was created outside of a Eurocentric scholarly tradition. Furthermore, scholarly knowledge within the academy is subject to peer evaluation and review, and the current composition of faculties includes very few individuals with expertise in the oral tradition and Aboriginal knowledge. In order to accommodate an Aboriginal perspective in the academy, university administrators and faculty members must first recognize traditional Aboriginal knowledge as

equal and valid, though different from European form of scholarship. Such a perspective would require systemic change.

University policies and procedures would have to be modified to include the hiring of Aboriginal elders, with practical implications that the university administrators and faculty would have to address. For example, the hiring process for Aboriginal elders must be addressed, as well as ongoing performance and evaluation issues. One Aboriginal academic suggests that university administrators should use caution when hiring elders for functions within the university. She voices concerns that university administrators, in their haste to develop an inclusive image, may not use the same discretion as they would when hiring mainstream academics. She observes a tendency among some academics to accept the wisdom and comments of Aboriginal people with a blind faith. "*Just because an Indian says it, doesn't mean it's true*," she says (Aboriginal academic, personal communication, 1994). She advises university administrators to ensure that an elder has respect and credibility in his or her own community, if they are considering such a hiring.

A second Aboriginal academic corroborates these concerns, stating that he is aware of situations where inappropriate hirings have taken place, thus creating a legacy of problems for the students and the university administration. An administrator with Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, in which elders have played vital roles, believes that if elders are involved in the academy, their roles and responsibilities must be clearly articulated. As she says, "*There is no use in just having the elders there if there is no role for them within the academy. It is just a waste of time, and reinforces to those members of the academy who don't support the hiring of elders that it is just another waste of resources*" (Administrator, personal communication, 1996).

Towards Inclusivity

Aikenhead (1996) describes education as a process of cultural assimilation in which students at all levels of the formal system are engaged in crossing borders "*from their own life-world cultures to other cultures*." Nowhere is this process more pronounced than with the entry

of students into the university community. Universities, through a thousand years of tradition, have evolved, to comprise a unique description of life that manifests itself in the values and behaviours of those within the institution. And although the traditional, Eurocentric, parochial values that have for so long governed these institutions are themselves currently under attack from post-modernist voices within, the dominant culture within universities is such that the "ivory tower" metaphor is appropriate, if somewhat ironic.

The entry of a student into the university culture can be construed as a border-crossing event, the individual entering a new culture that might be similar to, or very different from, his or her own. The delivery of university courses into a community, however, can be more appropriately seen as a meeting of cultures, because the structural elements of the students' own culture are present in the community in which the programme is delivered. Where there are major differences between the cultural values and behaviours of the learner community and that of the university, this meeting of cultures can be a difficult one, and must be attended to and nurtured in order to attain a successful educational transaction.

This exploratory study, involving the delivery of a university-degree programme in a Northern Cree community, suggests some criteria necessary for the development of a culturally sensitive, inclusive, dialogical learning experience for First Nations students. These criteria give rise to an operational model described as Community-Controlled Education.

Community-Controlled Education

The operational model described as *Community-Controlled Education* is visualized as two circles – one representing aspects of university culture and one representing aspects of Cree culture, (See Figure 2). The two circles intersect in the border world, in the offering of a university programme in a Northern Cree community. The border world can be described as a negotiated interface, in which both communities have valuable offerings as well as needs. Within this border world, some ideas emerged – from the conversations with the students and the

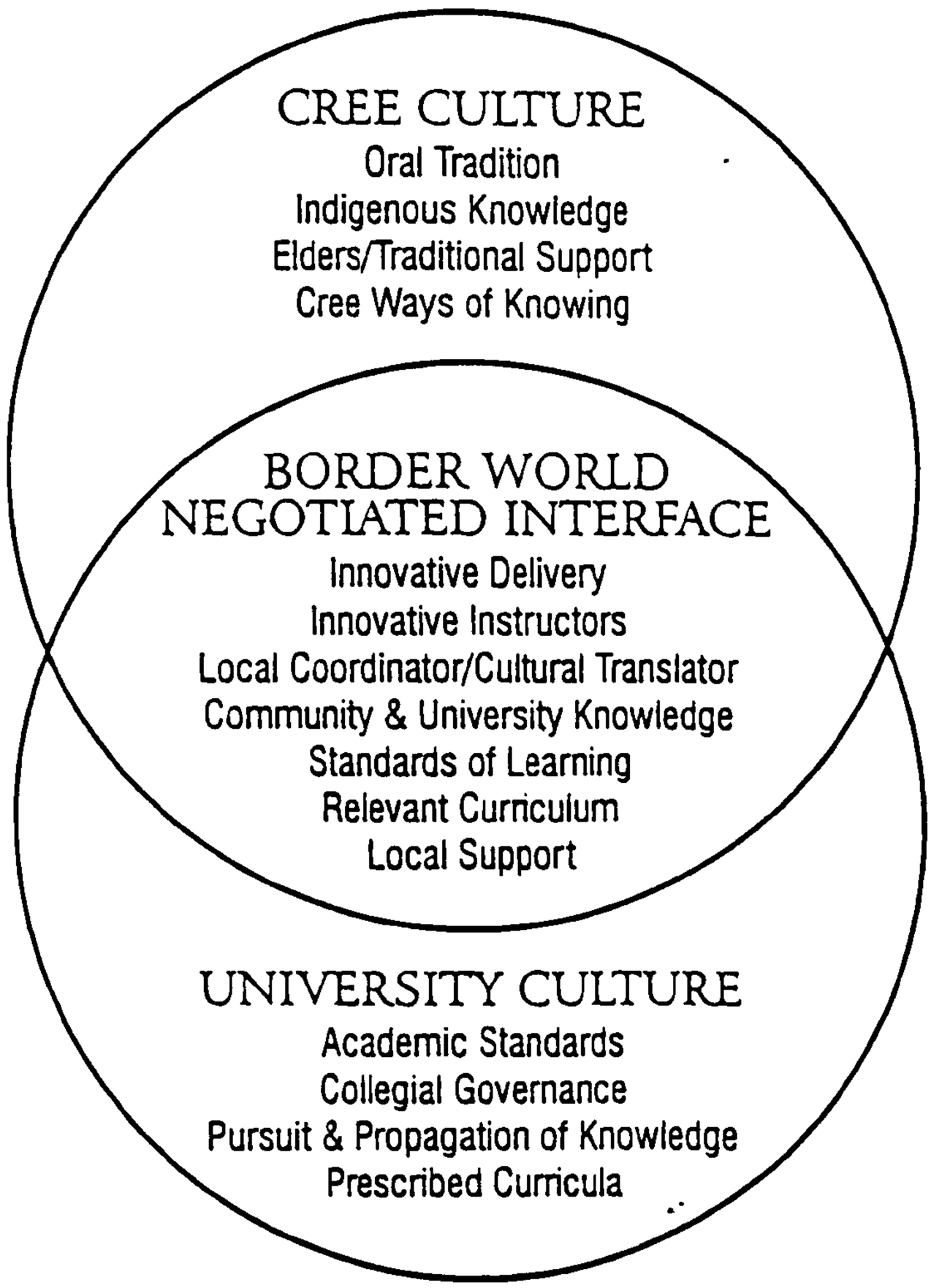

Figure 2: Community-Controlled Education

instructors, from my observations and field notes, and from my personal communication with Aboriginal educators and administrators over the period of the study. These ideas, I believe, provide a starting point of necessary conditions that must be met in order for the ongoing development and delivery of post-secondary learning experiences within First Nations communities in Canada. Finally, as mentioned in Chapter I, was the emergence of a *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996, Volume 3, p. 490-567) that included a substantive discussion of, and recommendations on, post-secondary education and Aboriginal peoples. The recommendations evolving from this commission a) provided a framework for construction of the model for Community-Controlled Education and b) validated my findings in the study.

However, in the presentation of a model there is always a concern that the representation does not recognize the complexities of the issues, and can be seen as providing simplified solutions for a very multifarious situation. In the model for Community-Controlled Education, I would like to reinforce the complexities in the provision of appropriate post-secondary education, and that many institutions have been attempting, with varying degrees of success, to include some of the suggested criteria in the delivery of their programmes to Aboriginal clientele. Currently, many senior administrators are now recognizing the importance of serving the Aboriginal clientele across the university. In particular, the Spring 2000 Western Canadian University Presidents' Meeting involved a presentation by an Aboriginal academic on an inclusive campus.

I would also like to stress that the model evolved from a study involving a specific community and a specific institution, and the reader must realize that diversity exists both within and between Aboriginal communities, and within and between academic institutions. Thus, the knowledge derived from this study, as within a case-study context, must be recognized as partial, local and specific (Usher and Edwards, 1994), and does not attempt to provide all the solutions, however it may be transferable into other situations and assist other institutions in their journey towards inclusivity. I believe the model provides a strong foundation from which universities can both challenge existing policies and practices, and develop new ways of delivering education in

Aboriginal communities; education that is accessible, appropriate, and accredited. Finally, I see the model as evolving; as institutions work in partnerships with Aboriginal communities, both will come to new understandings and create new knowledge about the delivery of post-secondary education.

In the delivery of university programs within the border world, several requirements emerged: *innovative delivery, a local coordinator/cultural translator, community and university knowledge, relevant curriculum, standards of learning, innovative instructors,* and *local support.* Each of these requirements are critical components to the development of an inclusive learning situation for Aboriginal students, and are critical recommendations that Brandon University and Canadian universities, in general, must adapt and operationalize. Furthermore, the conditions developed in the border world are also reflective of the four criteria that university administrators and faculty members must consider (as discussed in Chapter I), in order to create a learning situation appropriate to First Nations students: *respect, relevance, reciprocity*, and *relevance* (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991).

These recommendations are now discussed in detail.

The discussions within the border world reflected the need for *innovative delivery* – the incorporation of a learner-centered delivery mode that meets the needs of students and faculty. One aspect of innovative delivery could involve the move from a traditional lecture format to the creation of small self-paced learning cohorts, as well as the encouraged use of Cree in the classroom to facilitate the explanation of concepts. The use of distance-education technology alongside face-to-face delivery, or to link students with instructors who are not in the community, is also reflective of innovative delivery.

The Royal Commission findings also support the use of Aboriginal languages in the delivery of courses, and the need to structure teaching in ways congruent with Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning. In addressing distance education, the Royal Commission findings state that "*not all distance education forms are effective ... and it is a matter of finding appropriate*

configurations of technology, instructional methods, instructors and curriculum content" (Volume 3, p. 511).

Throughout the study, the central role of the *local coordinator/cultural translator* became apparent. Ideally, this individual should be a band member hired by the community and holding qualifications acceptable to both the community and the university. The local coordinator is responsible for the provision of the on-site management of the centre and academic and student support, while acting as a cultural translator and negotiator among the university administrators, faculty members, and students in the programme. An essential role for the local coordinator was to inform university instructors about the community and, in particular, the familial and hierarchical relationships in the community. An understanding of this whole area of power relationships within an Aboriginal community is particularly important given the familial relationships between most individuals in the community. From my experiences as an outsider, a researcher and university programme administrator, I both recognized and experienced the power relationships in Great River, particularly when there was a change in the local Chief and Council. At any time, due to change in the power structure, I could have been asked to discontinue my research. Fortunately, this did not occur and I was able to complete the study.

Instructors also need to be cognizant of the potential for a power relationship between themselves and students, particularly given the historical relationship between educational and governmental institutions and Aboriginal peoples. A second role for the local co-ordinator is to provide information to the instructors about the students in the programme – about their expectations of university study, about each student's suitcase of knowledge, and about their prior experiences with the secondary and post-secondary educational systems.

The local coordinator's ability to use traditional methods of counselling such as the sharing or talking circle with the students was also an integral component to student and ultimately programme success. The local coordinator must know students well, be aware of any personal or academic difficulties that they may have, and provide personal and academic

counselling as required. The critical role of the local student coordinator became more apparent when Sara, one of the three Aboriginal educators, reflected on a community-based programme in the Aboriginal institution in which she is an administrator: "*The role of the coordinator is so important – a main factor in whether programmes are successful or not. Our unsuccessful programmes all seem to have had poor or unsuitable local coordinators.*"

The Royal Commission validates this study's findings that non-Aboriginal instructors must understand the context in which community education takes place. The "*non-Aboriginal person must be aware of our history, our traditional lifestyle, and the downfall and resurgence of our peoples as history has evolved today*" (Volume 3, p. 499). Further, in providing criteria necessary for programs to work, the Royal Commission findings state the need to develop "mutual understanding" a key initiative for the local coordinator/cultural translator (Volume 3, p. 543).

A third recommendation involves the inclusion of both *community and university knowledge*. This condition requires the incorporation of traditional Aboriginal knowledge as equal to, but different from, the Eurocentric knowledge of the academy, and involves the creation of an inclusive classroom in which students are encouraged to share aspects of traditional Aboriginal knowledge – knowledge ranging from ways of teaching and learning to traditional forms of medicine and healing. To achieve this goal, university faculty members must explore the traditional knowledge of the community; they must learn from the Aboriginal elders, community members, and students. Community-based research may also comprise a component of university study by drawing upon knowledge transmitted through the oral tradition as well as published sources within the academy.

The Royal Commission findings validate the need for the integration and acceptance of traditional knowledge into the academy and recommend that "*educational institutions facilitate opportunities for elders to exchange traditional knowledge with students and scholars*" (Volume 3, p. 529) recognizing that "*Aboriginal intellectual traditions operate from a different, but equally*

valid, way of construing the world" (Volume 3, p. 526).

The fourth recommendation is the need for a *relevant curriculum*, a curriculum that satisfies both the academic and the Aboriginal community. The development of a relevant curriculum requires a careful and collaborative approach for, too often, curriculum that academics believe to be relevant may be irrelevant in the eyes of the learners. One solution could involve course review teams comprised of membership from the academy as well as the Aboriginal community, in an attempt to develop some appropriate and relevant resources for teaching within an Aboriginal setting.

The concept of relevancy raises concerns within the academic community. As one academic said: "*There are students all over the world who believe, at the time that their curriculum is irrelevant, and later discover that they learned something valuable.*" In our further discussion, she shared the following. In teaching an introductory management course, she knew she had to fulfill the curriculum requirements of the academy, which included areas as ethics, international marketing, and human resource management. In looking at a textbook presentation of these concepts, she recognized that they would be inappropriate to an Aboriginal clientele. So, in order to make the concepts relevant without comprising academic rigor, she developed a ten-part business case about two Aboriginal women who sell crafts locally, eventually hired employees, started a small local factory, and finally move into an international import/export business of Indigenous crafts. The case evolved each week, enabling her to include all the management concepts within a context relevant to the students. This is an example of someone making curriculum relevant, thus satisfying both academic rigor and the learners' needs.

The Royal Commission findings validate the importance of a relevant curriculum and transformative education. The Commission draws upon the words of the presenters and their desire to "*see the school joined to the real issues of their lives, to see relevance in what they are learning, to make a difference*" (Volume 3, p. 482), and stressing the need for partnerships and the inclusion of "*Aboriginal perspectives and methodologies*" (Volume 3, p. 543).

The fifth recommendation is the need for *standards of learning* that meet both the academic standards and the standards of learning inherent in Aboriginal culture. Although it is critical that academic standards be maintained, one possibility may be to allow the students, for a portion of their grade, to negotiate individual contracts of learning between learners and instructors. An aspect of this contract of learning could also require involvement of an Aboriginal elder as in Grant's (1995) earlier example. The exploration of alternative methods of evaluation are also critical – methods that are more appropriate for measuring learning within an Aboriginal setting, while maintaining the required academic standards.

While the Royal Commission does not address standards of learning directly, the essence of the report is that education for Aboriginal people must recognize their culture and community and forms of evaluation must be designed to meet their needs.

The sixth recommendation involves a need for *innovative and flexible instructors*, with whom the students could feel some personal connection. Such instructors have the ability to recognize that their students may be coming from a world view that is different from their own. They are able to recognize cultural capital and learning styles that Aboriginal students bring to the classroom, and they have the ability to respond with appropriate teaching methods. One non-Aboriginal administrator stresses, in discussing teaching in an Aboriginal community, that although instructors must ensure that course objectives and standards are met, innovation and flexibility are critical. "*It's how you get there that's different*," she says.

A flexible and innovative instructor must also strive to create transformative educational experiences in the classroom for Aboriginal students. In order for this to occur, the instructor must accept that the educational process is one of unequal power relationships and the need to facilitate a classroom environment where learners are active creators of knowledge, not passive recipients.

The Royal Commission findings also validate the importance of innovative and transformative educational experiences for Aboriginal students, in which instructors must use the

students' personal experiences as catalysts for critical analysis.

A final consideration in the delivery of community-based programmes is the requirement for *local support.* Alcorn (1995) discusses the importance of community support in the delivery of community-based programmes, and equates support to providing a "place" for education in Aboriginal culture – in essence, "putting education back into the culture." Local support also involves the recognition of academic success with a traditional celebration such as a feast, therefore connecting academic and Aboriginal cultures.

These recommendations that emerged within the negotiated interface within the border world are reflective of many of the themes throughout adult and continuing education, themes that express the importance of relevant learning, interacting with the learner, providing a safe environment for the learner to speak, and recognizing and respecting differences among learners (Weil, 1989). In addition, the situatedness of the academy and the learners in the border world provides for some opportunities not available in a traditional on-campus setting, opportunities for the creation of an inclusive, dialogical model of higher education. It is these community-based learning situations that offer the university administrators the greatest opportunity to provide an appropriate learning environment for Aboriginal learners, providing that the necessary recommendations outlined above are present in the equation.

For Northern Cree learners, community-based education provides an opportunity for access to education in their home community, allowing them to continue with their family and community responsibilities, as they incorporate the role of a student. However, to discuss the advantages of community-based programmes merely in terms of access to education would be missing an important finding within the study. Community-based programmes in Aboriginal settings allow academics to move outside their 1,000-year-old Eurocentric traditions and to explore oral traditions and Aboriginal ways of knowing. As the university moves to become a more inclusive institution, in which many voices and perspectives are recognized and celebrated within the classroom, academics with experiences in these Aboriginal communities will have

much to offer. In addition, Aboriginal students from these community-based programmes will have a stronger sense of their own identity and the validity of their own Indigenous knowledge, paired with an understanding of Eurocentric values and traditions. Armed with these diverse perspectives, they can add their voices to an inclusive academy.

For Brandon University, these recommendations for the delivery of community-based education in Aboriginal communities, validated by the findings of the Royal Commission, provide criteria that can enhance their continued delivery of post-secondary education in Aboriginal communities. The challenge for Brandon University as an access institution with over 25% Aboriginal students on-campus, and almost 100% Aboriginal students in community-based programmes is to operationalize these recommendations. Through the operationalization of the findings in the study, Brandon University can transform the relationship between Aboriginal people and the rest of Canada.

One final comment on the Royal Commission and its pertinence to Brandon University is the recommendation for the development of the Aboriginal People's International University, APIU. The APIU is envisioned as "*a network of regional institutions and programmes representing diverse cultural and linguistic traditions, those of First Nations, Inuit and Metis*" (Volume 3, p. 530). It is a university without walls and will depend greatly on facilities and linkages with existing post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal communities. The APIU would also allow the creation of virtual learning communities so individuals would have greater access to education in their home community. For Brandon University and its access mission involving the provision of education to Aboriginal students, it must take a lead role in this initiative. Furthermore, it must lobby with other institutions for funding to ensure the creation and maintenance of the APIU.

Post-Study Reflections

My thesis was a journey, a journey that is not yet finished. In this final section of the thesis, I would like to reflect on my journey including, as well, what I would like to do

differently.

My journey led me to many different sites, and to an awakening of my understanding of the complexities of the border world. It was a journey in which my perceptions were broadened. Initially, I was of the view that the responsibility lay squarely on the university to modify its culture to accommodate the Aboriginal communities. However, during the course of this journey, I began to understand that negotiation is a two-way process, that the answer did not lie merely in the university's accommodation to the Aboriginal culture; rather, it lies in an accommodation of both cultures to each other. In the model of Community-Controlled Education, the overlapping area, the border world, is a place where both cultures must demonstrate understanding if negotiations are to be successful.

My journey also exposed me to the systemic discrimination that Aboriginal people faced within the traditional educational systems. I recognized that this situation could not be rectified alone by changes in traditional institutions. There is a need for Aboriginally controlled institutions to be established, and their establishment must be supported by traditional institutions and partnerships developed. Traditional institutions must not see these institutions as a threat to their existence, but rather as a part of the solution to years of structural and systemic discrimination.

I also became aware, as a researcher, of the importance of the framework that I brought to the study and that, however empathetic I may try to be, I was raised in a white Eurocentric background. For me, this posed the following questions: Would my conclusions have been different if I were a Cree-speaking Aboriginal researcher? In my post-study visit to Great River, I noticed that Sara had her most intense conversations with those students who had had the least to say to me. Had I been a Cree speaker, would the women who participated in the study have been more amenable to sharing their thoughts with me, and would their comments have brought a different perspective to the study?

I return again to the concept of power, and the presence of power in all relationships.

(Foucault, 1980). I recognized throughout the study that power manifested itself in various relationships. Power was present in the relationship between the Chief and Council and the students, and between the Chief and Council and me. In order to interview the students, I had to ensure approval from the Chief and Council, and I informed the students that I had approval to interview them. For me, as researcher, this raises several questions: a) were the students participating because they felt obliged to, by the commitment made by the Chief and Council; b) if the Chief and Council had requested that I discontinue the study, would the students wish to continue or would they abide by the Chief's decision? These are questions for which I do not have answers, but merit further exploration.

Finally, I would like to reflect on the relationship between myself and the students, and the presence of power in this relationship – power as a result of my position as the Director of Extension at the university, and power as a result of my situatedness in society as a white, middle-class woman. While, in reflection, I recognize the presence of power in my relationship with the students, I neither understood it nor dealt with it effectively at the time I was doing the interviews. Further, in my attempt to create empathic relationships with the students, I believe I sacrificed aspects of critical analysis in the interviews. I was pre-occupied with my position as a non-Aboriginal woman doing research within an Aboriginal community. And, in my concern that my research was respectful to the interviewees, I did not question their comments for fear that the relationship would break down.

Also, in reflection, there is a need to revisit and question how close did I, as an outsider, go within the Aboriginal community. I embarked on the study with a belief that my "womaness" would provide an entry point for doing research for and with Aboriginal woman. As I reflect on the process, I believe more attention needs to be paid to the insider/outsider role that I played, i.e., inside womaness, but outside the Aboriginal culture.

My concluding comments evolve around both what I learned from the study and what I would do differently in subsequent research of this type. One critical component of the study was

the exploration and development of a methodology that was respectful of the Aboriginal community with whom the study was conducted. However, in future research of this kind, I would pay more attention to the dynamics in the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, in an attempt to create a more open and honest dialogue. I would attempt to bring more reflexivity to the process, an area I overlooked in my endeavour to develop the model for inclusive education.

I would recommend that this type of study could be better conducted by a team of Aboriginal (Cree-speaking) and non-Aboriginal researchers. Using this team approach, I believe, would ensure better student input (given my observations about Sara in the community) and would create an opportunity to balance empathy and critical analysis in the interview. One final caution – the presence of Aboriginal researchers, in itself, will not negate the potential for the presence of power within the process, nor will it ensure open, reflexive, and dialogical interviews. Such a team must understand and address the dynamics of power and work within a methodological framework that provides for open and reflexive research.

Suggestions for Further Research

My experiences in the border world, with the instructors and the learners, suggested areas for further research. Initially, my observations of the small numbers of Aboriginal men in post-secondary study leads me to suggest the need to explore why Aboriginal men so seldom enter, and so rarely succeed in, post-secondary study. My experience has taught me that this research would have to be conducted by a male researcher, preferably Aboriginal.

There is also a need for further research about Aboriginal students who have participated in community-based study and then moved to on-campus study. Did their experiences in the community-based model prepare them for on-campus study as was intended? As for the students of Great River, now teachers and administrators working in their community, what are their reflections on their degree programme? Did the programme prepare them to work within the border world? The three students involved in the study could provide valuable insight to further

research, as both participants and researchers in the process.

The story presented here is told from the perspective of a feminist-inspired case-study methodology within an Aboriginal context. A different methodological perspective such as the biographical approach (West, forthcoming) may provide a thicker description and understanding of the complexities of these communities.

Finally, the study demonstrates the need for on-going collaborative research towards the development of an inclusive learning environment for Aboriginal learners. My journey is just beginning.

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