

**JAMES BAY CREE STUDENTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION:  
ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE SHOCK**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January, 2005

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*ISBN: 0-494-12951-4*

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*ISBN: 0-494-12951-4*

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## Abstract

The Native peoples of North America still confront the challenges of lingering colonial cultural imperialism. One such challenge is that of Native education, and its unfortunate management by the European-descended political powers. Using tactics such as assimilation, segregation and integration, the establishment used schooling as a blunt tool to solve the so-called "Indian problem" – that is, the assimilation of the Native population into the European way of life. The results were predictably tragic; the current education system is still perceived as a tool of colonization by many Natives.

After so many failed attempts, policy-makers are finally looking to return to the First Nations the education they need, not what North America thinks they should have. One example of this is the proposal to create an institution of higher learning within the Cree communities of Northern Quebec. This dissertation examines the possible challenges and benefits of such a project. It explores the relationship between Cree students and the current "mainstream" education system by way of research, participant-observation narrative and the voice of the Cree themselves while interviewed.

Since they must travel to non-Native communities to pursue higher education, Cree students typically deal with culture shock, alienation and no small degree of racism while studying. In addition a commonality of experience between the Cree and students of other Native communities while attending a "white" school precipitates a pan-Indian/super-tribal perspective, which becomes an important factor in their world view.

Because this dissertation uses participant-observation and interview methodologies for research, and because the subjects of the observation and the interviews are Cree students, then it is necessary for this dissertation to first survey the topics of Pan-Indian Identity and Culture Shock and put them into context. In fact, a large part of the participant-observation narrative is that of the author integrating into a Cree community as an educator. This narrative essentially documents the author's own stages of culture shock, a mirror to that which the Native student faces "down south" at college. These are examples of the real anxieties and challenges faced when immersed in a new and different culture.

The Native perspective is provided by the Cree students themselves in interviews that were fortunately rich in narrative recollection. In addition to answering the standard interview questions, the interviewees offered their own anecdotes, observations and insights into their experiences within the "mainstream" education system.

The conclusions drawn in this body of research may go towards dealing with the legacy of Cree distrust towards an educational system possibly perceived as an imposition of a colonizing society, and to answering the real needs of Native students who are seeking to benefit from education, whatever its form.

## Résumé

Les autochtones de l'Amérique du nord font encore face aux défis résultant de la culture coloniale impérialiste, laquelle persiste de nos jours. Un exemple de ces défis est la gérance malencontreuse de l'éducation autochtone par les dirigeants politiques des descendants d'origines européens. En utilisant de tactiques comme l'assimilation, la ségrégation et l'intégration, les pouvoirs établis ont utilisé l'instruction à l'école comme un instrument contondant pour résoudre ledit "problème indien" – c'est-à-dire, l'assimilation de la population autochtone aux coutumes européens. Les résultats étaient prévisiblement tragiques: le système éducationnel est encore perçu comme un instrument de colonisation par plusieurs autochtones.

Après tant d'essais manqués, les politiciens envisagent enfin rendre aux Premières nations l'éducation dont ils ont besoin, et non celui dont l'Amérique du nord pense qu'ils devraient avoir. La proposition de créer une institution d'études supérieures dans les communautés Cris du nord du Québec en est un exemple. Cette thèse examine les défis et bénéfices possibles d'un tel projet. Elle explore le rapport entre les étudiants Cris et le système d'éducation "courant" par voie de la recherche, la narration d'un observateur-participant et la voix des Cris eux-même lors de leurs entrevues.

Puis-ce qu'ils doivent aller vivre dans les communautés non-autochtones afin de poursuivre leurs études supérieures, les étudiants Cris doivent typiquement affronter le choc culturel, l'aliénation et une bonne mesure de racisme tout en essayant de compléter leurs études. De plus, l'expérience commun partagée par les Cris et les étudiants des autres communautés autochtones dans les écoles "blanches" précipite l'encouragement d'une analyse "pan-indien/super-tribal", lequel est élément important dans leur perspective du monde.

Puisque cette thèse utilise à la fois les méthodologies de recherche observateur-participant et d'entrevue, et puisque les sujets de cette observation et ces entrevues sont des étudiants Cris, cette thèse doit considérer l'identité pan-indien et le choc culturel et ensuite les mettre en contexte. En fait, une partie importante de la narration "observateur-participant" consiste du compte rendu de l'auteur qui s'intègre dans une communauté Cris comme éducateur. Principalement, cette narration documente les stades de choc culturel de l'auteur, offrant en miroir un aperçu de ce que l'étudiant autochtone vit dans un collège "du sud". Ceci sont des exemples des anxiétés et des défis réels affrontés lors d'une immersion dans une culture nouvelle et différente.

Le point de vue des autochtones est fourni par les étudiants Cris eux-même lors des entrevues qui étaient heureusement riche en narration de souvenirs. En plus d'avoir répondu aux questions d'entrevue standards, les interviewés ont offert leurs propres anecdotes, observations et aperçus de leurs expériences dans le système d'éducation courant.

Les conclusions tirées de cette recherche peuvent nous aider à composer avec les legs de la méfiance Cris envers un système éducationnel qui est possiblement considéré comme un fardeau imposé par une société colonisante, et nous aider à répondre aux besoins réels des étudiants autochtones qui cherchent à bénéficier de l'éducation, quel qu'en soit sa forme.



## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: my wife, Melanie; my daughters, Farah-Roxanne and Yasmina; my son, Cyrus; my brother, Carlo; my sister, Corina; my mother, Soraya; and my father, Charles. Equally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to a few very important people in my life: Kathleen Wootton, Leah Auclair and Collette Coty; thank you for your direction, friendship and support. Finally, I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to all of the people of Mistissini, especially our housemates, Steve and Darlene Cheechoo and my students: Winnie, Charlotte, Demerise, Pat, Eva, Maggie, Emily, Lillian, Annie, Elizabeth and Myna and all of their families. Without everybody in this dedication, I would never have been able to get through the late nights and long drives.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dr. Steve Jordan for his guidance and insight; my dissertation committee for continued support; countless citizens of the Cree communities for sharing; my dissertation participants for contributing their stories; and the Cree School Board, especially Gordon Blackned, Charles Matoush and Matthew Iserhoff for all their impartial counsel and encouragement. I would also like to thank Carlo, Corina and Melanie for their patience and editing skills.

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## **Chapter One**

### **CEGEP, Higher Education and the Cree Student**

## Intent

Presently, there is debate within the Cree communities regarding whether or not students of the Northern Quebec Cree territory need their own CEGEP located within their own cultural and social milieu. In this dissertation I will explore the relationship between Cree students and “southern”<sup>1</sup> higher levels of education, specifically but not exclusively the Collèges d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel (herein referred to as CEGEPs). I hypothesize that any lack of success that Cree people have had while in, or even prior to entering, can be partially attributed to various significant social and cultural issues that are prevalent in the majority of North American Native Peoples.

MacIvor (1995) notes in The Circle Unfolds that only a small percentage of Native people attempt Higher Education: 6.2 per cent of their total population as compared to 18.5 per cent of other Canadians, and only 1.3 percent of the Native population achieve their degrees, as compared to 9.6 percent of the non-Aboriginal Canadian population. Statistics Canada's (2001) latest census reports show that while 20.2 percent of Canadians have attained University degrees, Native people trail at 7.8 percent. Native people from the province of Quebec aged 25 years of age and over with university degrees are at 5.8 percent and the Cree of James Bay region of Quebec follow with the same criteria at 2.6 percent. Given these statistics it seems imperative that we, as educational researchers, attempt to understand the deterrents that impede Cree students' ability to succeed academically within a higher education setting. The primary goal of this research is to contribute to this debate by examining the North American Indigenous cultural identity and its relationship with educational institutions.

It is the Cree students' *perceptions* of the cultural differences within the location of higher education and any possible consequences that arise from these differences that are of paramount concern. This research is interested in the difficulties encountered by Native students, specifically Cree students, studying outside of their cultural milieu and is related to issues of identity, culture shock (Pedersen, 1995) and cultural stress (Peregoy, 1990). Culture shock is a term used to describe the subjective reaction of a new and different culture radically different from one's own. Culture shock illustrates the anxiety that occurs when an individual

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<sup>1</sup> “Southern” is a common Cree term or reference for anything south of 50° latitude

loses all the familiar cues to reality on which each of us depend to function in our daily life. Familiarity that one normally encounters within their own context is then substituted by cues that are not identifiable and seem strange and often misunderstood (Pedersen, 1995). The particular impetus for this research topic is a direct result of my own experiences while teaching at the CEGEP level in the Cree village of Mistissini. It was through my own problematic journey from culture shock to an ultimate sense of belonging within the community and through my observations within the social and professional settings that inspired this research enquiry.

Why is cultural identity important in relation to this dilemma in Native education? Because the Cree experience regarding education, like that of the other North American Native peoples, has been overwhelmingly negative in its account. It is a history of devastating abuse and dubious intent (Cheechoo, 1993; Battiste & Jean Barman, 1995; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Grant, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1988; Jaine, 1995; Adams, 1995; Miller, 1996; Huff, 1997; Dyck, 1997, Whiteman, 1986). It is a relationship that includes a determined effort to destroy Native culture when the attempt to simply wipe them away failed (Bolt, 1987; Churchill, 1994, 1998; Hoxie, 2001, Thornton, 1990; Jaimes, 1992). Indigenous identity has been forcefully shaped by the effects of colonialism (Tuhivai Smith, 2001) and its relationship with the institution of education created by European settlers, their descendents and those that followed which was imposed upon them for purposes of assimilation and cultural genocide. McLaren (2001) writes that despite our attempts at multicultural education, we have ignored how colonialism influences the manner in which oppressed groups view North American society and its system of education. The relationship between the Native student, the school, the power blocs (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001) that control the school systems and the lingering effects of colonialism on identity and achievement within these academic settings is a topic of worthy investigation.

## **Introduction**

I am the essence of powwow, I am  
toilets without paper, I am fry bread  
in sawdust, I am bull dung  
on rodeo grounds at the All-Indian  
Rodeo and Horse Show, I am



the essence of powwow, I am  
video games with braids, I am spit  
from toothless whiskey, both selling  
for twenty bucks a swallow, I am

the essence of powwow ...

Author Sherman Alexie's (1993) visceral and purposeful poem challenges thinking regarding Native North Americans on two fronts: first, he shocks the reader by revealing that his own literary perception of self is deeply wrapped in the stereotypes that permeate Native identity. And second, he makes it clear that he, as a Native Indian author, knows that this is an identity that has been imposed upon him and created by the perceptions of the majority of the dominant power block (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001), that is, by "white" North Americans. Although whiteness is not an easy ethnic group to explain, for the purposes of this dissertation, "white North Americans" refers to the ethnic group that is "intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between white and non-white people (Kincheloe, 1999, P. 162). Power is what allows Alexie's characters to be defined by white, dominant power blocks and the white, dominant power blocks to define themselves.

Kent Chadwick (1993) described Alexie's writing as "naked realism" and critiqued how it offered both "pain and clarity". In essence, Alexie's words push at our comfort zones, testing the limits on what should or should not be said out loud about Natives, and yet is often thought, whispered and/or screamed, depending on the context. Alexie believes he knows what white people think of Natives, like him. In fact, he defies the reader to think otherwise and bluntly describes this in his short story, "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" (1993) as he describes a commonplace encounter between, we suppose, himself and a late night convenience store clerk:

"Can I help you?" the 7-11 clerk asked me loudly, searching for some response that would reassure him that I wasn't an armed robber. He knew this dark skin and long, black hair of mine was dangerous. I had potential. "Just getting a Creamsicle," I said after a long interval. It was a sick twist to pull on the guy, but it was late and I was bored. I grabbed my Creamsicle and walked back to the counter slowly, scanned the aisles for effect. I wanted to whistle low and menacingly but never learned how to whistle. "Pretty hot out tonight?" he asked, that old rhetorical weather bullshit question designed to put us both

at ease. "Hot enough to make you go crazy," I said and smiled. He swallowed hard like a white man does in those situations. (P. 183)

Alexie's writings make no apologies for how he contends the perceptions between non-Natives and Natives exist, nor does he hide the pain that he sees inflicted upon the Native perception of self. Describing this effect on perception, he recalls, again what we assume is based on a personal memory, an incident between himself and his second grade missionary teacher, " 'indians, indians, indians.' She said it without capitalization. She called me 'indian, indian, indian.' (P. 173)"

I first became aware of Alexie's writing after spending a year and a half in a region of Northern Quebec, Canada, that I, along with others, refer to as "Cree territory" (Salisbury, 1986); a vast land mass of approximately 150000 square miles of forest within the Province of Quebec's approximately 595000 square miles of land, most of which lies North of 50° latitude (please see appendix one). Who are the Cree? In their own words:

We are the Crees of liiyuuschii. In our language, we call ourselves "liiyuu" (in the dialect of the more northerly and coastal communities) or "linuu" (as pronounced in the more southerly, inland communities). The term means, simply, "the people." There are some 13,000 of us based in nine villages. The five communities located along the coast, which we call *wiinipakw* ("the sea") are: Waskaganish, Eastmain, Wemindji, Chisasibi, and Whapmagoostui. The four villages located inland (or *nuuchimiich*) are: Nemaska, Waswanipi, Oujé-Bougoumou and Mistissini. We have lived in liiyuuschii for thousands of years, and have historically been hunters, fishers, and trappers. The fundamentals of respect, courage, stewardship and patience are reflected in our way of life. Our values include respect for the land; respect for family; respect for the Creator; and respect for the Cree language and culture. (Aanischaukamikw —Cree Cultural Institute, 2001)

### **The James Bay Cree & development of a Dissertation**

According to Crowe (1991), "(t)he name "Cree" probably comes from a French version of the name of one part of the whole tribe, "Kristineaux", but it is not well known" (P. 44). The James Bay Cree Nation is comprised of nine communities with a population of well over 13,000 indigenous people. The Grand Council of the Cree attests that they have held traditional ancestral lands of which include a large area east of the James and Hudson Bays,

“since time immemorial”. Archaeological studies have confirmed the Cree presence in the Lake Mistissini region at approximately 6000 BC (Morantz, 1983). The title of the Hudson Bay Cree area has been established by common law, under the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and also by the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement of 1975, and related Canadian legislation (Grand Council of the Cree, 1998). Although the focus of this work centers on the James Bay Cree, experiences and histories of other Native-North American peoples will be regarded as well, as the predicament of many Native-North Americans has been viewed as similar by a majority of relevant literature.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, most of this dissertation contains applicable notions to any minority group that experience marginalization within institutes of higher education due to their distinctiveness from society’s norm.

My first hand experience in Cree territory commenced upon completion of my Master of Arts in Educational Studies (Social & Behavioural). I was fortunate enough to gain employment in CEGEP de St-Félicien, within the Native Early Childhood Education (herein referred to as NECE) program, as a full time instructor, which required relocation to the Cree village of Mistissini. It was a period of my life where I would make many personal discoveries and many realizations about the realities of life of Native people in Canada. My responsibility was to teach CEGEP level Early Childhood Education courses to a group of Cree students; it was a task that, according to the statistics of low Native attainment of higher education, should have been daunting. In fact, the statistical odds against Native attainment of higher education were always a concern for those of us who were committed to this task; personally, at the beginning I worried about student failure often. But in the end, failure was not the issue; instead I worried about who, out of the outstanding choices in my class, should be valedictorian.

In brief, the NECE program was completed as a success, and after spending four semesters teaching within the Cree village of Mistissini, one of the assumptions I came to was that if the Cree students had a CEGEP which they could call their own, many of the social and cultural walls that prevent them from succeeding in southern areas, (from metropolitan areas in such places as central Montreal to more suburban locations, as John Abbott College in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue), would be eliminated. I base this conviction primarily on the success of the CEGEP program in which I taught. As a CEGEP instructor, as well as a member of the NECE

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<sup>2</sup> An example of this can be found in Mifflin & Mifflin, 1982, P. 169.

program's evaluation committee, I came privy to the students' view that the main reason for their high graduation and low student dropout rate was the fact that they were more at ease taking courses within the familiar settings of the Cree territory. This supposition was further validated by a "Call for Submissions" notice for the discussion of a Cree CEGEP, penned by Clarence Tomatuk, Deputy Director General of the Cree School Board, posted in 1997, which stated:

At present time, pursuing post-secondary education means studying outside the Cree Territory. We must leave our families, friends, communities and sometimes our cultural pastimes behind. This often creates barriers to the pursuit of further education. And yet, the need for Crees to have post-secondary education becomes increasingly important.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, issues of culture were marked as barriers to achieving post-secondary success. Tomatuk's statement validated my own preliminary ideas on the subject, but the question remained: was the existence of a "cultural barrier" to CEGEP and post-secondary education a prevalent belief amongst the Cree and why did this perception of severe cultural barriers exist amongst First Nation Canadians?

### **Higher Education and Quebec's CEGEP System**

The Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel system was created in 1967 with the express intent of creating a bridge between secondary education and university, as high school graduates, "(b)ecause of their young age (sixteen years in some cases) and modest preparation, some could not handle the social and academic challenges of university life" (Magnuson, 1980, P. 112).

In Québec, the education system includes an original institution: the general and vocational college, commonly known as CEGEP (collège d'enseignement général et professionnel). CEGEPs are autonomous public corporations that offer postsecondary education to young people and adults. They accept students who have completed six years of elementary school and five years of secondary school. CEGEP is the first level of higher education, the second being university. (Federation des CEGEPs, 2001)

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<sup>3</sup> Please see appendix two

Bureaucrat definitions aside, for those who have experienced Quebec's CEGEP system, it can best be described as an educational institution that provides for semi-professional vocational training or an avenue for entrance into a university education. Whereas our provincial counterparts and American neighbours continue their high school education into grades twelve and thirteen, Quebec high school graduates enter an educational world that is altogether different than their secondary education. CEGEP has a "higher education" flair to it; a seriousness about it that forces you to quickly realize that the "teacher as a guardian" relationship is gone. Put quite simply: you don't work, you don't pass. There is no principal roaming the halls reminding you to get to class and few teachers, if any, will hound you to attend class, complete readings or assignments. Moreover, the CEGEP educators that teach you take on an appearance of professor as opposed to teacher; the rapport between learner and CEGEP professor are poles apart from the relationship teachers and students have in high school.

This unique Quebec approach to post secondary education has led to the sometimes confusing comparisons to colleges outside of the province, but it is something altogether different. If anything, it can be compared to a miniature version of our universities, if not in depth then in the breadth of similar subjects you have at your disposal. If you are part of a community that expects you to achieve a university degree, it allows you the opportunity to taste what is to come. However, despite the attempt to build a bridge between university and high school life, the differences between the two still leaves it with problems of its own as was evident by the CEGEP related complications and dropouts within my own middle class social circle. Difficulties existed within our own customization between these two environments, and it only became evident after my own CEGEP teaching within a Native Indian community that more profound difficulties would exist with them due to additional struggles specific to their condition.

### **The Research Question**

This dissertation will focus on the Canadian Native Cree people of Northern Quebec and the perceived barriers impeding academic success within institutes of higher education,

mostly but not exclusively, within the Quebec CEGEP program. It is the hypothesis of this dissertation that much of the failure Cree people have had while in, or even prior to entering, "southern" higher levels of education can be partially attributed to various significant social and cultural issues. This is an examination that other educational/researchers, such as Hoffman, Sill and Brokenleg (1986), have suggested should be carried out in a manner in which the subjective experiences of those involved should but have not yet been fully recorded. Literary reviews, historic and present; applicable theories of social development; and a qualitative approach in which the participants' perceptions are considered and combined with my own experiences will be the foundation to this study. It is the perceptions of the cultural and social differences involved with being submerged into the respectively different communities and schools, non-Cree and Cree, and the possible consequences that may arise from this that will receive the most consideration.

Of course, there are other significant factors that impede Native North Americans from succeeding in higher education, such as academic preparation. For example, Kerbo (1981) notes that Native students' grade point average is a strong indicator of achievement within the college setting. But what about cultural and social issues? For instance, does culture shock play a role in Cree students' studies outside of their communities? Do they encounter prejudice in the schools of higher education or in their location of residence? Do their primary and secondary schools within the communities adequately prepare their students for the social and cultural challenges they may face outside of their communities and pursuit of higher education? Do Native students' prior levels of social integration into "white" mainstream society also play a key role in determining academic achievement and if it does, what implications and stressors does that have on culture, cultural identity and sense of self for those who want to pursue higher levels of education?

Carney (1999) writes that many of the problems experienced by Native American students can be found by two cultural categories. The first is the condition in which the primary and secondary schools exist: "...Poorly funded, lacking special programs and support services" (P. 147). The second is, according to Carney, "...much more deeply ingrained. (...) It goes directly to differences between the white and native cultures" (P. 148).

My concern with cultural categories relates to identity and sense of self relates to the meanings that the individual derives from his/her ascribed or learned perceptions of his culture

and the implications that arise from those meanings. If the student questions his/her place within the school and feels a cultural and social disconnection due to these stressors do they then risk failure? Stresses related to "making the grade" upon entering college is felt by all cultural groups, and depending on the individual, some of us are more prepared than others to handle this tension. In this sense, Native and non-Native students share the same stress, however, Natives must endure added stress by entering a college that is "alien to them" (Peregoy, 1990, P. 8). In support of this rationale, consider the following quote by Edgewater (1981):

...(T)he Indian/Native student is faced with the dilemma of cultural beliefs, values and self concepts as well as the same stresses faced by the White students. (P. 28)

It should be noted that this study is also written with three presuppositions regarding the James Bay Cree. The first is that the Cree are a distinct people with a distinct culture and way of life (Sindell & Wintrob, 1969). The second is that the experience of colonialism continues to have a profound effect on the manner in which Indigenous people, namely the Cree, map their environment as well as their sense of self (Chomsky, 1993; Green, 1995; Maybury-Lewis, 1997; Said, 1997; Tuhiwai Smith, 2001; and Vickers, 1998). And the third is that although the membership of the white power blocs has changed since the time of early colonialism, the initial group still maintains majority control of North American/Canadian society and thereby the education system that serves it (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001).

Most of the concepts associated with cultural identity are steeped in sociological and anthropological research, thereby providing much substance for discussion. The theories and studies of cultural identity that I am primarily interested with are those that deal with the formation and continuing development of cultural identity through the acts and perceptions of the self and "Others" (Said, 1978, 1997). Notable prior research that has dealt with the subject of Native (or indigenous) cultural identity as influenced by self and others can be found within the Interactionist framework (Peregoy, 1990 and Sindell, 1968); within the anthropological interpretation, specifically as defined by Barth's (1969) Materialist theory (Nagel, 1996 and Kilfoil, 1979); and those who cite Imperialist and Colonial philosophies and practices of oppression as having the foremost influence on Native identity (Churchill, 1982; Deloria, 1982;

Green, 1995; Maybury-Lewis, 1997; Vickers, 1998; Chomsky, 1993; Said, 1997; and Tuhiwai Smith, 2001).

Despite differing theoretical approaches, all authors share the notion that indigenous cultural identity is profoundly shaped by the perceptions and actions of others outside of their culture as well as within. They also perceive cultural identity as a "...snapshot of unfolding meanings..." (Barker, 2000, P. 382) of one's sense of self continuously changing depending on circumstance. Some theories recognize the importance of history on cultural identity more than others, some address areas that are more "group" oriented and some are more "individual" in focus. My intent is to draw upon the strengths of each theory that suits this study and develop an eclectic and diverse union of theories regarding Native cultural identity.

### **Methods of Inquiry**

It is hoped that the methods of inquiry used within this dissertation will create a dialogue between my own experiences as an educator within Cree territory, in effect becoming a participant myself, and the perceptions of Cree participants towards their experiences within institutions of education. In creating this dialogue, one on one interviews as well as a narrative, participant observation have been used, (both will be explained briefly within this introductory chapter but will be further expanded upon within the methodology chapter). The qualitative approach I have used is diverse, in that I have not relied on a single model, and much of chapter five, Methods of Inquiry, focuses on my reasoning. The qualitative approach has many "liberating" characteristics, but it can mire the researcher in often conflicting, posturing and confusing classifications (Wolcott, 1992). Merriam (1998), Tesch (1990), Patton (c2002). Lancy (1993) notes the numerous variances in classifications that scholarly authors have given to the various types of qualitative research, citing the many approaches to qualitative research, conflicting perspectives or traditions and multiple theoretical roots. Personally, I find academic liberation in Wolcott's (1992) statement that "(n)o one 'owns' ethnography, any more than anyone owns participant observation or case studies" (P. 43). I find empowerment from Wolcott's warning against academic peddlers "or even ... 'hawkers' unabashedly touting their wares" (P. 5). Wolcott suggests that when it comes to theory and methodology, he prefers to work "...on a gentle theoretical 'plain' where distinguishing features are not so prominent,



watersheds not so sharply divided" (P. 10). Perhaps, this is the strength of qualitative research. Where a researcher can, as Wolcott describes, carry out research in a manner in which we are at liberty to commence with one perspective of inquiry, but are encouraged to draw from others as best suits our research question. From these perspectives, I developed a diverse approach in carrying out my research, relying on interview and participant observations strategies while grounding my approach from multiple authors as I felt it suited the research question.

Interviews were carried out representing each of the nine villages in Cree territory, the closest distance of which is 850 kilometres north of Montreal. Time restraints, traveling distance, participant availability and the sheer cost associated with the research all played a role in dictating the development of a single interview format (Seidman, 1998, P. 15). Non-residents are not allowed entering Cree "reserves" without permission from proper Indigenous authorities, so, during the summer of 1997, I approached Gordon Blackned, the Director of the Cree School Board and the head of the Committee to Create a Cree CEGEP, with the proposed topic of my research. In the subsequent fall of 1997, Mr. Blackned resolved to support the work, stating that his department would assist as necessary and also approved a modest grant that would cover the considerable costs of traveling to the Cree communities.<sup>4</sup> With approval from the proper authorities secured, an ethics outline was submitted to the Department of Graduate Studies and interview consent was sought and received from participants (please see appendix two) and interviews began in the winter semester of 1998.

The participant narrative derived from observational notes were collected while teaching and living in Cree territory between 1996 and 1997. This writing developed, in part, to make sense of a rich and sometimes challenging life within the community of Mistissini. What began as an attempt to make sense of my new surrounding through journal writing, quickly grew into a narrative case study of the experience, organized within the framework of Pedersen's (1995) Five Stages of Culture Shock. As I organized my observations, I became increasingly aware of the narrative aspects of my writing and the information it revealed about my own perceptions of my new surroundings in effect creating a story of my experience

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It is imperative to note that Mr. Blackned sympathised completely that this research is dissertation work and must, foremost, meet the strict standards of McGill University's Educational Studies, Graduate program. At no time was any influence regarding research outcome ever suggested.

(Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). I used the same narrative format in a recent publication, "Consequences of Perceived Ethnic Identities" (Stonebanks, 2004) where my experiences of growing up as an ethnic minority in a middle class homogeneous suburban neighbourhood were recounted.

Developing the narrative aspect of the participant observations created a more in-depth account of life and it is an endeavour I encourage with the interviews from the Cree perspective as well. Interviews were created, based on the notion that they would be used "...to reveal how participants conceive of their worlds and how they explain these conceptions" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, Pg. 126). Over thirty interviews were carried out with Cree students, twenty on an individual basis and others in a variety of group settings, who have studied at the CEGEP level, focusing on their perception of self within the southern culture. It was my attempt to not only investigate the Native perceptions of these educational issues of cultural identity but to allow them a narrative "counterstory" (Lindemann Nelson, 2001) to what they perceive as problems and solutions.

Braroe (1988) wrote that this type of research allowed the researcher to "...assess the participant's definition of social situations and recognise the images of selves contained in these definitions" (P. 20). Lindemann Nelson (2001) advocates the use of the narrative when working with groups who are dealing with damaged identities. Using the theoretical assumption that identity is "...understood as a complicated interaction of one's sense of self and others understanding of who one is..." (P. xi), Lindemann Nelson calls for the use of the narrative to repair group and individual damaged identities and many would argue that the Indigenous peoples would fit this category. This is a situation in which a dominant group constructs the identities of certain people through socially shared narratives. To repair the damaging narratives, Lindemann Nelson calls for oppressed groups to confront them by developing their own "counterstory" narratives. These narratives "...are, then, narrative acts of insubordination" (P. 8). Along with the suffering that came from African slave trade, no other ethnic groups in the North America have been as oppressed as Native North American Indians, not only in the physical sense, but also in regards to identity and image creation and distortion (Shaheen, 2001). By means of placing the "counterstories" about the groups in question alongside with narratives, Nelson believes that damaged identities can begin the process of redefining themselves.

Although most of the interview participants were Cree citizens who made the attempt, successful or not, to study in the south, I also interviewed the graduating CEGEP class I taught and Cree high school students who were faced with the southern CEGEP option. Moreover, interviews were also done with community leaders who are not only concerned with the future of their people achieving higher education, but who have studied in southern schools of higher education as well. Through these interviews, I believe their voices on this matter will come through and that I can add their expertise and experience to my own and vice versa.

Of course, it is noted that whenever tackling a subject that contains a combination of perspectives, the subject of “voice” is an issue that must be addressed and will be in the Methods chapter. The subject of voice appropriation in research within Native contexts is as prevalent a dilemma as asking who really benefits from such research.

### **Whom does the Research Benefit?**

Perhaps Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) framed this question of research of Native issues most succinctly when she stated, “...research (is) talked about both in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the indigenous world, and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument. It told us things already known, and made careers for people who already had jobs” (P. 3). Tuhiwai-Smith develops arguments, contextualizing the debate within any study of “indigenous peoples”, specifically asking: whose research is it, who owns it, whose interest does it serve and who will benefit from it” (P. 10)? Furthermore, apart from the actual research itself, Tuhiwai-Smith asks of the researcher, “Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix the generator? Can they actually do anything” (P. 10)?

Admittedly, Tuhiwai-Smith notes the cynicism in such statements and acknowledges that many of the researchers who have worked in Native communities have been well liked, but is quick to add that despite the massive amount of research that has been carried out amongst Indigenous people, few positive results have been seen within the communities. Drawing upon Said's (1978) concept of an “Othered” representation of the researched, Tuhiwai-Smith candidly questions the right and motives of non-Indigenous researchers and the relevance of their Euro-centred research methods, in effect questioning the continued use of

the “Orientalist” (Said, 1978) perspective. Recently, Said (2002) wrote on this subject “... that Orientalist learning itself was premised on the silence of the Native ... presenting that unfortunate creature as an undeveloped, deficient, and uncivilized being who couldn’t represent himself” (P. 2). Although Said observes that some forms of representation regarding certain ethnic/racial groups from Occidental researchers are now considered politically incorrect, for instance, “... it has now become inappropriate to speak on behalf of “Negroes” ...” (P. 2), however even though Said calls for the same respect for those that are still considered Others, it has yet to happen.

From a current perspective and wrapped in our “post 9/11” world, it is plain to anyone who comes from “the East”, “the Arab world” or the “Muslim world” how experts of these people within the media, are usually not of these people and when they are, there is always the presupposition that they are somehow not objective due to their indigeniousness. How, I wonder, do these experts and the research they have done to gain the title of expert benefited the people they have studied?

So again, the question I ask myself is, whom does this research benefit? It is a troubling issue and one I grapple with in greater depth in my chapter on Methods of Inquiry. With the understanding that this will be discussed in greater detail, I feel, in brief, that the solution to this research dilemma is that the intent of this study lies in perceptions: perceptions of those who participated in this study; perceptions of authors who have written about this subject; my own perceptions and, hopefully, the perceptions of the reader as well. It is within this dialogue of perceptions that I feel the question of who benefits from this study is answered.

Tuhiwai-Smith is correct; as the researcher I will benefit from this work. Living the experience of teaching CEGEP in a Cree community, working within the milieu, facing challenges and making personal discoveries of First Nation people is enriching. However, by adding myself as a participant within this research, Cree (or other First Nation) readers will understand the Non-Cree experience of living within their community and working in the educational milieu. I believe the Cree community will also benefit from the opportunity to generate a voice for their own perceptions on the barriers impeding them from higher education. The general reader, Indigenous, Native, Non-Native or otherwise will hopefully gain an understanding or simply benefit from a confirmation and validation of the complexities regarding Native education. Finally, I hope the non-Native educator, especially those who are

part of the power bloc, who reads this dissertation will begin his or her own journey of understanding the difficulties of functioning outside of one's own culture and community, the reality of the colonial experience as having an effect on Native education and the perceptions that Natives hold towards these institutions and their place within them. In the end, I hope the reader adds to the dialogue between the participants of this written work by reflecting on what he or she has read and countering or complementing it with his or her own perceptions.

### **Framing Perceptions**

The theories and studies of cultural identity with which I am primarily concerned are those that deal with the formation and continuing development of cultural identity through the acts and perceptions of the self and "Others" (Said, 1978, 1997). Consider again the panel of so called "experts" (Said 2001) that bombard the airwaves in a post 9/11 environment: who are the people that represent the so called "middle east"? Rarely are they actually indigenous to this land. Much is the same for the Native people of North America; voice appropriation is not the only concern as there is always the danger of being completely ignored and utterly removed from popular consciousness. For instance, it was not until extreme incidents like Davis Inlet's harsh reality of desperate social problems were brought about in the media in 2000 that anyone seemed to pay attention to the cries of a distressed social situation. It would seem that few Native issues seem to be on the agenda for newsmakers and members of the more economically elite who control them (Chomsky & Herman, Edward, 1988). It would seem that Plato's quote that "those who tell the stories also rule society" still rings true.

Chomsky and Herman (1988) stated, within Manufacturing Consent, that public approval and information is manufactured through a continuous and repetitive barrage of images and facts that are controlled by the agreement and approval of the privileged. Much of North America's history has been and still continues to be written and reinforced in a distinctly un-Aboriginal voice (Wright, 1992; Zinn, 2003). My own middle class, public school primary and secondary education had little history or current information from a Native perspective and a recent discussion with first year McGill University education students within my Interculturalism class revealed that little to nothing has changed, as was evident by their shock when I lectured on residential schooling. Perhaps more appalling was the answer from my

students, Cree students who are registered in McGill's teacher training program, who when asked the question, "who discovered North America", answered "Christopher Columbus". When pressed with the same question again, they repeated Columbus, and then changed their answer to Cartier, trying to give it a more Canadian feeling. Finally, one student said, "Oh, you want the *real* answer". It was a strong indication of how they felt that their "real answers" were not acceptable in the school setting, even in higher learning. Imagine for a moment how maddening it must be to have so much of your perceptions of the world, or your own community, taken away from you.

In the North American scheme, images from television portray the authors of discovery as seemingly always White; European or North American researchers name exotic flowers in the rainforests, never considering that the local indigenous tribes may have actually given it a name hundreds or thousands of years ago; similarly, the Quebec government's topography department assigns names to mountains in Cree territory that have already long since been named. Take the following as a "thought experiment" of sorts: That Hillary conquered the peak of Mt. Everest or that Peary was the first man to reach the North Pole; such statements are made with common acceptance. In the same train of thought, and from a counterstory perspective, there was always something unsettling about the idea that perhaps four or five hundred years ago, a Native Sherpa never looked upon the mountain peak of Nepal's Mt. Everest, or Sagarmatha for the Indigenous people, and thought, "I'm going to reach that peak!" and did it. For years it was thought that no human could scale the peak without "the West's" technological assistance, but Babu Chhiri, a Sherpa Native, demonstrated through his record breaking climbs, (both in time reaching the peak and time spent atop), that it could be done without such assistance. Is it so odd to think that perhaps another "man" (or woman for that matter) had reached the peak before Hillary? Perhaps an indigenous person who resided next to the mountain and spent every year of his or her life contemplating its mysteries and challenges? Could this not be a real possibility? If so, it must be maddening to know that your reality means nothing in a European and North American centered world.

### **The Dissertation**

Because, "Indian education cannot be understood apart from an historical analysis" (Hampton, 1993, P. 277), the following second chapter chronicles the Cree and the generalised Indian education experience from the arrival of Europeans to North America to present day. By having a brief history of Native Education at the outset, I hope this will give the reader a more complete understanding of the issues being presented within this dissertation. Having introduced the idea of a larger than tribal Indian experience, chapter three argues the point that all Native education and social experiences should be taken into account when assessing any North American Indian issue because of the rising influence of a pan-Indian collective consciousness. With this in mind, there is an unavoidable connection between Native cultural identity, the educational system and a history of cultural assimilation (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Nagel, 1996; Fournier & Crey, 1998), problems that plague Native education to this day. The formation of a cultural identity by groups who have experienced oppression and colonialism will be defined in chapter four which also explores the ramifications that develop from the unequal relationship between dominant groups and the oppressed. Chapter five, a methodology chapter clarifies the format and rationale of the qualitative methods that I used and also presents an argument for the necessity of using such research approaches in regard to studying issues of education and the ethnic minority student. The methodology chapter frames chapters five and six. These two chapters of this dissertation will be dedicated to providing a qualitative account of life outside of one's cultural context; a personal narrative of my own experience living and teaching at the CEGEP level in Cree territory as well as another chapter devoted to the interviews carried out with Cree students and former students who attended institutions of higher education outside of their own cultural context. Once more, the next chapter reviews the history of First Nation education since Europeans first contacted, conquered and colonised North America and their consequences on Indigenous life and education.

## **Chapter Two**

### **A Brief History of Native Education**



## Introduction

*"History is nearly always written by the victors."*  
(anonymous)

As the above mentioned and often cited quote suggests, history can be a very subjective topic. In conflict, it is the victors who invariably write the history that commandingly retells the event and the losers who do not. Although the perspectives of the powerless are not entirely lost, they certainly are at the mercy of those who are in power to make their perspective commonly heard, understood and accepted. The history of Natives in North America shares much of this problem and has long been subjected to a European, colonial and then non-Aboriginal bias, ignoring the Native perspective (Stiffarm & Lane, 1992). If your education was anything like mine, or like Mander's (1991) for that matter, from primary to higher education, the history of Native people was, somehow, conveniently absent from your Canadian/North American curriculum, learning and classroom discussions. Much of what was Native, its history, origins and/or names, has lost its significance to all but a small few and our education system has had little success in averting or changing this loss.

Reflecting back on Chomsky's (1988) assertion that public awareness, or lack thereof, is manufactured through a continuous and repetitive barrage of images and alleged facts that are controlled by privileged members' agreement and approval, it is easy to see why Native history has endured so much misinformation and whitewashing. Consider a brief exercise I do in my McGill University's Multicultural class for example: what does the average person think of when he/she hears the word "Blackhawk"? Perhaps, images of the Chicago "original six" National Hockey League team comes to mind; or, perhaps it is associated with a Hollywood rendition of the military attack helicopter that was shot down in Somalia. Rarely, I doubt, would anyone remember Chief Black hawk, the tragic leader of Sac and Fox Indians, who would become their namesake. The history of Black hawk and his people involves the massacre of an entire tribe, men, women and children alike, by a U.S. volunteer militia, despite being in full retreat of their own territory and under the white flag of surrender. Despite its significance to North American history, I question how many people have any idea where the designation of "Blackhawk" was derived. Is this lost knowledge a matter of convenience, a certain collective

conscious amnesia that gives comfort to those who do not want to admit that the history of North America is not as honourable, romantic or heroic as we were led to believe?

This chapter is intended for the reader who is unfamiliar with the history of Native education and its relationship with the domination and control of indigenous people. After my own immersion in this subject in 1996, I feel somewhat reluctant to repeat what should be a historic “truism”, what should be, but is not, common knowledge. Much in the same manner in which respected academic Chomsky (2003) is increasingly expressing his own frustrations at having to explain what he believes to be self evident “truisms” when discussing the role of his own country, the United States of America, within the world:

I apologize for mentioning this. It's an obvious truism that shouldn't have to be mentioned, and I do so only because when anyone tries to pursue this transparently obvious course, which follows the most elementary political and moral truisms, it elicits the most intriguing reactions. (P. 26)

Few current scholars on the subject of Native issues would argue against the statement that the European colonization of North America brought upon the Natives a loss of land, culture and life. However, this is still not the version of North American history which we are taught in either formal or non-formal settings. The history of North America is certainly not portrayed as one in which “...colonists in North America pursued the course laid out by their forerunners (...) to exterminate the “devil worshippers” and “cruel beasts” whose generosity had enabled the colonists to survive, hunting them down with savage dogs, massacring women and children, destroying crops, spreading smallpox with infected blankets, and other measures...” (Chomsky, c1993, segment 8). From the Native perspective, the history of North America recalls a land stolen through genocide and terrorism (Chomsky, c1993; Jaimes, 1992; Mayburry Lewis, 1997; Thornton, 1987) and, perhaps, as Stiffarm and Lane (1992) point out, this perspective was never taught within our schools because it indeed weighs too heavily on our own non-Native collective consciousness.

What relevance does the history of Native education have to a dissertation that questions the relationship between Cree students and the social and cultural differences they encounter when they study in institutions of higher education? Again, as Hampton (1995)

clearly states, "Indian education cannot be understood apart from an historical analysis" (P. 15). In the following chapters regarding cultural Identity and collective consciousness, I argue that it is important to understand the perceptions and feelings that the majority of Native Indians have regarding the history of Aboriginal education because these viewpoints act as powerful catalysts in creating their own perceptions as well as those of future generations that they will invariably, and understandably, help shape. Geotz and Lecompte (1984) declare that the subjective preconceptions and presuppositions of studied participants must be defined as completely as possible. The North American Natives' perception of educational institutions is undoubtedly at least somewhat shaped by the history of schooling and by whichever means the Native people were made to be "educated". Their presuppositions, their understanding of their collective history and their own personal experiences allow us to gain a better understanding of some of the perceptions that the Native/Cree student has towards an imposed education system.

The limited quantity of resources that are available on the history of Cree education poses a problem to the student of this subject matter. Put simply, there are no books that definitively cover the James Bay Cree experience within the European education system. In her book, The White Man's Gonna Getcha, Toby Morantz (2002) wrote that "The Crees may not venerate their past but they do recount it" (P. 10). I find that this observation is fairly accurate to my own experiences in Cree territory. However, I would like to add that although in regards to their educational experience, they may not "venerate their past", they certainly are open to enlightening others on the hardships that they or others within their community have had to endure. For whatever reason, the Cree and others within the research communities, both indigenous and non-indigenous alike, have only just begun the process of amassing narratives on this subject. However, as will be discussed within the chapter on collective consciousness, much can be understood by balancing the greater Native experience with what material can be found on the James Bay Cree. Within the scope of this brief chapter, I have no illusion of being able to fully recount the wrongs that Native people have endured while losing their autonomy. However, by the end of this chapter, I expect the reader will begin to appreciate the nature of the uneven relationship between the Indigenous people of North America and the non-Native people who, ultimately, conquered their land. If one does not accept this as a "truism", it is nonetheless important to accept it as a counter perspective if one

is to understand the Indigenous perspective regarding an educational system that was imposed with questionable intentions upon a people.

### Time Line

To better explain the current state of Native education, I will examine the original methods of education that were already in place by Indigenous people prior to European colonization; reveal how first contact between European and various Native groups set the path for an uneven relationship between the two peoples; consider the impact of the “discovery of new world” and the ensuing use of education to deal with the colonizer’s “Indian problem”; review the philosophical transformation that the Native education system went through in order to deal with this “problem”; and then draw attention to the fact that Native people, even from the outset, perceived and understood the less than noble intentions of non-Native people in bringing their education to them.

Although some authors may further break the education time line into subsequent categories or debate the specific dates, for the purpose of this chapter, the breakdown will be investigated through a time line suggested by the Canadian Assembly of First Nations (1994) by separating it into four major periods: **Assimilation** (1850-1910), **Segregation** (1910-1951), **Integration** (1951-1972) and **Self-Determination** (1972-present). The only variation that will be made here to the Canadian Assembly of First Nations’ timeline will be to expand the era of “Assimilation”.

The Canadian Assembly of First Nations has dated the period of Assimilation from 1850 to 1910. Within this chapter, the date has been taken back to include the time in which the education system was used to assimilate Natives into the European model of what was to be “civilized”. This time line corresponds to how long the Natives have experienced the “general” European model education setting appropriate to the elementary and secondary education systems. Although the focus of this dissertation is on higher education, this part of the timeline will concentrate on this level of education as it more accurately reflects the general popular education setting of that era. The periods of Native involvement in higher education are not as easily discernible as that of Native children’s education, but they do follow relatively

closely (Beck, 1995). The emphasis of this chapter will be on the period of “assimilation” with a brief mention of the period of “segregation”. The eras of “integration” and “self-determination” will be clarified within the discussion section of this dissertation as they pertain to the experiences and the content of the participants who have been interviewed.

### **Original Cree and Native Education**

School was another institution from the south imposed on the Crees, as on other Indians across the land. We must distinguish between education and schooling. Education for the Crees was as old as their culture; schooling, though, was a new and foreign institution. (Morantz, 2001, P. 212)

It is important to note that prior to the imposition of a European model of education, Aboriginal peoples of North America had their own method of educating their children and were certainly not lacking in this area. “North American indigenous people, like humans everywhere, possessed systems of education even though they did not have schools prior to the coming of the Europeans” (Miller, 1997, P. 37). If the aim of any education is to provide the proper tools for future generations to fit in and function productively within their community, then it must be said that the Native peoples of North America had a functional and highly successful system of education. This statement can be made quite confidently by noting the existence of North American populations that flourished in comparison to the period following the influx of Europeans (Thornton, 1987, Ryberg, 1973). In fact, whereas in the recent past native population in America prior to the arrival of Columbus was usually reported in the range of one million, current demographic studies place the number at 15 million (Stiffarm & Lane, 1992, p.27) while others research the number of the entire Americas at 100 million (Stannard, 1992). Although dissimilar to the rigid manner in which Europe, at that time, educated its children, the Natives of North America educated their people in a concerted and successful manner (Miller, 1997).

Contrary to popular belief, education ... the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and skills did not come to the North American continent on the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria. Education is as Native to this continent as its

Native people. We Native Americans have educated our youth through a rich oral tradition, which was - and is yet today transmitted by the elders of the tribe. (Whiteman, 1978, P. 105)

Although there was no single "Native education model", most Aboriginal people utilized an instructional approach that relied on looking, listening, and learning, or what Miller (1997) quoted as "the three Ls." Considering the multitude and variety of groups of indigenous peoples that inhabit the immense land that is North America, it would seem improbable that there *would* be a single Native model of education. Despite the differences that accompany the variety of languages, customs and tribal attitudes of Native people, however, there does seem to be a common thread of teaching by looking, listening and learning. The time I spent within the Cree territory of Northern Quebec validated that this method of imparting knowledge still continues despite the infringement of the European schooling model. Cree elders and parents still value "schooling in the bush", a time in which children are shown traditional ways of life in the forest. It is a time in which Cree youth are taught how to live like Cree.

A 1986 National Film Board of Canada (NFB) production, "School in the Bush", a remake of the 1974 NFB film "Cree Hunters of Mistissini", gives an admirable account of the manner in which Cree parents, during the early 1970s, attempted to pass on Cree values and culture to their children. This documentary follows the experiences of a young Cree girl who leaves her residential school in La Tuque, Quebec, approximately 400 kilometres away from Cree territory, to spend a "traditional" winter in the bush with her family. The film portrays the Cree belief that life and education are the same: "children learn by working with their parents; schooling in the bush never stops" (National Film Board of Canada, 1999). Teaching in traditional Cree settings, during the time of European educational encroachment, was a way in which Cree adults could ensure the continuation of their culture, values and way of life.

Prior to European contact, this was simply the consistent manner in which Cree children were "schoolled". To this day, even though the Cree of Northern Quebec have assumed control of their educational system within the European framework of schooling, Cree parents and grandparents encourage the Cree youth to take extended time off school to join those family members who continue to live in the bush. In many ways, this form of education

is held in equal or higher esteem by many of the Cree people over the local schools that are designed in the western tradition of learning.

Many customs that are both educational and ceremonial play an important role in the upbringing and schooling of a Cree child within his community and still permeate the character of Cree learning. These episodes are often called "rites of passage" within our own western vision of the events, but should also be viewed as valid, traditional forms of education that have a profound learning effect on all involved. The Grand Council of the Crees (1998) are quite clear in their declaration that their traditional form of education is genuine, stating: "In Canada we Aboriginal people educated our children in our own way long before the coming of Europeans"<sup>5</sup>. The "walking out ceremony" of the Mistissini Cree is an excellent example of an early childhood learning experience.

At dawn, dressed in special clothing, the child left the tent and proceeded around it from east to west, being greeted by guests. Children on walking-out ceremony followed a path covered with fir boughs until they reached a tree some six or seven metres from their tent. In the case of the boys, who would be carrying a gun and a sack, the youngsters would fire their first shot and then place a goose that had been deposited at the base of the tree into the sack. After walking around the tree from east to west, they would return to their tents, where they would be congratulated by elders, and fowl added to a feast that was already prepared. Young girls performed a parallel ceremony: holding hatchets, they approached the tree, where they picked up a cut branch, circled the tree while carrying it, and returned to their tent for congratulations. The branches the girls brought back would be put on the fire that was readied for feasting and celebrating, which lasted the rest of the day and involved the entire community. (Miller, 1997, PP. 17-18)

Events such as these teach much more than simple celebratory customs: societal expectations, cultural norms and a respect for a way of life still maintained by the community are all intertwined in this educational ceremony. The walking-out ceremony can easily be compared to Christian/Catholic first communion customs and practices that are still very much part of the curriculum of many schools within Canada.

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Grand Council of the Cree (GCC) (1998). *History of the Cree* [www document]  
URL <http://www.gcc.ca/education/Cree-education.html>

Native education approaches should be accorded as much educational merit as any comparative religious or civic courses that exist, or have existed, within our more formal style of western schooling. However, comparative respect for the content of and the manner in which Natives educated their youth were not respected by the newly arrived Europeans. Many of the non-Native peoples' attitudes towards the indigenous populations of North America were made obvious from the outset of "first contact" between them and set the tone for the acceptance of an unequal relationship between the two civilizations.

### **First Contact**

I have often heard tales, told from the somewhat romanticized non-Native perspective, of the awe that must have filled the hearts and minds of the indigenous people of America when they first laid eyes upon the Europeans. Cinema, television, art and literature have created the image of the Native having foreseen the arrival of the Europeans to their land as the coming of "gods", supernatural beings or, at the very least, of a race or society that was clearly superior to their own. By this account, there was an acquiescent understanding that the European was destined to become the master and the Native to become the servant. Children, Native and non-Native alike, are still exposed to this vision of history in such films as Disney's "Pocahontas"(1995) in which the lead character, Pocahontas, shows her awe at the approaching British ships, thereby conveying that there was an initial impression of superiority and inferiority between the cultures. Bruce Trigger (1991), after reviewing romantic interpretive historical accounts of Native first encounters, concluded that most stories shared the common themes "...that Native North Americans believed the first European ships they saw to be floating islands inhabited by supernatural spirits and sometimes covered by white clouds (sails) from which lightening and thunder (cannons) were discharged, or else the mobile dwelling places of powerful spirits whom they prepared to welcome with sacrifices, food, and entertainment. These stories indicate that there was much about Europeans that offered itself to supernatural interpretation in terms of Native religious concepts" (Pgs. 1200-1201). Films such as Disney's Pocahontas (1995), demonstrate that this is still a common theme that is perpetuated and accepted today.



Some may argue that it is entirely plausible that Indigenous people of the Americas would have been “awed” by the superior technology of the Europeans upon first contact. Indeed, this mindset and language pervades North America today. Consider the terminology used by the American government and accepted and adopted by the media when it described its attack on Iraq in 2003 as planned “Shock and Awe”. This term was used to convey a message that the technique of advanced technological warfare would make the Iraqis understand the clear distinction of superiority and inferiority between the two nations. The mindset that European-influenced historians (no doubt influenced by accounts made by original explorers, colonizers and settlers themselves) had of the Europeans’ relationship with the Others is still part of the Europeans’ descendants language today. If however there ever was a “romantic” first contact, its significance seems to have been lost on the Natives themselves. There is no recorded account of a first “romantic” contact between a Cree person and a non-Native. The recording of such an event seems to be non-existent for other Canadian Native groups as well.

In no instance in Canada do we have records of Native reactions paralleling those of the West Indians and Mexicans, who wondered if Europeans were returning spirits. The documentation that survived for Canada is silent on the subject. (Dickason, c2002, P. 97.)

Rather, one account of first contact, documented in 1611, between a member of the Cree of Northern Quebec and a European suggests a much more pragmatic interpretation of the encounter. A crewmember of Henry Hudson’s ship encountered a lone Cree while the British-led ship was wintered near the mouth of Rupert River. The crewmember told of a trade that he had made with the Cree man, who, from the crewmember’s perspective, had simply appeared from out of the surrounding wooded area. The English crewman apparently initiated the bargaining for the two caribou skins and two beaver skins that the Cree man was carrying with him. Although the Cree man accepted the exchange, he apparently demonstrated visible dissatisfaction and simply departed with his goods, never again to be seen by the Englishman. (Glyndwr, Williams. Andrew Grahm’s Observations on Hudson’s Bay 1767-91.)

Dickason (c2002) wrote that this first contact between the English crewmember and the Cree hunter "... suggests that the Cree had a clear idea of the exchange rate he expected, as well as the trading protocol to be followed..." (P. 93). Dickason theorized that the Cree individual's apparent understanding of what was expected in trading with the Europeans was perhaps an indication of a vast and intricate Native communication and trading network. This would lend credence to Gagne's point that there is a collective influential experience between all North American Indians, as information would ebb and flow between different Native groups. One can also take this speculation further and assume that if different Native tribes were exchanging stories concerning trade with the Europeans, then surely they must have continued in later years to discuss the Europeans' various infringements and atrocities against Native populations as a consequence of their "discovery".

### **Consequences of "discovery"**

In writing this chapter, I did not set out to make a moral argument against the European control of Aboriginal education in the past. However, it became evident while reviewing impartial historical chronicles (such as documented educational policies) that the intent of such control, with its covert and overt aim of assimilation, segregation and integration, does lend itself to certain ethical conclusions (Adams, 1995; Dickasson, c2002; Persson, 1980). An historical investigation of educational policies supports the compelling Native argument that the European-imposed educational system were designed specifically to deal with the Indian "problem" through such means as the encouragement of cultural assimilation (Bolt, 1987; Fournier, & Crey, 1997; Hoxie, 1984). Personal moral conclusions aside, an investigation into the history of Native and non-Native contact provides a compelling counter-perspective to the popular images and stories we hear on a regular basis about such matters and offers insight into the Other's viewpoint.

For most Canadian students, the teaching of Canada's history of its "discovery" by Europeans is fairly uniform. It generally progresses as follows: the Viking, Leif Ericson, of Greenland, arrives in Canada around 985 AD; John Cabot, a Venetian in the service of England, comes to the Beothuk island in 1497; Jacques Cartier arrives in 1534, sent by King

Francis I of France who was intent on discovering a "Northwest Passage" to the much valued Orient and so on. Cartier and other European explorers would obviously never find the economically proficient Northwest Passage to the Orient, but their exploits would set in motion the European colonization of present day Canada.

When the White man first arrived in North America he was both welcomed and aided by the Indians, who were aware of his pathetic helplessness in the face of a wilderness he was ill-equipped to deal with. The Indians, of course, were not aware that these first helpless guests were the advance guard of a powerful and expanding civilization. (Bowles, Hanly, Hodgins & Rawlyk, 1972, P. 109)

What we are not sufficiently taught in our schools is that without the assistance of the Native people, it is highly doubtful that any of the early explorers or settlers, who were suffering hardships such as scurvy and many others would have survived without the compassion of the Native population they encountered (Bowles et al., 1972). Perhaps unwittingly, the Native people who helped these early explorers and settlers not only ensured the latter's survival and promises of possible fortune, but helped convince the elite of Europe that money could be made in "the New World". It is due to Europe's insatiable and undeniable appetite for gain, both territorially and economically, that the Native population of North America endured their greatest tragedies and challenges.

Initially, the intrusion into Aboriginal life was limited. However, given the competitive and acquisitive nature of European culture, growth and ever-deeper intrusions into Aboriginal culture were inevitable. (Armitage, 1995, P. 3)

Early encounters between the Europeans and the local indigenous population of North America began on a somewhat equal footing of power, with mutual exploration, curiosity and trade being the usual point of convergence. Once it became apparent to both parties that the Europeans were intent on colonizing Native land, the battle over who would control North America quickly became one-sided. The Europeans' superior military/technological power

quickly established their imposing and dominating vision, in which the Native population would be pushed aside, eliminated or assimilated.

It was the intent of the newly arrived Europeans to either “exterminate them (Indian peoples) as separate peoples or assimilate them forcibly into the general population” (Wax, Wax & Dumont, 1989, P. 2). Initially, however, the Europeans knew that they had to depend on the charity and protection of the Natives. Although the Europeans possessed superior technology, they were lacking in manpower and had insufficient knowledge of how to simply survive within their New World. This is an obvious irony to Native people: a Cree friend of mine would often recount her mother’s favourite saying: “The first people in the welfare line was the white-man.” Following closely to the writing of Zinn (2003), it is not only a perceptive twist on today’s common stereotypes but it is a far cry from the imagery of the first-arrived European provided in the version of history to which we are exposed. The settlers were therefore in a precarious position from the outset and so forged pacts with Native tribes, at first to ensure their basic survival and then to secure alliances against other enemy Old World European explorers and colonists competing for the valuable North American land and its resources.

During this early period, Natives experienced a great number of indignities at the hands of their “guests.” They would set the tone for the future treatment of Natives. In one incident, for example, Jacques Cartier kidnapped Taignoagny and Doagaya, two sons of the Iroquois Chief Donnacona, to take them back to France. The two sons survived their abduction to France, an amazing feat in itself, but died on their return voyage (Dickason, 1992). It is not clear whether Cartier kidnapped these two boys in order to prove his voyage to North America or as a means of convincing the Natives of the superiority of France’s civilization. Native abductions and the reasons for them had become fairly routine in that period (Dickason, 1992). However, the fact that Cartier attempted to return the Chief’s sons may be evidence that he had attempted to “educate” and impress the Native Chief through the experience of his sons. Cartier must have thought that once the Natives had seen and recounted tales of the splendours and advancements of Europe, the Natives would have gladly embraced the Europeanization of their land and culture.

## **Early Native Perceptions towards European Schooling**

Early Native perceptions towards the imposition of a foreign method of schooling, with all its overt desires to culturally and religiously change the Native population, was clearly negative. The stories that spread from tribe to tribe surely must have contributed to the eventual supratribal Native perceptions of the Europeans and the institutions that would soon be imposed upon them. It was clear from the outset that most Native groups had their doubts about the utility of and the motives behind the European education system that was increasingly being imposed upon their people. South of the Canadian border, Benjamin Franklin's "Two Tracts" recalled the attitude and statements of Native Chiefs in Virginia in 1774 when responding to an offer to educate six of their young men at a college in Williamsburg, Virginia:

Several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the Northern Provinces. They were instructed in all of your sciences, but when they came back to us they were bad runners, ignorant in every means of living in the woods; unable to bear either cold or hunger; know neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy; spoke our language imperfectly; were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, or counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we must decline it; and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take care of their education, instruct them in all we know and make men of them. (as cited in Franklin, c1959, P. 483)

It is obvious from Benjamin Franklin's recount that the Native leaders of this time found the "White-man's" education to be useless to their way of life. Their attitude stands in direct contrast to the overwhelming feeling that early colonists had in the inferiority that they viewed in the "Amerindian" population (Huff, 1997).

Few written records indicate what the Cree perceptions may have been towards the first encroachments of schooling upon their communities. Perhaps, as Morantz's exhaustive review of the journals of the time have led her to consider, Cree parents initially may have seen schools as an opportunity for their children to learn either French or English, or perhaps learn a

new trade; few would have foreseen the growing imposition of a European-based education system as "...one of the most destructive southern institutions imposed on the Crees" (Morantz, 2001, P. 216).

Their pride and appreciation of their own forms of education belie the early colonists' assumption of an acquiescent mutual understanding of the Europeans' educational superiority. The competing Native and European visions of civilisation, education and the future of the land were coming to a deadlock. As time progressed and Europe realised that there was a continuing opportunity to be made in North America, it became imperative that the Native population not stand in the way of its advancement. The first priority was to wrest the land from the various Native groups. To help achieve this goal, it became common for the Europeans to rationalize that the Native was an "inferior people" in need of "civilizing" and, to meet this end, began implementing a plan of assimilation through education in order to deal with the "Indian problem" with increased vigour.

The "time line" of Native schooling has gone through some unique phases, but all have the dubious distinction of maintaining the attempt to assimilate the Native people into the European-based North American culture. No one should underestimate the physical assault carried out upon the Native populations of North America in order to conquer the land and its Indigenous people. Few nations or "peoples" are subjugated and conquered without the use of force and intimidation. Much could and should be written on the military conquest of North America as it is a subject that is conspicuously silent within our media, schools and consciousness. However, within the context of this dissertation, I will focus on one aspect of that conquest, namely the use of cultural assimilation through education.

### **Assimilation (1850-1910)**

At some point, European policy makers decided that it was better to assimilate the Native population into the European way of life rather than trying to exterminate them: this option made greater sense economically and allowed them to maintain their Old World population. The early approach of assimilating the Natives into the European way of life was

done under the Europeans' belief that it would simply be a natural progression for the Natives to adopt their superior way of life.

As they were removed, it was almost universally agreed upon by the non-Indians concerned, with rare exception of a few traders, that Indians were in fact uncivilized, they needed some adequate form of religion which differed from the form they were practicing, and they also needed education. (...) Many of the colonists believed that the savages were savages that needed civilizing. (Ryberg. 1973, P. 4)

Religion became an immediate tool used against the Natives in the battle of coercing the Natives into joining the European settlers' vision of the "New World". The Cree of the James Bay region were no different than other tribes that had persistent contact with European settlers and traders. The missionaries came to the Cree's Native land with the pledge of bringing Christianity and their version of civilisation into their lives through education and the Cree way of life would be changed forever.

Initially, the Cree of Northern Quebec dealt mainly with the British, who had set up camp in the Hudson Bay area to create a "back-door" to the French fur-trade route coming through the St. Lawrence passage. The Hudson's Bay Company was the European entity that held the firmest control of this area and its policy on Native education was to allow the missionaries to deliver education to the Natives in any manner they saw fit. It was the original policy of the Hudson's Bay Company "to keep contacts between company 'servants' and Amerindians to a minimum" (Dickason. C2002, P. 143), however, they ultimately did not dissuade the church from such matters, as they "recognised the usefulness of having clergymen posted in the area, to assimilate Natives" (Gagne, 1994, P. 43).

In the mid-1840s, the James Bay Cree had their first missionary and schoolteacher, George Barnley. A stream of fellow missionary/schoolteachers succeeded Barnley and within a decade the Anglican religion was firmly entrenched within Cree territory. Although the Anglicans were responsible for educating Cree children between the 1880s and the 1940s, the Catholics were allowed to organise similar religious/education programs wherever no Protestants operated (Gagne, 1994). Although the Cree dealt mainly with the British, the latter

did not exert sole control over the Natives of Northern Quebec. The Cree were well aware of the rivalry between the English and the French and tried to play each off the other in order to enjoy better trading deals (Dickason, 1992). Although contact between both the French and the English became more common place, the latter ultimately played the greater role in the lives of the James Bay Cree. However,

...(t)hroughout the history of New France, the French policy toward Amerindians was consistent: treat them with every consideration, avoid violence (this was not always successful), and transform them into Frenchman. (Dickason, c2002, P. 163)

The French had hoped that they would be able to transform the Natives by progressively introducing the French way of life into their culture. The French struggled with many methods of "educating" the Native population. As early as 1620, they attempted to culturally transform the Huron by implementing a program that sent Huron and other tribes' youths to France.

The idea was that after a few years in France, the children would become proficient in French and familiar enough with French ways that they would retain them upon return to their Native land. Not only that, but they would influence their countrymen to adopt French culture. (Dickason. c2002, P. 165)

Dickason (c2002), using sources from the *Collection de manuscrits contenant lettres, memoirs et autres documents historiques relatifs a la Nouvelle France*, concludes that when the program did not produce the expected results, it was cancelled with the French population's impression that its failure was due to the "abject" character of the Amerindians. More elaborate attempts were made by the French to send Natives to France to "amaze and dazzle them with the greatness and splendour of the French Court and Armie (sic)" (O'Callaghan & Brodhead, 1856-1861, PP. 206-211). Painstaking efforts were even made to bring Natives to the battlefields of Flanders where French armies were brought in solely for the benefit of impressing and perhaps scaring them. "Amerindians proved not to be so easily



impressed" (Dickason., c2002, P. 166) and the procedure was discontinued as it proved to be too expensive.

Some authors, such as S. Lyman Tyler (1973), whose book, A History of Indian Policy, was published through the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, have a very positive vision of the French Colonial treatment of the Native populations. Most of Tyler's referencing came from Vera Brown Holmes' 1950 publication A History of the Americas. Holmes contended that "of all the white men, the Indians preferred the Frenchmen". She continued:

In intercourse with them, the French neither treated them, as did the Spaniards, as minors or "wards" whose every action and opinion must be supervised, nor did they despise them as the English obviously did. ... The attitude of the French was more like that of an **older brother** who might coax, scold, punish, deceive, or seek to impress his primitive kin, but who never attempted to enslave him or behave contemptuously toward him. (emphasis mine) (Holmes, 1950, P. 311)

The "older brother" attitude persists even to this day, as I and others have personally witnessed among the many Quebecois who work within the Cree education field today. However, the older brother reference may be perceived as a more paternalistic, albeit perhaps arguably somewhat outwardly sympathetic, attitude that persists to this day. On more than one occasion, references to the Native population as being "nos enfants" (our children) are still made by some of the specialists working in the Native field. Although the reference is not normally intended to be derogatory, it is hard to escape the perhaps unconscious assumption of superiority by its speaker. This air of superiority, addressed in Miller's (1996) chapter "Race and Assimilation" in Shingwauk's Vision, points to the continued common feeling shared by a great deal of European-descended Canadians who have worked for or within the Native population.

Tyler notes that the French colonials "possessed a certain genius for securing the co-operation and retaining the good will of the Indians." According to Tyler, this was done through living in harmony with the aboriginal people. The author cites by way of example an 1899 "Bureau of American Ethnology" report by Charles C. Royce showing the considerable amount of intermarriage between the French and Native races in order to demonstrate that the French

did not regard the Natives as an inferior race. But it must be remembered that this intermarriage was not only done to preserve the population of France, but to continue the French policy of assimilation through these means. Population depletion had become a concern for the French administration and in the 1660s it was decided that intermarriage between the French and Native "races" as well as an aggressive educational system aimed at assimilation would be "(a)n effective way of boosting the French population in North America without depopulating old France" (Miller. 1997, P. 51).

For the Native Indian, living within the influence of the French and the English provided a unique predicament in that they had to deal with two competing European forces. Reviewing some of the articles that were written by authors in English Canada at the time, Morantz writes that "(t)he reader can decide whether the provincial school system in Nouveau Quebec was motivated by a concern for educating ... or establishing a French presence there ..." (Morantz, 2001. P. 215). Some may forward the argument that the English were more intent on commerce and the French on nation building. Regardless, for the Natives of North America, including the Cree, the role of "...schooling of Indians was intended to provide the means by which Crees could be employed and/or assimilated to Canadian ways" (Morantz, 2001. P. 215).

It is important to note that in the Pan-Indian framework, the use of the tool of assimilation of Native people through education came about only after the hopes of a military conquest of the Native population had run its economic course. Many economic arguments were forwarded to assimilate the Native population through religion and education rather than the cost of wiping it out through outright war. As previously mentioned, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior during the 1880s, calculated a cost of one million dollars to kill an Indian versus the \$1,200 it cost to school an Indian child, and in 1885, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, stated simply: "It is cheaper to give them education ... than it is to fight them." Assimilation became the preferred policy, enforced through laws such as the "Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilisation of the Indians" in 1857 or the 1874 "Indian Act". The point of assault on Natives thus switched to the use of the education system in order to bring the Native population under "white" control. This policy of assimilation through education had been present since the initial contact by European Christian missionaries who made thinly veiled attempts to "civilise" those they considered to be pagans and savages by "educating" them with their own cultural and

religious beliefs. "The major Christian churches shared this view ... and considered schools to be the principal agent of religious conversion and cultural change" (Titley, 1986, P. 1814). Boarding schools, industrial schools and residential schools became the preferred means of assimilating Native youth into the new Canadian culture. Schools were preferred because "...they were more effective in separating and isolating Native children from the influence of their traditional culture" (Dawson, 1988, p. 46). The schools that were built within Canada focussed little on the teaching of skills and concentrated mainly on preparing Natives to take their allotted place in Canadian Society: that is, merely on its lower rungs (Titley, 1986).

### **Segregation (1910-1951)**

The period known as "segregation" did not mark an end to the idea of assimilating Native youth into European culture. In reality, it marked a more concerted and efficient effort to achieve this goal by removing the Native youth from their family, homes and culture and into residential schools. Industrial, boarding and residential schooling continued to be the norm until the early 1900s when the policies of assimilation were put to task, not because people were questioning the morality of what was being done, but because it had not fulfilled its promise of eradicating the Amerindian culture and converting the Natives into the "white" vision of civility.

Contacts between the Mistissini and Waswanipi Cree and Euro-Canadians increased significantly in the twentieth century as the Hudson Bay Company expanded its operations in the region, the Anglican and Roman Catholic missions to the Cree became more active, and the Indian Affairs Branch extended its authority and services through the appointment of "Indian agents" to administer the affairs of each band. During the 1930's the first steps were taken to introduce the Euro-Canadian system of formal education. A small number of Mistissini and Waswanipi children were sent to residential schools operated by the Anglican Church at Chapleau, Ontario. Education was imposed on the Cree at that time, since children were arbitrarily selected to be sent to school despite parental opposition. The purpose of formal education was, at best, very inadequately explained to and understood by Cree adults. They resented the fact that their children were separated from them for the

duration of their school careers of two, three, or even four years, and were thus prevented from learning the Cree way of life. (Wintrob, 1969, P. 88)

The period marked as “segregation” was a particularly destructive era. It is marked by the amended Indian Act, which called for the compulsory schooling of all First Nation children between the ages of seven to fifteen (Persson, 1980). Few Native families during this period were left untouched by its damaging effects. Various authorities connected with Native communities, such as ministers, RCMP officers, priests and Indian Agents, all had the authority to forcibly remove children from their families, communities and culture. Because of this amendment, residential schooling saw a tremendous increase in population and Native communities experienced the many heartaches of parents and their children who were torn apart for extended and socially crucial periods of time. An anonymous quote taken from the Assembly of First Nations in the 1994 Breaking the Silence, describes the torment that continuously occurred:

The Indian agent: we called him the overseer: lived on the reserve. He went around and told parents which children had to go to school. And the priests arrived with their little black cars.... This older woman still stands out in my mind. She was crying because her daughter Marie was getting into the car. She tried to pull her back out of the car and the RCMP took a hold from her and flung her away and from the car and she landed in the ditch and she just lay there crying....(Assembly of First Nations. 1994, Preface)

In contrast to the aims of mainstream Canadian schooling at that time, Residential schooling for Natives did not appear to be geared towards the creation of either higher-level employable citizens or candidates for higher education. In fact, many believe that they had no clear educational objectives at all. The intended policy was however quite clear: “Students were to be removed from home at an early age and kept at the school until they lost all trace of their culture and language” (Grant. 1996, P. 68). The concerted effort to remove Native culture, customs, language and way of life became the major theme of the brand of “education” that these children received. The Christianisation of Native children, as well as the strict enforcement against speaking one’s Native language, became the common methods used by

the education system designed to remove the Indian from the Native child. As Morantz puts it, “(w)hatever the government thinking may have been, the school curriculum was nothing more than a policy of social engineering” (Morantz, 2001, P. 216).

Graduates and participants of these programs neither fit into “white” nor Native communities and became relegated to the periphery of society (Coates, 1984). The system was, therefore, “successful” in removing enough of the children’s Native culture to cause serious distress when the students returned home.

As with so many other Indian children, Beatrice said she had almost to relearn her language; she would have been strapped if she was heard speaking Cree (in school). (Morantz, 2001, P. 215)

A tremendous amount of physical and psychological abuse has been recorded and continues to be revealed in connection with the means used to achieve this “social engineering”. In Barman, Herbert & McCaskill’s, (1986), Indian Education in Canada: the Legacy of the Past, Jane Willis, a James Bay Cree who experienced residential schooling between 1948 and 1956, summed up her experience as follows: “... I was made to feel untrustworthy, inferior, incapable and immoral .... I was brainwashed into believing that ‘Indian’ was synonymous with ‘subhuman’, ‘savage’, ‘idiot’ and ‘worthless’ ...” (Barman, Herbert & McCaskill, 1986, P. 13).

Much has been written on the suffering that occurred within the Native residential schooling system (Alter, 1999; Claes & Clifton, 1998; Fournier, c1997; Grant, 1996; Miller, 1996)<sup>6</sup> and many pages could be devoted to the atrocities committed to Native people within residential schooling. However, as evidenced in my own experiences teaching at the undergraduate level in the Department of Education at McGill University, there is still a significant number of people who do not believe, or cannot believe, that such things could have occurred.

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography on the subject of residential schooling in Canada please visit the Library and Archives of Canada website: <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/Native-residential/index-e.html>

Contemporary Canadians often find it hard to understand how a system such as residential schools could have been allowed to function in a country which prides itself on democracy. (...) Indian education in Canada was only one aspect of Indian/white relations, but it was an important element in an overall policy of assimilation. (...) Education attacked the spirituality, culture, language, land, and means of livelihood of Native people. (Grant, 1996, P. 87)

However, history and supporting literature has shown that since the arrival of the Europeans, the pre-existing Native education has been ravaged by policies that were greatly or solely based on assimilation or cultural genocide. I encourage those readers who are still in doubt to research the subject or perhaps attend a symposium designed to disclose to non-Native people the horrors endured. Within the Interview Narrative chapter of this dissertation, first-hand accounts are forwarded that not only support the findings of the negative effects of residential schooling, but will support the existence of causation between the past abuses that Natives endured, both personal and generational, and the Cree's perceptions of formal schooling.

Although the period of "Segregation" is commonly placed between 1910-1951, Cree children continued to be placed in residential schools, such as the one in La Tuque, Quebec, or Moose Factory, Ontario, until the late 1960s and early 1970s. This extension of the Cree residential school experience into what is referred to in the Pan-Indian context as the "Integration" period, discussed below, is best explained by Morantz's (2003) suggestion that the remote location of Cree territory caused this overlap or delay in policy enforcement.

### **Integration (1951-1972)**

In 1946-48, a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons developed a policy regarding the integration of Native children into mainstream schooling. This shift in policy was slowly shifting towards assimilating Native people into conventional Canadian culture through a philosophy of forced integration with non-Native children, rather than using the segregation techniques of the "Natives only" residential schools (Barman, Herbert & McCaskill, 1986). Again, the purpose was still to assimilate Native people into Canadian culture, but in this phase of Native education policy, the Federal government

acknowledged its failure to meet its “Indian problem” with segregational/residential schooling and decided that schooling with non-Native students and housing with non-Native border/foster homes would further reduce the influences of their Native heritage in a greater manner by fully submerging them into the dominant Canadian culture (Barman, Herbert & McCaskill, 1986). Native children were increasingly placed in secular schools, no longer under the direct control of the various Christian religious orders. The heavy work loads (physical labour) that were common in the residential schools no longer made up much of the student’s day. However, even within Canadian secular schools, especially during this time, the influence of Christianity continued to play a substantial role within the school curriculum (i.e.: Christmas concerts, Easter parades, and so on).

High school aged students felt the effects of integration policies. Philomen Wright High School in Hull, Quebec, served as the main location of integration schooling for the Cree, a setting that is more than 800 kilometres away from the nearest Cree community. The situation was different for elementary aged James Bay Cree. While those of other Native groups began experiencing the effects of the integration policies, residential schooling continued, in large part, for the elementary aged James Bay Cree. The remote nature of the Cree villages must have played an economic role in the decision to keep the Amos, La Tuque and Moose Factory residential schools open. And because the Anglican and Catholic churches continued to exert control over Cree education until 1975 under the Northern Affairs and Northern Quebec School Board (The Eeyou Estchee Commission Final Report, 1996), we may assume that, even with the secular rulings of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons, Christian teaching still had a significant role in Cree children’s lives, particularly since the children were still in residential schools and, in effect, held as a captive audience therein.

Integration policies may have been created for the noblest of intentions, that is, to give Native children the same quality of education as all other Canadian children, but it could not escape the fact of its primary function: schooling for assimilation. Indeed, this would be the primary goal of schooling for Native children until the National Indian Brotherhood document, Indian Control of Indian education (1973), set Native groups on the path for educational self-determination.

### **Self-Determination (1972-present)**

The Cree's self-determination over their own education came in 1975 as part of the negotiated outcome resulting from the successful challenge to the proposal to build a massive hydroelectric dam within their territory. Section 16 of the James Bay and Northern Quebec agreement signed between the Grand Council of the Crees (of Quebec) and the Quebec government gave Natives control over their education. The Cree school board was created in 1978. As a result, the James Bay Cree became the first Native school board empowered with significant self-governance.

Among the continued and prevalent arguments for self-control in education were the deterrence of assimilation and the prevention of the academic failures of Cree students arising from culture shock. (Cree School Board, The Eeyou Estchee Commission Final Report, 1996)

The pre-1975 regime had a very low success rate. Few Cree people actually completed their high school education, and even fewer went on to post secondary or vocational training. One reason for this was the difficulties encountered by students on adapting to the southern environment ... (Cree School Board, 1996, P. 21)

The creation of the Cree School board and the ensuing Cree control over their education necessarily suffered the natural progression of successes and difficulties. Some researchers argue that "(m)ost schools for Native children retain assimilation goals, lack Native-language instruction, and have high failure rates" (Hampton, 1995, P. 9). In response to these criticisms, my experience has shown me that the Cree School Board's attempts have and still continue to meet these challenges as best as can be expected from an organization that has had to repair years of devastation resulting from "(t)he traumatic effects of residential schooling..." (Cree School Board, 1996, P. 23).

### **Conclusion**

My brief study of the history of the "education" of North America's Native population has revealed to me the deep chasm between the type of schooling that was provided for



non-Native and Native children. The lack of respect for indigenous people and their humanity saturates this North American First Nation history, with non-Native controlled Native schooling acting and remaining one of the primary tools of aggression. The education system that was imposed upon the Cree was, after all, "... intended to provide a means by which Crees could be employable and/or assimilate to Canadian ways" (Morantz, 2001, P. 215). It is hard to remove this permeating reality of the function of schooling for Native people away from the current schools that exist today. Is this still a common perception of this institution? Is education perceived as friend or foe by the Cree and other Native people? If the institution continues to be viewed in a negative light, how can we expect Native/Cree attainment of higher education when the entire perception of schooling from the very root is seen as a tool of cultural genocide?

Morantz (2003) notes that, "(l)ittle in the recorded oral histories inform us about Cree attitudes to schooling thirty and forty years ago" (Morantz, 2001, P. 217). I can speculate, as a parent, how I would feel if I was ultimately powerless to stop strangers from taking my child away from me; or as a child, how I would feel being ripped apart from my family.

I am aware that there are arguments that state that some Native people encouraged their children to learn at these schools, so as to help their communities meet their forthcoming challenges, but it is hard to imagine how anyone can justify the experience as being a positive opportunity for the Cree overall. These institutions were ultimately, "alien places" (Morantz, 2001, P. 218) to the children who went to these schools, designed to remove the Indian from the child and assimilate. I wonder how many Cree still suspect that this remains as their primary function? If these institutions continue to be perceived as "alien places" by the Cree who send their children to school, then those who attend them must feel that they are being put at an automatic disadvantage. While it is true that we really have no written evidence of how children and parents felt about their schooling thirty or forty years ago, it is hoped that chapters six, Participant Narrative, and seven, Interviews, will help us better appreciate this matter by revealing my own observations as well as the perceptions of the Cree individuals who partook in the interviews on this subject. The following chapter delves into the Native collective consciousness that has developed as a result of a Pan-Indian identity and its consequences to the perceptions of self and to educational achievement.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Collective Consciousness as an Influence on Cree Perspectives towards Education**

## **Introduction**

“Mitaku Oyasin...”

Russell Means, American Indian Leader

Circa 1999

The words “Mitaku Oyasin” is Sioux for “We are all related” and should be interpreted as a meticulously formulated statement by a man who wanted to impart the understanding that Natives, despite their geographical, linguistic and tribal differences, are all one people. The author of this statement, Russell Means, is an American Indian leader who was the first national director of the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.), founded in 1968 as one of the first modern “Pan-Indian” activist organizations. The viewpoint and political stance of AIM was and still is clear:

Pledged to fight White Man's injustice to Indians, his oppression, his persecution, discrimination and malfeasance in the handling of Indian Affairs. No area in North America is too remote when trouble impends for Indians, A.I.M. shall be there to help the Native People regain human rights and achieve restitutions and restorations ... (The American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council, 2001)

The agenda of A.I.M. is to establish Native unity through a strong and positive “Pan Indian” identity. Their pledge is to assist their Native brothers against oppression regardless of tribal differences or imposed borders (Deloria, 1984, P. 80). Their vision is united and is bound in concepts of racial pride, collective identity, memory and consciousness and it is part of a movement that is meant to confirm that Native people share historic and continued suffering (Rhea, 1997).

This chapter will explore the concept of a North American Native peoples' shared sense of collective identity and consciousness within the Pan-Indian framework. It is important to review this concept so as to explore the possibility of whether collective identity and consciousness affect Native Indian historic and current perceptions on different issues,

especially regarding perceptions to the institution of education. A supratribal collective consciousness account of Native schooling is particularly important given the difficulties in acquiring substantial amounts of written information concerning the James Bay Cree and their history relating to the imposed educational system of the Europeans. Depending on the topic and with whom they are having the discussion, the Cree interviewees' response and views may be based on personal or ethnic experience, be it tribal, supratribal, Cree or Pan-Indian. Theories relating to the understanding of a supratribal ethnicity are important given its influence on Native peoples' account of the history of Native schooling.

Specifically, we look to consider whether it is possible that any and all Native peoples' perception of the European derived educational system has been shaped by the greater Pan-Indian experience. This chapter does not advance any arguments or hypothesis related to race or ethnicity but accepts the belief that the American Indians are a diverse people who, due to the encroachment of the Europeans, now share a common history and ethnic identity. I refer here to the common bond between Native people that has created a shared sense of identity and understanding that, experience has shown me through my continued teaching within Cree territory, can be a powerful influence on perception within the educational setting.

Scrutiny over blood percentages, issues of tribal representation and ethnic purity have always been matters of concern for academics, politicians and policy makers regarding Native North Americans (Forbes, 1990). Imposing ethnic identity, denying tribal affiliation and spurning supratribalism for the sake of support and advocacy have left Native people of North America without the same options of individuality and collectiveness that have been allowed in other more dominant ethnic groups. Recognizing a Pan-Indian collective consciousness permits researchers to accept the singularity of the voice along with the collectiveness that can be used for purposes of transferability; *not generalization, but transferability*. Accepting a supratribal perspective opens up multiple possibilities for clarification on many Native issues that seem to be so common within Native community to Native community; for example, elevated school drop out rates. In effect, I'm suggesting that we allow the same respect for the collective experience of the indigenous people of North America that we do for all other ethnic groups and I believe that this is especially pertinent in regards to education, where Native people have been subjugated to a particularly negative experience.

It is, of course, recognised that the nature of education for Natives has changed dramatically in function and purpose in recent years. On the larger scale, we are witnessing the majority of Native groups gaining increased control (Buffalohead, 1976; Miller, 1996) and at the local level, we see the Cree people of Northern Quebec striving at the forefront of Native educational autonomy in Canada. Still, there is a ceiling on the level of education that most Natives manage to attain and a continuing overall distrust of school systems in general. It will be argued that these perceptions are derived from three main sources: personal first-hand accounts, second-hand memories from a tribal level and, pertinent to the issue at hand, perceptions that are derived from a collective consciousness or on a supratribal level.

### **Resisting Imposed Borders**

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the possibility that the perceptions many First Nation people hold towards schooling and other relevant topics may have been shaped not only by their own individual experiences but by the shared collective experiences and histories of other Native peoples. As this is being written in a Canadian context, I made the purposeful attempt to research the subject from a Canadian point of view. It quickly became apparent that although all North American Natives have played roles in creating a collective consciousness towards this topic, much of the "Pan-Indian" literature and research focuses on the experiences of the Indian population residing in the United States of America. This has more to do with the American nationality of the authors who carried out the research than the Native Indian groups' outlook on the imposed borders that separate them. Regardless of the official divide, Canada has often turned to its southern neighbour for guidance:

For a model of Institutional care for Indians, the fledgling Canadian government looked with interest to the south, where the United States was establishing a system of industrial boarding schools in wake of a long and bloody conquest of American Indian tribes by the U.S. Army. (Fournier & Crey, 1997, P. 55)

Just as our present and future actions seem to be intertwined with those of our southern neighbours, so too did they link in the past.

Although there are some historical differences between the experiences of the North American Aboriginal peoples, there is a general trend across the continent that allows us to note similarities and conclusions from their combined history and condition. (Gagne, 1994) Therefore, particularly with respect to Native issues, it would seem prudent to acknowledge activities and research that involve all Natives, regardless of imposed borders, much as the Natives themselves have done. From the past to the present, Native people have attempted to assist Canadian/American Native People causes regardless of tribe, geography or citizenship. AIM makes the statement clearly within its description of the organization's intent:

The movement was founded to turn the attention of Indian people toward a renewal of spirituality which would impart the strength of resolve needed to reverse the ruinous policies of the United States, Canada, and other colonialist governments of Central and South America. At the heart of AIM is deep spirituality and a belief in the connectedness of all Indian people. During the past thirty years, The American Indian Movement has organized communities and created opportunities for people across the Americas and Canada. (The American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council, 2001, P. 3)

During the Oka Crisis of 1990, Ronald "Lasagna" Cross put AIM's philosophy, knowingly or not, into practice and was catapulted into national fame by his overtly defiant attitude towards the Canadian military and provincial police. His actions drew a great deal of press and much was made of the fact that his birthplace was Brooklyn, New York; technically, he was an American citizen involved in armed conflict with the Canadian military and police. At the time, as probably to this day, there was considerable unity among the Mohawks despite the fact that traditional Mohawk land lies within the Canadian provinces of Quebec, Ontario and the American state of New York. Pertusati (1993) notes that, since 1968, there has been an increasing amount of individual, group and political bonding between all of the Mohawk communities.

During the Oka Crisis, the close networks between the Warrior Societies of the Akwesasne reserve in New York and the Kahnawake community of Quebec became apparent. The tribal bond between the Mohawk communities was in many ways a statement of Mohawk sovereignty and can also be viewed as a Native statement that imposed borders would not separate tribes. Moreover, the Oka Crisis also included Native participants who were not Mohawk.

The Mohawk-Oka crisis engendered an enormous display of aboriginal unity. Indigenous peoples, from all across Canada and the United States ... rallied to support the Warriors and the Mohawk nation. (Pertusati, 1994, P. 177)

Pertusati (1994) interviewed Natives who joined the Mohawks in their barricade. One of them was an Ottawa-Chippewa from Detroit, who stated:

It's important that all Indian people stand together as one ... united to defend our rights. When we stand together it makes us all stronger, we can accomplish more. That's why we all went there to support them. (P. 173)

This sentiment continues to date. Akwesasne Mohawks defiantly allowed anti-globalization activists, who feared being refused entry into Canada, to protest the upcoming 2001 "Globalization Summit" in Quebec City, access through their land. John Boots, an Akwesasne Mohawk, asserted that he "...doesn't recognize the international border ..." and that the issues related to globalization was a particularly relevant problem to the "... indigenous groups throughout the hemisphere..." (Hanes, 2001, Pg. A6).

Native support for Indigenous issues has stretched into an inclusive effort. In the "Nature of Things" (2001) documentary called "Changing Ground" we see Sto:Lo Natives of the Fraser Valley of British Columbia visiting the Maisin Natives of New Guinea. As the narrator notes, "Indigenous people around the world are beginning to share their experiences with each other ..." (The Nature of Things, 2001). A Sto:Lo delegate supported this statement of shared Indian perspective by saying, "We're Mother Earth's Children just like the Maisin are ... I think we feel more like brothers and sisters" (The Nature of Things, 2001). The inclusion of Natives from outside tribal groups in situations such as the Oka Crisis or cross-continental Sto:Lo-Maisin efforts can only be seen as an increasing indicator of a conscious effort to consider one's self as part of a larger-than-tribal identity. This is often referred to as "Pan-Indianism", "intertribalism" or "supratribalism".

### **Pan-Indianism and the Collective Consciousness**

The term "Pan-Indian" or "pan-tribal" refers to a sense of ethnic, political, cultural, or other identity among Native American groups that crosses tribal boundaries and refers to the collectiveness that encompasses all Natives, "... defined as the larger-than-tribal "Indian" level of American Indian ethnicity, similar to "Latino", "Asian American" or "White"" (Cornell, 1988, P. 14). Nagel (1996) uses supratribal, Pan-Indian and pan-tribal interchangeably, stating that the terms refer simply "to the larger-than-tribal or "Indian" ethnicity" (P. xii). Pan-Indian and supratribal are the common terms used within much of the work dealing with a larger-than-tribal identity but the term "intertribal" is also used with the same meaning.

Anthropologists and other scholars often use the term "Pan-Indian" to refer to this movement toward intertribal organization, but Indians prefer to use the term "intertribal" instead. (Fortunate Eagle, 1992, P. 26)

Regardless of the term used, each refers to an increased level of empathy towards the current and historic plight of one Native tribe towards another, despite geographical separation and specific historical differences. In Cornell's 1988 book, The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence, he theorizes that an ongoing transformation has occurred within the Native tribes that have brought them from the tribal level to the all-inclusive supratribal level of all Native groups. Cornell explains supratribalism as an "Indian consciousness" and asserts that Indians are increasingly thinking of themselves in terms of a whole rather than as an individual tribe. With this comes an increased Pan-Indian political involvement in which Natives are increasingly thinking in terms of what is best for the entire "Indian race", rather than what is good for any one particular tribe.

Cornell's work focuses on a historical analysis of Native politics and sees it as having an influence on the continuously transforming Indian identity. His efforts points out that there has been a "... growth of a supratribal consciousness and constituency, to the eventual emergence of 'American Indians' as a politically self-conscious population" (P. 72). The transformation from tribal to supratribal has had an impact on the increased and unified political voice of North American Natives. Rhea (1997) notes that this came about as a result of a nation or a people who had to turn "... to history for a sense of Identity..." (P. 8). Rhea contends that the shared beliefs that Natives began to develop about their past acknowledged



a collective memory or collective consciousness and that this, in turn, made them a people. A Native collective consciousness implies a shared sense of experience and identity amongst Native people despite their tribal differences. This Native collective consciousness is derived, in part, from the empathetic feeling that Aboriginal persons have towards one another that they both perceive as being a belonging to the same ethnicity, and therefore, similar histories and intertwined fate.

### **History, Cultural Identity and Collective Consciousness**

The collective memory of a nation is that set of beliefs about the past which the nation's citizens hold in common and publicly recognize as legitimate representations of their history. Collective memory is important because shared beliefs about the past provide citizens with common landmarks or examples which can be referred to when addressing the problems of the present. (Rhea, 1997, P. 2)

When we take Rhea's argument that a people need a "...history for a sense of Identity..." (P. 8) into consideration, we begin to understand how the Pan-Indian Native Identity and the collective consciousness were created through the emergence of a collective memory. Asserted through an Indigenous account of the North American experience, a history that is shared within the Pan-Indian framework, becomes altogether different than the version taught to most people. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) discuss this in terms of "dominant memory" that can serve to bleach the bloodstains of historical records (P. 242) and, within the context of North America, justify current power blocs. As an example they cite popular collective perceptions of Iran by North Americans:

Such power is illustrated by the American public's memory of the United States' relations with Iran. Most Americans remember only angry Iranians chanting anti-American slogans in the streets of Tehran, a crazed Ayatollah preaching martyrdom and hostages torn away from their families. Not included in the dominant memory are images of CIA working to overthrow the government of Iranian Premier Mohammed Mossedegh in 1953 and replacing it with the 'friendly' Pahlavi Dynasty represented by the young Shah. The

structuring of such memories makes a difference. (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997, P. 242)

Similarly a victim of this dominant memory, Native people have long been denied a history that was reflective of their own narrative, when the larger, or dominant, North American population rejected the Native people's own memory of their past. This point was not lost on Yellow Wolf of the Nez Perce when in 1887 he said, "The Whites told only one side. Told it to please themselves. Told much of what is not true. Only his best deeds, only the worst deeds of the Indians, has the White man told".<sup>7</sup> Only with the relatively recent "... (o)rganized opposition to national collective memory (which) first emerged with the Red Power movement in the late 1960s" (Rhea, 1997, P. 10) did non-Natives become an authority of their own history. The highly vocal publicized actions of the unified Pan-Indian Red Power movement granted and empowered Native people with a collective memory of their past, thereby developing an ethnic collective consciousness and emerging Native Identity.

Again, this was a view on their history that had long been denied to Native people through a schooling system that was designed to inculcate a point of view that decidedly reflected that of the dominant, power bloc class (Wright, 1993, Fournier & Crey, 1997). Narragaanset (1994) puts this into perspective, stating:

I think what present day Americans have to learn is that our heroes are not their heroes and that their heroes are not our heroes. And, when I went to school, just as you and everyone else in this land, we all have been exposed to the same value system, the same perspective on history. But, the lesson that is there, the very important lesson today, for all people, is to realize the value of the alternate perspective and that is why we are here. That is why the creator allowed some of us to remain in spite of all the attempts to destroy us. Every tribe has had their "Great Swamp" ... every tribe has had their "Sand Creek", every tribe has had their "wounded knee"; the list is endless. **And we all have shared in that experience.**<sup>8</sup> (emphasis mine)

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<sup>7</sup> As cited in Wright, William. Stolen Continents: The New World through Indian Eyes. P. 4  
<sup>8</sup> Narragaansett, Tall Oak. As cited in TIG Productions Presents (Producer). (1994). 500 Nations (Attack on Culture) [Videotape]. Burbank, CA: Time Warner Entertainment.

Mander (1991) notes his disappointment at having to come to his children's high school to teach about native issues because it was absent from their American history curriculum. He writes, "The youngsters I met had never been offered one course, or even an extended segment of a course, about the Indian nations of this continent, about Indian-Anglo interactions (...) American educational curriculum is almost bereft of information about Indians, making it difficult for young non-Indian Americans to understand or care about present-day Indian issues"(P. 197). Moreover, Mander recounts the students' lack of knowledge of how land was stolen from Native people or the mass-killing that was part of the European/colonist conquest of North America. In the absence of this history being taught in North American schools, how is it that accounts, such as "Sand Creek", "Great Swamp" or "Wounded Knee" has remained, to some degree, part of the Native discourse? The organized use of the united collective consciousness has allowed for a stronger voice on "grass-roots" scene in North America is one answer to this question; allowing this united perspective of Native history that has now become increasingly prevalent within Indigenous centres of learning, as the above quote Narragaanset states, despite it not being taught in non-Native schools.

If the existence and growth of Pan-Indian collective consciousness in response to perceptions on education is a plausible theory, then one must consider the histories and experiences of all Native people on a larger scale even when working with Native groups on an individual or tribal level. Taking into account that the experiences of all North American Natives have each played a role in creating a collective consciousness towards education, all relevant experiences of First Nation peoples should be forwarded, regardless of tribal or even Canadian and American territorial borders, if *they* feel it is relevant. Canada and the United States of America have often shared similar perceptions regarding the field of education, including the education of Native Indians.

The Pan-Indian movement and its effect on the Canadian Aboriginal collective consciousness towards education-related issues is a topic that has yet to be explored within academia. The factors that foster the Native-Canadian sense of supratribalism have not been fully examined either. Because, as Rhea, Nagel and Cornell note, much of the collective memory, consciousness and supratribalism are rooted in a shared sense of history, I will at least briefly explore examples of Pan-Indian efforts in Canadian-Aboriginal history that may have contributed to the fostering of modern Native perspectives and identities.

## **Early Pan-Indian Movements**

There are numerous examples of instances in which Pan-Tribal efforts were made not only throughout the history of North America, but also specifically within the current borders of Canada. Many of these examples also demonstrate the Native leaders' indifference towards imposed international borders as they sought to unify Native tribes regardless of their location within Canadian (British) or American territory. Notable among them is Pontiac, referred to as "The Delaware Prophet", an Ottawa who prophesied that all of North America would be returned to all Native people by divine intervention. Pontiac implored all Native people "to behave as brothers to one another" (Hertzberg, 1971, P. 6).

Despite a diverse and loyal following, however, Pontiac was unable to maintain inter-tribal unity for very long. Joseph Brant, known in his own language as Thayendanege, was a Mohawk war chief who, after fighting on the side of the British Army during the American Revolution, urged all Native Indian people to think "all of one mind – one heart" (Hertzberg, 1971, P. 6). Thayendanege hoped to create a Pan-Indian union based on a political-military concept that would stop American expansion. His ultimate vision was the establishment of an Indian Nation whereby the land of the Northwest would be held as common property by all Indians. Another Native whose supratribal endeavour would parallel and arguably surpass Thayendanege's efforts was Tecumseh.

In the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tecumseh, a Shawnee Native of what is now the state of Ohio, became an important figure in both the shaping of Canada and also became almost synonymous with the Pan-Indian movement. Debatably, Tecumseh may have been the most influential figure in establishing the feasibility of the Pan-Indian movement. His vision, much of which was derived from the apparitions of his brother, Tenskwataya (referred to as the "Shawnee Prophet"), elaborated the military success of a unified multi-tribal effort. His strong words, reportedly orated from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, stirred the consciousness of Native People towards a confederacy of Native affiliation. Initially a Pan-Indian movement that was spiritual in nature, Tecumseh's intertribal movement became of invaluable assistance to the British Army while defending the borders of Canada from the American army during the

War of 1812. Although Tecumseh died in the War of 1812, his words for Native unification are still a strong presence in the voice of the Pan-Indian movement.

We all belong to one family; we are all children of the Great Spirit; we walk in the same path; slake our thirst at the same spring; and now affairs of the greatest concern leads us to smoke the pipe around the same council fire. Brothers, we are friends; we must assist each other to bear our burden. The blood of our fathers and brothers has run like water in the ground to satisfy the avarice of the White man. (Tecumseh as cited in Klinck, 1961, P. 105)

Hence, there is a Canadian precedent in efforts to set aside tribal differences in recognition of a common Indian identity. Pan-Indian movements such as Tecumseh's, although never achieving the ultimate goal of a self-governing "Native Land", have demonstrated that Pan-Indian movements can have an impact on the shaping of a nation, specifically, Canada. Much of what was struggled for in the collective past would inspire the Native people to again attempt the same with the relatively recent "modern" Pan-Indian movement.

### **Modern Pan-Indian Movement**

The transformation of Native tribalism and Identity to Pan-American supratribalism and a collective Indian ethnic consciousness reached its turning point during the 1969–1971 American Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island (Nagel, 1996). In our recent history, prior to the Alcatraz occupation, resistance and activism were local and tribal in nature. Alcatraz symbolized the beginning of a Native American activism that was inclusive of all "indigenous" people across North America.

Identifying themselves as "Indians of All Tribes," the group claimed the island by the terms of an 1868 Sioux treaty that granted Indians the right to unused federal property on Indian land. Except for a small caretaker staff, Alcatraz Island had been abandoned by the federal government since the early 1960s when the federal penitentiary was closed. In a press statement, Indians of All Tribes claimed the island by "right of discovery" and set the tone of the occupation. (Nagel, 1996, P. 131)

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1969, a chartered boat, the Monte Cristo, and all its occupants set out to reclaim a piece of land that was under the federal jurisdiction of the United States of America. The first occupation was short-lived and somewhat ill-conceived due to a progressive series of organizational oversights but it set the course for the nineteen month-long occupation that followed shortly thereafter. The new occupants of the all-but abandoned Alcatraz Island were a motley crew of Native Indians determined to make a statement about the rebirth of Native pride, Native rights and Native ethnicity. The Monte Cristo itself flew the Canadian flag and its captain, Ronald Craig, although a somewhat unwitting participant in the historic occupation, was nonetheless described as showing "...concern and sympathy for the Indian people and their problems" (Fortunate Eagle, 1992, P. 54).

The group of Natives that were aboard the Canadian Monte Cristo was of diverse tribal ancestry. However, their agreement in occupying the federally held land was a revived commitment to grow unity amongst the Native tribes and advocated the creation of a common power to tackle issues that had long consumed the Native populations. In effect, they set out to galvanize the "Red Power" movement, a movement that in many ways paralleled the "Black Power" movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. (Fortunate Eagle, 1992)

Most scholars frequently and incorrectly credit the American Indian Movement with sparking occupations and protest, but the occupation of Alcatraz was the real catalyst because it marked the first time different Indian groups had banded together to form a multiracial organization. (Johnson, 1996, P. 219)

Much in the same manner that the "Black Power" movement paid little attention to the possibility of potentially divisive factors such as geographical separation and ancestral tribal differences between its members and supporters, the "Red Power" movement sought strength in ethnic unity. The ensuing occupation of Alcatraz Island by American Indians from November 20, 1969 through June 11, 1971 focused on creating strength from the "Indian" stereotypes that had been likened with the slow destruction of the diversity of Native culture. The banner of "Red" ethnicity opposed the tribal differences that had contributed significantly to the separation of Native tribes. Such differences had often been used by the Europeans to divide the Natives in order to conquer North America.

Red Power protest claims were generally phrased as universal to all American Indians, and not limited to the concerns of specific tribes. (Nagel, 1996, P. 5)

The Alcatraz occupation brought together a large number of Natives from different tribal affiliations: Sioux, Navajos, Cherokees, Mohawks, Puyallups, Yakimas, Hoopas, Omahas and other Native people from the United States, Mexico and Canada, and united them under the ethnic banner of "Indian".

While researching the Pan-Indian movement, it was difficult to find mention of a Canadian connection, almost as if it is counter-productive to mention international borders when discussing it. However, a central figure to the Alcatraz invasion, Richard Oakes, "... (a) Mohawk Indian born in 1942 ... (who) grew up on the St. Regis reservation near the Canadian border ..." (Fortunate Eagle, 1992, P. 107), did play a significant role in the initial occupation and in many ways was considered the group's "leader". Responding to a personal email, Troy Johnson (2000), California State University professor and specialist on the Pan-Indian topic, concurred that there was indeed a "Canadian connection" to the Alcatraz occupation.

Regarding the Canada question. Peter Blue Cloud is from Canada and lives there now. I do not know for sure that he came directly from Canada to be involved in the occupation but he was a friend of Richard Oakes. Oakes of course came initially from Mohawk and Mohawk runs up to Canada. So, there was a Canadian connection. Peter Blue then went on to write that book "We Hold The Rock" that was written while he was still on Alcatraz and is a partial diary of the occupation.<sup>9</sup>

Blue Cloud was born to the Turtle Clan of the Mohawk tribe on the Caughnawaga Reserve in Kahnawake, Quebec, Canada. The Alcatraz occupation marked the pinnacle of the modern "Red Power" activist movement and publicly initiated and embraced the emergence of "Indian" ethnicity and pride in the "Indian" collective identity. It is interesting to note that although it could not be confirmed that any participant of the Alcatraz occupation was known to be from the northern Quebec Cree region, many of the Quebec Cree make reference to the support that the Canadian Indians gave to their American counterparts during this time of

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, Troy (trj@csulb.edu). (September 20, 2000). *Re-McGill-Montreal*. E-mail to Christopher D. Stonebanks (cstone1@po-box.mcgill.ca)

struggle. When discussing this subject with the Cree I interviewed, I noticed that the Cree participants tended to lose their tribal affiliation and often recounted this point in Native history in a Pan-Indian manner.

Red Power protest claims were generally phrased as universal to all American Indians, and not limited to the concerns of specific tribes. Protests about the poor living conditions on all reservations, widespread treaty violations, and racism and discrimination against all Indians were examples of broad-based, Pan-Indian Red Power protest grievances. The redress of these grievances was also generally phrased in universalistic terms, including such goals as the establishment of Indian (not tribal) educational facilities, Indian cultural centers, or urban Indian access to what were primarily reservation-based services (e.g., health care, education). (Nagel, 1996, P. 5)

Pan-Indian activism influenced other Natives who identified with the common struggle to call for self-determination, autonomy and respect for all Native culture. Johnson (1999), describing the feelings of the Alcatraz occupiers, reflected the feelings of Native resurgence that permeated and grew from such activist acts: "Days and nights on the Island were often filled with a new-found sense of pride in Indian culture – what the occupants called "Indianness" ...".<sup>10</sup>

### **Oppression and Schools as an Influence to Collective Consciousness**

Ethnic consciousness is a special case, or another level, of critical consciousness that applies to oppressed groups of colour. It includes an additional focus on group or collective history. (Pertusati, 1994, P. 25)

Native people have developed a collective consciousness larger than tribal because their history ceased being simply tribal upon the arrival of Europeans. Hampton (1993) describes a 1982 Minnesota Chamber of Commerce meeting in which various concerned

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson, Troy. "The American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island".  
<http://www.csulb.edu/gc/libarts/am-indian/alcatraz/>



Indian university students expressed their concerns over a proposed "pageant" depicting the 1892 mass hanging of 38 Sioux Indians. As the Native students individually spoke to the Chamber of Commerce, they prefaced each statement with an acknowledgment to their tribal roots, stating, for instance, "I am Lakota ...", "I am Creek", or "I am Winnebago". When the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce asked the question "...what is it that all Indians have in common?" Iris Drew, the Creek, answered ... "The white man" (P. 288).

As European colonists and its descendants advanced through North America, Native tribes had the dubious honour of, at one time or another, being treated in a similarly heavy-handed manner. With the diminishing power of the individual Native tribes arose the Pan-Indian, supratribal consciousness deeply embedded in its increased oppression. In essence, Native collective consciousness is "rooted in an experience with and a critical awareness of oppression and exploitation..." (Pertusati, 1994, P. 24-25).

The long complex process of Indian resistance and adjustment carried out largely in tribal terms reflected the diversity of Indian societies and differing and fragmented nature of Indian contacts with whites. But all the while another theme was at work, sometimes complementing, sometimes contradicting, sometimes overwhelming the tribal one. This was the effort to find a common ground beyond the tribe, a broader identity and unity based on shared cultural elements, shared experiences, shared needs, and a shared common fate. ... The Pan-Indian response ... was sometimes military, was sometimes political, sometimes religious. (Hertzberg, 1971, P. 6)

Within the literature and research that has been written on the subject of a Pan-Indian identity, the final characterization of the formation of Pan-Indianism is that it is based either in political activism or religious associations. Hertzberg (1971) notes that after the death of Tecumseh in the War of 1812, there were few major efforts to combine the religious Pan-Indian movement with a political agenda. "Hereafter Pan-Indian movements tended to either have a primarily secular or a primarily religious cast" (Hertzberg, 1971, P. 9). Research in the field of supratribalism focussed on the formal Native group's associations with organised political or religious pan-tribalism. Relatively little has been researched on the Individual Native's association with tribalism from a more informal influence; for instance, the bond that was

created between children and their respective communities through the residential school experience.

Hertzberg, Nagel, Cornell and many other authors agree that one of the major influences for Pan-Indianism and supratribalism was derived from forced residential schooling and urban relocation programs. In brief, residential schooling and urban relocation programs compelled inter-tribal affiliations out of necessity as diverse tribal groups shared living spaces and communities that had been artificially created and administered. The common dilemma of being forced to relocate unwittingly created a bond between different Native groups through this shared experience. Furthermore, it gave the groups the opportunity to communicate with other tribes through a common (English) language, whereas in the past a language barrier would surely have played a role in preventing the individual from attempting verbal communication with foreign tribal members. When these programs terminated, however, the question arose as to where and how the current youth were developing a sense of supratribalism. How were individuals within remote villages in Cree territory, with their own independent primary and secondary schooling and local work programs, developing a sense of supratribalism?

To clearly understand current supratribal attitudes that the Native people, like the Cree, hold towards schooling, we must first understand where their supratribal perspectives derived from historically. In a sense, to understand the Natives' collective perception of schooling we must understand it within the context of their past because, according to most researchers, they are intertwined (Hampton, 1995). Rhea (1997) also notes the importance of recognizing Native American history to the development of a collective consciousness of the group as a "race". Often, it will be argued that it is not only one's local past that can affect one's perspective but a greater shared history that is at work as well.

I now realize that there was a plan to tear us away from who we were, to make us into something else... (Assembly of First Nations, 1994, P. 12.)

The above anonymous quote from the 1994 Assembly of First Nations' Breaking the Silence evokes a powerful account of Native perceptions towards the intent of schooling for

Canada's Indigenous people. Experiences that shape perspective are not always founded from within one's tribe but rather form from supratribal experiences. The intent of Native education was clearly developed to remove the Native child of their culture and make them as "white" as possible (Dumont, Wax & Wax, 1989; Szasz, 1984) and in many cases left the students woefully unprepared to live in either community (Schreirbeck, Barlow, McKee & Patterson, 1976) or physically and/or emotionally assaulted (Founier and Crey, 1997). When we consider that this powerful quote of being made "into something else" has been forwarded with absolutely no tribal affiliation or geographical context, we are imparted with the idea that the participant's voice is so universal among Natives that no name is necessary; it is an experience that is somehow shared by all Native groups.

This begs the question: if a specific tribal group has experienced a social trauma in its past or present, do other tribal groups share in it? For instance, has the history that has affected the identity, experience and perceptions of the Sioux through the traumatic experience of "Wounded Knee" also influenced the Cree of Northern Quebec? Recall what Tall Oak of the Narragansett Nation expressed: "Every tribe has had their "great swamp" ... every tribe has had their "Sand Creek", every tribe has had their "Wounded Knee"; the list is endless. ***And we all have shared in that experience.***"<sup>11</sup> (Emphasis mine)

With few exceptions, the history of any group will play a pivotal role in shaping its current perceptions. Regardless of whether we are discussing a collective or an individual, to a greater or lesser extent we learn from our experiences and, for better or worse, we learn to react based on our past. It not only shapes our current perceptions but, as Nagel (1996) promptly points out, guides our future as well:

History, tradition, and culture are not only used as building blocks of contemporary ethnic consciousness, they also constrain the shape and direction of mobilization. (P. 1)

Whether or not there was any Native Indian collective identity or consciousness prior to the European influx to North America is debatable but in any event there was little need for

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<sup>11</sup> Narragansett, Tall Oak. As cited in TIG Productions Presents (Producer). (1994). 500 Nations (Attack on Culture) [Videotape]. Burbank, CA: Time Warner Entertainment.

unification. The arrival of the White European gave the Native Indian tribes the first sense of themselves as a collective against foreigners. In many ways, it gave them a forced sense of "us against them". Or, as Nagel contends: "Despite differences, there is an overarching sense of "we" (and of "they") that emerges when collective fates and interests are at stake and when the larger group confronts outsiders" (Nagel, 1996, P. 7).

White people of this century, even those who think of themselves as liberal and somehow romantically attached to the Indian cause, seldom understand that being "Indian" is something forced upon people of cultures as different as Chinese and Italian. Totally different languages and customs, old rivalries, and even hatreds still stand between many tribes. The unity among them has sometimes been forced out of desperation, mutual agony, or pride. These differences were laid aside ... on the common ground of oppression. (Fortunate Eagle, 1992, PGS. 37-38)

Native Indian ethnicity developed under the dual forces of the "larger group" defining the Natives as "Indian". Natives consequently made the choice of unifying under the umbrella of oppression. When Price (1969) delved into the growing Pan-Indian subculture in Los Angeles in the late 1960s, he wrote, "(t)he physical appearance of the Indian invariably conditions many of the choices he makes. The majority of Indians "look Indian" and are defined and treated by the majority population of Los Angeles simply as Indians ... rather than specifically as Navaho, Sioux or Creek" (P. 7). This entry provides insight that extends beyond its roots as an anthropological piece of research. It stands as a voice from the time that states, with its matter-of-fact tone, that despite tribal differences, to the majority of American non-Natives these Navaho, Sioux or Creek simply "look Indian".

The entire concept of Pan-Indianism and supratribal activism has likely received more scrutiny than other acts of ethnic unity. Rarely, if ever, do we see the media or academic researchers hesitate or question collective identity of other ethnic or racial groups, such as the Blacks or Jews. Jack D. Forbes (1990) contends that Native Indians are the only ethnic group in North America that are so heavily scrutinized by experts in the social science field for the purity or existence of their Indian ethnicity. Forbes offers by way of comparison that African-Americans are considered African-American despite having descended from mixed heritage of

multiple tribes and civilizations. Nagel (1996) states "'Indians' are no more or less real a group than are 'Kurds,' 'Africans,' 'Latinos,' 'blacks,' or Arabs" (P. 7)."

Native Americans differed in that they once had been land owners and had legal documents granting them this status (...) a somewhat different situation than other oppressed groups. (Pertusati, 1994, P. 123)

Perhaps the scrutiny of Natives as an ethnic group derives from the fact that in North America we can safely acknowledge the moral plight and unity of other ethnic groups without the fear of having to accept their contentions and its end result. This, in the case of the Indian claims, would be the return of much of their land.

### **A Native Pan-Indian Identity amongst the Cree?**

My experience, through informal and formal participation, observation and interviews with members of the Cree community, has shown me that, although the Cree are distinct, they sometimes draw upon the experiences and histories of other Native groups in order to shape their own perceptions and identity. In certain situations, it is not uncommon for the Cree, individual or group, to discuss "Native" matters and concerns on a more global, supratribal, Pan-Indian Native level, just as did John Boots (2001) of Akwesasne when he said that he doesn't recognize the international border. My conversations and interviews with Cree participants have demonstrated that a great deal of them speak of past and current injustices that have no direct link with the Cree of Northern Quebec, but nevertheless seem to have an impact on them as Native Indians.

An example of this can be found within an essay titled "Cree History Chronology Project", prepared by Ricky Jolly (1996), in McGill University library's Northern Collection. This essay chronicles the major events that have shaped and influenced Cree history. The project was a compilation of a number of Cree teachers' perspectives on the subject matter in preparation for a McGill Cree History course. Within this paper, there is an array of references to other Native groups, citing their history and struggles as having an influence on the Cree.

One Cree teacher, Eva Happyjack, includes a recent event, dated 1990, in which she quotes Jose Barriero's (1991) account of the Mohawk standoff of Oka:

A violent standoff at Oka, Quebec with Mohawks on one side and the provincial police of Quebec and the Canadian army on the other side brought to light the growing unrest among Native peoples across Canada. (Barriero 1995, page 16)

This entry demonstrates that the Cree people can be and are influenced and affected by the historic and current issues that other Native groups have endured and continue to endure. The simple act of including this Mohawk incident shows the influence that it had on this one Cree teacher and her associates. As I have mentioned, Pan-Indian suffering within the imposed schooling system was often mentioned within my own conversations and interviews. This is not to say that the Cree have not shared in the suffering of an imposed educational system, rather that the collective experience and history of other Native groups has compounded their own experiences. To interpret the Cree perception of what they have historically endured as a people, we must go beyond the tribal people to the supratribal people. We must go beyond what the tribe has experienced individually, to what it has experienced ethnically.

It is without argument that prior to the colonisation of America, the Native tribes were as diverse as they were numerous. North America is vast and the multiple cultures, languages, politics and beliefs of its Native people reflect its magnitude. Prior to the European colonisation of North America, the Native tribes probably considered themselves as distinct from each other as do the nations within Europe. European colonisation and the conquest of the American continent and its indigenous people changed that perception. It is the European view of the Native tribes and people that ultimately changed the Natives' perceptions of themselves and the relationships that the Native tribes and people had with each other. It is the very perception that the majority of white people held of the Natives as a group that encouraged the genesis of Pan-Indianism.

Fredrick Barth's 1969 anthropological publication, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, postulates that ethnicity evolves from the unification of socially ascribed designation and group

self-identification. This process is not unlike the Interactionist theory that contends that the individual is shaped not only by how one perceives him/herself but by how others see him/her as well. According to Barth's perspective, ethnicity is decided from both the group's view of itself and how those outside the group view it as well. Nagel's use of Barth's theory pertaining to the Native Indian grouping of North America is of interest to us here. Nagel contends that the Native people of North America should be considered as an "ethnic" group if they are not already. Using Max Weber's and Barth's interpretation of ethnicity, Nagel contends:

I define an ethnic group as a community of people who see themselves as descended from common ancestors and whom others consider part of a distinct community. Thus I consider both Indian tribes and the larger supratribal "Indian" category to be ethnic groups. (Nagel, 1996, P. 8)

As already stated, prior to the European colonisation of Europe, Native tribes defined themselves according to their own definitions: the Cree, the Inuit, the Mohawk, the Huron, etc... all probably agreed that they were different from each other. Anyone who has spent a substantial amount of time within a Cree community will agree that their feeling of distinctiveness still exists today. The Cree are proud of the separation and differences they perceive between themselves and other Native tribes.

However, I have found that when the Cree are faced with conversation or debate on the relationship between the Cree and non-Natives, in the context of Pan-Indian experience or issues, the Pan-Indian identity can be and often is readily adopted by them. This demonstrates the duality of identity that Barth and Nagel would contend has developed due to the encroachment and eventual conquest of the American continent by European settlers. Indeed, as Nagel would argue, the Native population was transformed into an ethnic group and created its collective consciousness because of the kinds of instruments that white-Europeans used to control and assimilate it.

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the differences between the languages must have played a great role in the division of tribes. Communication between different tribes would have been as much of a natural barrier as the vast geographical distances that lay between them.

According to Nagel, it was the assimilatory undertakings of the Canadian and American federal governments that unwittingly bridged these communication and geographical gaps.

... American Indian ethnic renewal arose, in part, as an unintended consequence of assimilationist federal Indian policies that forced schooling and English on tribal children, encouraged urban relocation of Indian adults, and funded reservation and urban organizations and programs. (Nagel, 1996, P. 12)

The enforcement of the English language and the bringing together of otherwise separated tribes into the common location of a residential school allowed Natives to communicate with each other and bring the newly shared stories, trials and sufferings of other tribes back to their own. Interviewees who attended residential schooling in La Tuque, Quebec mentioned the influence that non-Cree councillors, who were of other Native heritage, had on their perceptions of Native and White relations. Within the modern Pan-Indian movement, the 1960s efforts to move the people of the different Native tribes into "mainstream" society, either within Canada or the United States, exposed them to Natives with whom they might have otherwise never had contact. In the past, the enlarged plan to relocate Natives within settings outside of the reservation, whether through educational or employment means, forced the tribal Indian into bonds at an intertribal level. When speaking on Alcatraz, Richard Oakes stated, "It's the first time we've gotten all the Indians together – perhaps we can develop an all-tribes consciousness" (Fortunate Eagle, 1992, P. 109).

From such forced encounters, Nagel would contend, grew a sense of shared collective consciousness, history and "Indianness". Deloria (1983) supports the view of a growing Native Indian identity that transcends tribal ethnicity by citing the use of interchangeable behaviours and traditions between tribes:

(A) general sense of 'indianness' in which similarities between kinds of tribal behaviors gradually merged into a new kind of social value that was acceptable in both tribal traditions. Such ceremonies as the sweat lodge soon transcended individual tribal customs to become one of the things that Indians did - regardless of tribal backgrounds. By the 1970s it was possible to find wholly new kinds of behavior generally accepted as 'indian'... (I)n a Pan-Indian



setting...making friends became simply an act of identifying fellow Indians within a non-Indian social context.... (Deloria, 1983, P. 38)

Deloria's findings closely follow Nagel's view that the presentation of self is influenced by others and that "...individuals engage in a continuous assessment of situation and audience, emphasizing or deemphasizing particular dimensions of ethnicity according to some measure of utility or feasibility. According to this depiction, calculations of the worth, appropriateness, or credibility of a particular ethnic identity are made on the basis of feedback from various audiences in different social settings"(Nagel, 1996, P. 23). As such, she holds that that Native Indian ethnic identity can be flexible and transformative depending on the circumstance.

This hypothesis confirms that of other identity theorists, such as Cooley, who state "(t)here is no sense of "I"... without its correlative sense of you, or he, or they" (Cooley, 1964, P. 182). One's consciousness of self is a reflection of the ideas about one's self that one attributes to other minds and perceptions. Therefore, depending on the context, Native people can employ a dual identity of "Indianness" that can either be tribal or supratribal.

### **Possible Current Influences on the Pan-Indian Consciousness**

From a modern perspective, and after a considerable amount of research on the source of Pan-Indian consciousness was conducted, I came upon a third possible source for the creation of a Pan-Indian consciousness: the influence of mass-media. This idea came about while reflecting on my two years of teaching in the Northern Cree village of Mistissini, Quebec. I wondered about whether remote Native communities were developing a sense of supratribalism through such mediums as the Internet, Pan-Indian world wide web sites and specialty Pan-Indian television stations that televised directly into their communities through satellite dishes. Whereas urban relocation and residential schooling may have developed the more formal supratribal bonds, such as political activism and religious associations, could supratribal feelings derived through the mass-media develop a more non-formal sense of collective consciousness that could be best described as a "secular non-political collective

consciousness"? This would be a collective consciousness that is not demonstrated through formal movements but simply affects Native perceptions towards day to day issues, such as schooling.

Pan-Indian Native television stations such as the Canadian-based Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) carry a broadcast that provides a wide variety of documentaries, series, films and news that are both tribal and supratribal in focus. APTN news reports provide a summary of daily events from the Native perspective and focus of interest, and the same holds true for the nature of its entertainment programming. By its own account, APTN describes its programming as "...sharing our peoples journey, celebrating our cultures, inspiring our children and honouring the wisdom of our Elders" (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, 2001).

Much of the programming within the APTN network, such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) "North of 60" television drama series, explores Native issues in a Pan-Indian manner. "North of 60", which is set in the fictional Dene town of Bragg Creek, not only enjoys a great deal of patronage and accolades from Native people across Canada but, as Schwartzberg (1996) notes, even from the "... American Indian communities who catch the show off satellite". Part of the attraction of a show such as "North of 60" is that it is reflective of the Pan-Indian experience. Tina Keeper, a Cree who plays the role of a Dene Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer, explains the appeal this show has for Natives across North America:

"Most of mainstream Canada doesn't know much about Indian people and I think they have deeply embedded stereotypes about who we are (...) (T)here are ... people in our communities who are very much like the people on North of 60, our movers and shakers, who are sober and planning their future. (...) I think here's a show that for once represents Indians as people." (Keeper as quoted in Schwartzberg, Winter '95/96)

Keeper's interpretation of the success of "North of 60" demonstrates the dual perspective that Native people have towards their tribal and intertribal identification. More than likely Keeper is proud of her own tribal Cree roots but when she states that "mainstream Canada doesn't know much about Indian people and ... who *we* are", it is not difficult to grasp that the "we" she refers to is the Pan-Indian "we".

Richard Wagamese, an Ojibway columnist for the Calgary Herald, wrote about the movie, "Dances With Wolves", expressing the impact it made on him as an "Indian":

As a journalist it provides much fodder for inquiry and investigation. And as an Indian it will remain a vital reconnection to something not so much lost as misplaced. There were tears at the premiere. Native people, and their non-Native friends, hugged each other and cried in the aisles at the closing credits. (Wagamese, 1996, P. 87)

That Wagamese felt a connection with the Dakota Sioux through a Hollywood movie demonstrates how the mass media was able to move him beyond the tribal to the supratribal "Indian". Through the movie, an Ojibway made a connection or bond with the Dakota Sioux characters in recognition of a shared sense of history.

My search for literature revealed little on this subject. The exception was a non-published article called "Cyberspace Smoke Signals: New Technologies and Native American Ethnicity" (presented in a conference in 2001) by Zimmerman, Zimmerman (University of Iowa) and Bruguier (University of South Dakota), which touched on the idea of the "World-Wide-Web in the formation and maintenance of identity". Correspondence with the authors, via e-mail, confirmed that this was a yet-to-be explored area of Pan-Indianism. Larry J. Zimmerman wrote, "Your comments are interesting in the sense of a collective ethnic consciousness. Certainly the Internet can promote that."<sup>12</sup> Brugier noted the frustration he felt as a Native professor when attempting to explain the complexity of this subject to his students writing, "(t)he "collective consciousness" is an important addition to scholarly investigation. Even as I write I'm thinking of how I can get this point across to a couple of students who absolutely refuse to let Indian people make choices..."<sup>13</sup>

In the past, the Cree, like any other Native group, developed perceptions towards the changing political/power climate of North America through first-hand accounts, such as physically experiencing face-to-face contact with European fur traders, or through second-hand

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<sup>12</sup> Zimmerman, Larry J. (larry-zimmerman@uiowa.edu). (September 28, 2000). *Re-McGill-Montreal*. E-mail to Christopher D. Stonebanks (cstone1@po-box.mcgill.ca)

<sup>13</sup> Brugier, Leonard R. (brugier@usd.edu). (September 28, 2000). *Re-McGill-Montreal*. E-mail to Christopher D. Stonebanks (cstone1@po-box.mcgill.ca)

accounts, such as perhaps, and this is purely speculation, hearing of the genocide of the Beothuk of Newfoundland through Nascapi Cree.

We can only postulate what may have influenced pan-Indianism and to what extent it existed in the past, however, the modern collective Native consciousness can, in great part, be attributed to a variety of media sources. As mentioned, satellite television has brought "First Nation" channels to the Cree communities filled with movies, documentaries and "edutainment" that has exposed them to multiple Native experiences. The Internet (World Wide Web) has allowed them to have interactive access to other Native concerns. All of these sources are not only allowing Cree communities to experience other Native issues but to develop an increased sense of collective ethnic consciousness. As modern mass media plays an ever-increasing role in the lives of Native youth, I believe that further detailed research should be conducted into the concept of modern media as an influence on collective consciousness and the perceptions of self and that relationship with education.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has sought to explore the concept of a North American Native peoples' shared sense of collective identity and consciousness within the Pan-Indian framework. If the shared sense of identity among Native people and its influence on educational issues is a plausible theory then one must consider the histories and experiences of all Native people on a larger scale when working with Native groups on educational issues. As educators and educational researchers, we must be aware of this as an important consideration.

Tall Oak of the Naragansett Nation said it was his destiny, perhaps that of all Native people to be the conscience of America: To see that the tragedy of the past would never be repeated. Hopefully ... we too can be a part of the collective conscience. (500 Nations, 1994)

The use of a supratribal or Pan-Indian collective consciousness allows scholarly research to accept that the voice of Native groups, as a whole, can be used to draw parallels to the individuals or groups whose voice has yet to be documented. Acknowledging that the

supratribal experience has an influence on the collective consciousness of Native people allows us to better comprehend the perspectives they may hold towards the schooling that has been imposed upon them. To do so, we must therefore accept that the perspective of the individual can be shaped by the consciousness of the supratribal experience. In essence, we must pay the same respect to the Native collective consciousness as we do to the collective memory and history of other ethnic groups. The next chapter examines theories of cultural identity and its relevance to the Cree experience within non-Native settings.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Theories of Cultural Identity**

## **Introduction**

The objective of this chapter is to develop a theoretical foundation and then generate and establish methods of inquiry, within the subsequent chapter, that will assist in questioning whether Cree students of the James Bay region studying in institutions of higher education, mostly CEGEPs, within the Montreal area perceive cultural differences as having an effect on the academic success that they set out to achieve. The Cree students' perceptions of the cultural differences within the location of higher education and any possible consequences that arise from these differences are of paramount concern to my proposed dissertation. This chapter will explore theories of cultural identity that focus on the development and progress of that identity as affected by one's self and others.

This research is interested in the difficulties that Native, specifically, Cree, students have while studying outside of their cultural milieu, and is related to issues of identity, culture shock and cultural stress. The experience of culture shock or cultural stress is a very subjective one but can be defined as the impact that a new and different culture, radically different from a person's own culture, has on one's self. Culture shock describes the apprehension and anxiety that comes about when a person is unsure of all the familiar cues to reality on which each of us depends to function normally. Familiar cues and norms that one usually relies on within one's own culture are substituted by cues that are then perceived as unfamiliar (Pedersen, 1995).

To investigate this, this chapter will provide a conceptual path that will assist in questions regarding the development of identity and the perception of that identity within different cultural settings. With a conceptual framework developed, it will then set the theoretical foundation that will forward methods of inquiry.

As mentioned, the impetuses for these research questions are a direct result of my own experiences while teaching at the CEGEP level in the Cree village of Mistissini. It was through my own problematic journey from culture shock to an ultimate sense of belonging within the community and my observations within these social and professional settings that inspired this research enquiry. For this reason, my account of that cultural experience will be presented within a qualitative "culture shock" narrative framework, as developed by Paul Pedersen

(1995), within chapter six to demonstrate the reality of cultural differences between the Cree and Montreal way of life, either urban or suburban.

Why is cultural identity important to Native education? There is an unavoidable connection between the Native cultural identity, the educational system and a history of cultural assimilation (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Fournier & Crey, 1998; Nagel, 1996). In brief, Canada and its influential neighbour, the United States of America, indisputably have a long tradition of conflict with the Native population. And even when all the military conflicts, campaigns and wars against the Natives finally ended, the politicians were still left with what the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1913-32), Duncan Campbell Scott, and many others, had long referred to as the "Indian Problem".

### **The "Indian Problem"**

Thomas J. Morgan, Indian Commissioner in the USA, wrote in 1889 that "the Indians must conform 'to the white man's ways,' peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must"<sup>14</sup> Once the Native population was left with no military defence, many non-Natives forwarded economic arguments that promoted the assimilation of the Native population rather than committing genocide against it. Indeed, the government of the United States of America actually weighed the financial cost of a final outright war against the cost of assimilating the Native population through educational means. As an example, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior during the 1880s, Carl Schurz, estimated that it would cost nearly one million dollars to kill a single Indian in warfare, whereas it would cost only \$1,200 to provide an Indian child with eight years of schooling that could be aimed at "civilising" the child.<sup>15</sup> In 1891, Thomas Morgan, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, echoed this sentiment by stating, "It's cheaper to educate Indians than to kill them." (as cited in Lindauer, 1998) Arizona historian, Thomas Edwin Farish (1918) wrote "... the Apache cannot be tamed, as proper measures for doing so have never been taken, but it may be that the opportunity will soon be here. We hope so at all events, and

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<sup>14</sup> As cited in Reyhner. (1989) "Changes in American Indian Education: A Historical Retrospective for Educators in the United States". (ERIC Reproduction Service No. ED314228)

<sup>15</sup> As cited in Matt. (1999) "American Indians Describe School Beatings."



it is cheaper by far for the country to further their civilization than it is to fight them, which latter mode of dealing with them has, so far, proven an expensive way of subduing them" (P. 119).

A fiscal economic plan of assimilation and ethnocide became the favoured policy over genocide: this is shown by the adoption of such policies as the "Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilisation of the Indians" in 1857, the 1874 "Indian Act" or, as the authors of the "Red Paper" (1970) would note, the earlier "White Paper" in 1969. It became clear that the next assault on Native culture was going to be directed primarily through the education system.

A historical investigation of educational policies forwarded in chapter five helps demonstrate the compelling Native contention that the educational system was designed to foster the assimilation of Natives in order to destroy Native culture as a means of dealing with the "Indian problem" (Hoxie, 1984). The use of educational assimilation policies and practices as the final assault on Native culture merits our further investigation of culture and cultural identity for the significant impact that they have had on Native perception to education. Therefore, with an understanding of the importance and relevance of this issue to exploring theories and developing methods, let us first define "cultural identity".

### **Cultural Identity**

There can be a lot of confusion on the implications of using "culture" versus "cultural", with some arguing that the word culture implies "... boundedness, homogeneity ... whereas social reality is characterized by variability, inconsistencies, conflict, change, and individual agency" (Brumann, 1999, .P. 1). "Cultural", on the other hand, is argued to imply a more flexible definition of society. "If *culture* as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, *cultural* the adjective moves one into the realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that is more helpful" (Appadurai, 1996,. P. 12). Although within this paper the use of the words culture and cultural may be used interchangeably, it is done with the understanding that it implies the adjectival mode.

Culture is typically defined in general anthropological and sociological terms, and drawing from a diverse field of study, freely borrowing from gender studies, feminism, Interactionism, Marxism, history, literary criticism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis and much more. By its own admission, the study of culture is an eclectic, interdisciplinary field from which

theories can be drawn to primarily examine the relationship between culture and power (Bennett, 1998).

It seems that settling on a definition of culture is no small task. Williams (1983) concedes that culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language and advocates that researchers should spend less time asking what culture “is” and spend more time examining its use and purpose.

Bearing Williams’ caution in mind, we should provide a definition of culture so that we may begin examining its use and purpose. David Maybury-Lewis (1997), author of Indigenous Peoples, Ethnic Groups, and the State, defines culture as “...a term used by social scientists to refer to the totality of ideas, attitudes, customs and ways of doing things that people acquire as members of a society ” (Maybury-Lewis, 1997, P. 9). Within this essay, we will concur with Maybury-Lewis’ definition and agree “...the term *culture* is used to refer generally to the distinctive way of life of a given people” (Maybury-Lewis, 1997, P. 9).

Considering the complexity and diversity of the language associated with “culture” itself, one cannot help but feel a sense of good fortune that the exploration within this paper centers on defining “cultural identity”, even if it is not obviously separate from culture. Keeping in mind that this is a study centered on educational issues, we will avoid further debates within the field of cultural studies over the meanings of culture and succinctly define cultural identity as such:

A snapshot of unfolding meanings relating to self-nomination or ascription by others. Cultural identity relates to the nodal points of cultural meaning, most notably class, gender, race, ethnicity, nation and age. (Barker, 2000, P. 382)

We are interested in cultural identity for the meanings that an individual may develop from ascribed or learned perceptions of his or her culture and for the implications that arise from these meanings. Again, most of the concepts associated with cultural identity are steeped in sociological and anthropological research. However, the theories and studies of cultural identity of primary concern to us are those that deal with the formation and continuing development of cultural identity through the acts and perceptions of the self and others.

## **Theories Addressing Cultural Identity**

Research dealing with the subject of Native (or indigenous) cultural identity can be carried out with many different theoretical lenses. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will make use of a diverse framework of theoretical standpoints to compose an eclectic perspective along the same lines as Wolcott's (1992) suggestion for theory and methodology, working "...on a gentle theoretical "plain" where distinguishing features are not so prominent, watersheds not so sharply divided" (P. 10). For this dissertation I have researched within three neighbourhoods of theoretical perspectives: those who used an Interactionist framework (Peregoy, 1990; Sindell, 1968); those who defined their studies within the anthropological interpretation of Fredrik Barth's Materialist theory (Kilfoil, 1979; Nagel, 1996 ); and by those who cite the past and current effects of European imperialist philosophies and practices of oppression as having the primary influence on Native identity (Churchill, 1982; Deloria, 1982; Chomsky, 1993; Green, 1995; Maybury-Lewis, 1997; Said, 1997; Tuhiwai Smith, 2001; Vickers, 1998).

Despite differing theoretical approaches, all authors share the notion that Native cultural identity is profoundly shaped by the perceptions and actions of others outside their culture as well as within. They also perceive cultural identity as a "...snapshot of unfolding meanings..." (Barker, 2000, P. 382), that one's sense of self continuously changes depending on circumstance. Some theories recognize the importance of history on cultural identity more than others, some address areas that are more "group" oriented and some are more "individual" in focus. Fortunately, we may draw upon the strengths of each theory that suits our study. We may develop a diverse union of theories regarding Native cultural identity by focusing on cultural identity as being developed and influenced not only by one's self and the significant others who are within one's cultural group, but also by the significant others who are outside one's cultural group.

## **Materialism and Cultural Identity**

At the group level, Fredrick Barth (1969) contends that cultural identity is not only formulated within one's own cultural collection but is also influenced through the defining of

perceived differences that are ascribed by those outside of one's group's cultural boundaries. Within the anthropological publication, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, Barth postulates that ethnicity evolves from the union of socially ascribed designation and group self-identification. According to Barth, ethnic identity is decided from both the group's view of itself as well as from how those outside the group view it. Barth states that "...ethnic identity is a matter of self-ascription and ascription by others in interaction, not the analyst's construct on the basis of his or her construction of a group's "culture"" (P. 6).

Barth's perspectives are founded in the notion that the boundaries that separate ethnicities are created by cultural differences that are recognized by at least two groups. This means that an ethnic group's cultural identity is formed by the others' perspectives of the group as well. Advocating this notion and applying it to the debate on how oppression is constructed, Young (1990) writes that Native Indians originally thought of themselves only as "the people" and that this changed only upon meetings with other American Indians. This then created an awareness of variation between one's own group and the other and amongst groups of equal power, the effects of defining each other based on their perspectives may confirm a group's own perceived identity; however, when the relationship is unbalanced, it may sometimes be stigmatizing. Within this theory, "identification should be seen as based in ascription and self-ascription, rather than in 'possessing' a certain cultural inventory" (Safizadeh, 1998, P. 4). The group's cultural or ethnic similarities are based upon the sharing, agreement and understanding of elements including values, history and economic and political circumstance. The individual's perceptions of his/her own identity, through the process of ethnic boundary maintenance, develop the group's continuously forming cultural identity. "It is the everyday actions, choices, situations and conditions in which each individual finds himself or herself, and with which they choose to identify, which makes a difference in how ethnic groups are made up" (Safizadeh, 1998, P. 3).

Of interest to this study is Joanne Nagel's use of Barth's theory pertaining to the North American Native Indian ethnic identity. Within American Indian Ethnic Renewal (1996), Nagel contends that the Native people of North America ultimately became an "ethnic" group through the development of socially constructed and negotiated boundaries between themselves and the Europeans. Using Barth's interpretation of ethnicity, Nagel contends:

American Indian identities ... are constantly changing and evolving, responding to external threats and challenges as well as to incentives and opportunities. (P. 11)

Nagel convincingly develops the argument that Native identity, in the larger sense, changed from that of tribal to Supratribal identity (discussed in the prior chapter) with the arrival and growth of the Europeans as a dominant group. This change was precipitated by the European's perceptions of the individual Native tribes as being "Indian" and the "... unintended consequence of assimilationist federal Indian policies that forced schooling and English on tribal children ..." (Nagel, 1996, P. 12). Eventually, the dominant group's popular perception of the Native people, and the manner in which it subjugated these people through policies, helped create this sense of Supratribal identity. As Nagel clearly states, this is not to say that the Native people played no part in this ethnic renewal: as the efforts of the "Red Power" movement and the political activism of the American Indian Movement demonstrate, relatively recent political developments in Native ethnic renewal that have reinforced Supratribal themes have been seen as advantageous by the Native people. The theory that the development of cultural and ethnic identities is in continuous flux is not unlike other theories that contend that the individual is shaped not only by how one perceives him/herself but by how others see him/her as well.

Barth was himself said to be inspired by the works of Interactionist Erving Goffman (Llobera, 1999). Goffman, author of The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) wrote from a Symbolic Interactionist perspective and used qualitative analysis, attempting to delve into the common interactive processes of daily life. Goffman's work was primarily microsociological and investigated the particulars of individual identity and group relations and the impact that environment had on both. Goffman's work bridged the gap of one of Barth's weaknesses, in that it paid in-depth attention to the intricacies of how the individual's sense of cultural identity is formed. It is through the Interactionist perspective that the effects of daily interaction between identities can be addressed.

### **Interactionism and Cultural Identity**

The Interactionist theory is an interpretative theory that concerns itself primarily with the role of the individual within society. "(T)he social construction of meaning in social interactions" (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995, P.19) is central to the Interactionist perspective. Five major notions drive the Interactionist theory:

- First, that individuals do not respond to the world directly, but rather they respond to it depending on the meaning they have developed in relation to it;
- Second, that meaning dictates how individuals interpret any given symbol; a symbol can be anything from an object, to a person or a religious belief;
- Third, that social groups are developed and made up when a collected people share in the meanings of symbols;
- Fourth, that the self is developed through social interaction;
- And finally, the fifth and final notion is that if you have been socialised to define a situation as real, then it will be real and have purpose.<sup>16</sup>

George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley theorized that the genesis of the self is accomplished through the gradually developing ability of a person to take on the role of others, and to then visualise his/her own performance from the point of view of others. It was the belief of Mead (1956) that the human concept of "self" was derived through these social acts within a society. The self, in Cooley's perception, is not an island unto itself; it develops solely through the communication with others. Cooley states that "(t)he social origin of his life comes by a pathway of intercourse with other persons" (Cooley, 1909, P. 5.).

The "self" is a "hypothetical construct: Something that serves to explain observable behaviour but is not directly observable itself." (Miffelen & Miffelen, 1982, P. 183)

The self or self-concept is what each person finds individualising about him/herself in a social setting. Therefore, without the action of individualisation, or setting one's self apart from others within a social environment, there would be no self. The concept of self, consequently, relates directly to that of social interaction. This means that we draw much of our identity through the ways others perceive us, just as others are influenced by how we perceive them. One's sense of self is intertwined with society:

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<sup>16</sup> Adapted from Blumer, Herbert. Symbolic Interactionism,

Self and society are twin born, we know one as immediately as we know the other, and the notion of a separate and independent ego is an illusion. (Cooley, 1962, P. 5)

The self arises simultaneously with the act of socialization. We can only develop a sense of identity when we understand who others are, so that we can then compare our differences. Cooley states "(t)here is no sense of 'I'... without its correlative sense of you, or he, or they" (Cooley, 1964, P. 182). Cooley maintained that there can be no isolates. One's consciousness of self is a reflection of the ideas about him/herself that s/he attributes to other minds and perceptions. This action is called the "reflected self" or the "looking glass self" (Congalton & Daniel, 1976, P. 136).

The reflected self implies that we are all a reflection of how others see us. One's identity is, therefore, foremost derived from others' perception of him/her, just as that of the others are somewhat moulded from that first individual's perception of them. The conception of the reflected self is composed of three principal elements:

- 1) The imagination of our appearance to the other person;
- 2) The imagination of his/her judgement of that appearance; and
- 3) Some sort of feeling derived from this action, such as pride or mortification.<sup>17</sup>

Society, from Cooley's perspective, is an interweaving and interworking of mental selves. He continues with examples of possibilities: "my mind affects your mind, I imagine your mind, you imagine mine, I fictionalise about what you think I think of myself just as you do about me; whoever cannot or will not perform these feats is not properly in the game" (Cooley, 1964, P. 201). (The concept of "playing in the game" will be further explored in greater detail later on, as an apt cultural comparison and example of Cree culture and the dominant culture in Montreal.)

According to Mead, it is interaction that makes a collection of individuals a society, and gesture is the key element through which social acts are affected. Mead separates the non-significant gesture, unself-consciousness, being found on the animal level, and the significant gesture, self-consciousness, as being associated with most human interaction. Human

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<sup>17</sup> Source adapted from Charles Horton Cooley

interaction only becomes possible when the individual interprets the meaning of an act, or symbol, in the same way as it is interpreted by other individuals.

Gestures become significant when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse... in other individuals. (Mead, 1934, P. 47)

Symbolic interaction thus occurs when significant gestures are socially recognised. Symbolic interaction can take many forms of communication, such as the vocal, as in different languages (e.g., Cree, French or English) or the physical (e.g., a frown or smile). Children must learn the shared meanings of symbol in order to develop a sense of self within their society (Blumer, 1969). A Cree child, who grows up in a vastly culturally different setting than that of our own southern children, would therefore develop different common perceptions of self, self within their community and also commonly shared concepts of gestures, meaning and reality.

For Mead, the development of the self is a gradual learning of roles consisting of three stages:

**PREPARATORY STAGE:** Simple imitation of adults.  
E.g., child play-talking on telephone just like mom/dad.

**PLAY STAGE:** Role playing is deliberate, but children cannot understand the relationship between different roles.  
E.g., child plays house, takes on the role of "parent". Although s/he may understand the role of "parent" as pertains to him/herself, s/he does not understand his/her real parent's various roles to others.

**GAME STAGE:** The youngster sees him/herself playing one role in a network of roles.<sup>18</sup>

In Mead's final stage, the child learns his/her individual role in a network of individual roles that make up a society. The example of a baseball team is given by Mead to illustrate his theory; for a baseball team to actually be a team everyone must know his/her role. A pitcher must be aware of not only his/her personal role but also everyone else's, just as every other

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<sup>18</sup> Source adapted from George Herbert Mead



player must be aware of the pitcher's role. An individual's role, however, may change depending on circumstance.

We carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people. We are one thing to one man and another thing to another. There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social relations. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience. (Mead, 1977, P. 207)

If the established self changes according to one's circumstance or situation, as Mead states, then one's self perception is vulnerable to negative as well as positive influence from his or her surroundings and circumstances. Both Cooley's and Mead's theories of development of self are derivative of a societal influence on the individual's development of self. Within a context of relative privilege and power then, one's self perception in relation to cultural identity is developed within the safe confines of knowing you were born on top, so to speak. However, the situation of the healthy development of one's sense of self would therefore be different if your cultural identity was intertwined in the realities of not belonging to the socially and culturally privileged and dominant groups. These social and political issues of power and domination are important parts of the Native cultural identity dilemma within institutions of higher education. Herein lay the limitation of the Interactionist theory. For many who study issues regarding Natives of North America, it is difficult not to recognize the arrival of Europeans and their forceful colonization of this continent as having a profound impact on Native cultural identity. This is true for most indigenous people who have had to deal with histories of European expansionist efforts of colonialism and Imperialism.

### **Imperialism, Colonialism and the Indigenous Cultural Identity**

Imperialism frames the indigenous experience. (Smith Tuhiwai, 1999, P. 19)

Imperialism, in its simplest form, is defined as the practice by which powerful nations exert control and domination over nations or people of lesser strength. Throughout history and, some would argue, in present times, these actions have been and are justified through a

number of reasons. These may be categorized roughly as economic, such as the Marxist theory that links imperialism to capitalist motives to dominate others in order to expand the economic base; political, whereby a nation's needs and security interests are argued to be best served by controlling another nation or people; and ideological aims, best described through Britain's era of colonialism in which domination was rationalized or moralized as being the "white man's burden" to civilize "backward" peoples. Although there is debate as to whether the term colonialism may be used interchangeably with imperialism, there can be little doubt of their interconnection within the discussion of the North American Native situation. "Imperialism was the system of control which secured the markets and capital investments. Colonialism facilitated this expansion by ensuring there was European control, which necessarily meant securing and subjugating the indigenous populations" (Smith Tuhiwai, 1999, P. 21). Imperialism is referred to today in historical terms, but for those who have experienced its actions, it is still perceived to be an ongoing subjugation. John Mohawk (1992) wrote:

"... Imperialism and colonialism are not something that happened decades ago or generations ago, but they are still happening now with the exploitation of people. (...) The kind of thing that took place long ago in which people were dispossessed from their land and forced out of subsistence economies and into market economies -- those processes are still happening today."<sup>19</sup>

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) reinforces this notion by quoting "... activist Bobbi Sykes, who mockingly asked at an academic conference on post-colonialism, 'What? Post-colonialism? Have they left'" (P. 24)? Whether one agrees to the argument that imperialism and colonialism are still being carried out in our modern times is irrelevant to this discussion: the very fact that indigenous people still suffer over its effects is enough to warrant investigation.

Tuhiwai Smith writes that perceptions of self for Indigenous people are tainted partially because of imperialist philosophies that were bound to social Darwinist notions. It is a result of these social Darwinist beliefs that advocates racial or cultural superiority, and that allowed scientists to mutilate Aboriginal bodies or anthropologists and archaeologists to steal

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<sup>19</sup> As cited in American Indian Heritage Foundation (2001) *Columbus* [www document]  
<http://www.indians.org/welker/columbu1.htm>

and/or appropriate Native physical artefacts, ancestral bones, and in some cases, the culture itself.

Drawing upon the ideas of Darwin, the evolutionists approached the study of anthropology with the assumption that societies were located on a developmental scale, progressing from lower civilisations through to higher, more advanced civilisations (such as Western capitalist cultures). (Mayo, 2000, Pgs. 18-19)

The effect of this principle, resulting in a feeling of helplessness and objectification, has had a profound impact on Native perceptions of self and cultural identity. In the past, as Mayo suggests, the very act of studying a culture has, unfortunately, led to the assumption of a higher order civilization studying a lower order culture; empowering and validating the researcher's culture and demeaning the "other".

Many who have researched the subject of indigenous cultural identity have used Edward Said's (1978) concept of "Other" to clarify their perspective. Within Said's (1978) Orientalism, he asserts that the creation of the Other helped define Europe's self-image, thereby having a continued impact upon the manner in which the Other, in this case, the indigenous people of the Middle-East, were perceived. "It has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (P. 12). The formation of identity throughout history and within every society, Said maintains, involves creating opposites and Others. This occurs because "the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another different and competing alter ego" (P. 12). This is a formation of cultural identity that is developed by one super-power's perception of identities over a dominated people, which, in this case, inevitably leads to the positive self-image of one group and the stereotyped negative images of another.

One can only suspect that, in the face of racial prejudice and historic oppression, the ability and desire to find one's authentic selfhood are severely affected by negative images of that self as a racial Other. (Vickers, 1998, P. 10)

This becomes an oppression of cultural identity, an oppression which Scott (1998) views as "...a guiding mythos of the colonial cultures of white Euramerica ..." to destroy the historical identities of Indian cultures and individuals" (Vickers, 1998, P. 2). Cairns recognizes

this notion within the historic roots of cultural oppression of the Canadian Native population and by way of illustration, refers to a quote from John A. McDonald: "The great aim of our civilization has to be to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the dominion, as speedily as they are fit for change."<sup>20</sup>

However, Imperialist cultural oppression goes far beyond the denial of the indigenous culture. The rejection of being perceived as "human" has its history as well, and its impact also leaves a heavy scar on cultural identity.

The struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a consistent thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression. (Smith Tuhiwai, 1999, P. 26)

History, even a history that many researchers claim is a biased one written by the conquerors, provides ample evidence of imperialist notions of a racial superiority that falsely justified many crimes against humanity. A review of Noam Chomsky's (1993) Year 501, The Conquest Continues supports this assertion. In some instances, the perceptions created of the indigenous left wounds that they were not merely racially inferior, but that there was a notion of the indigenous being "...not 'fully human'; some ... were not even considered partially human" (Smith Tuhiwai, 1999, P. 25).

Native Americans were thought of as being outside the bounds of civilization, devoid of culture (...) The savage, being uncultured, could best be understood in terms of animal and animal behaviour. Savages were often compared to animals – considered to be like dogs. Indeed, even early pictures of Native Americans portrayed them as dog-headed animals. (Green, 1995, P. 7)

Again, many indigenous people still feel that non-Natives hold this view of them and this perception still permeates the identity of Native and Indigenous people. Maracle (1996), a Native Canadian asks, "How often do we read in the newspaper about the death or murder of a Native man, and in the same paper about the victimization of a female Native, as though we were a species of sub-human animal life? A female horse, a female Native, but everyone else gets to be called a man or a woman" (P. 21). Such images of one's cultural identity have left and continue to leave lasting impressions.

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As cited in Cairns, (2000), Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State. Pg. 17.

For those who have experienced colonial or imperialist efforts, there can be little doubt that "Imperialism frames the indigenous experience" (Smith Tuhiwai, 1999, P. 19). It is far too intrusive and powerful an experience not to leave an impression on one's sense of cultural identity. Many still believe that the impressions of a colonial and imperialist past exists in the psyche today. Many also continue to believe that colonial and imperialist efforts and notions are still being actively carried out to this day.

The analysis of the effects of imperialism provides strong arguments explaining Indigenous perceptions of their cultural identity; perhaps most interesting is the use of an "anti-colonialism" or "decolonizing" approach to the study of Native issues. Much of what has been written on this topic draws upon multiple theories as best suits each theoretical argument, (critical theory, Marxism, feminism and more). This, in part, has become the current model for my own research, in order to prevent any single theory from dictating my own perspective. In sum, the theories of cultural identity presented within this dissertation represent the concept that cultural identity can be viewed as a process that evolves from both a union of ascribed designations as well as from self-identification.

## **Conclusion**

On a closing note regarding theories of cultural identity, there are many serious issues regarding this subject. But it is not a situation without hope. As Cairns (2000) notes:

The "Aboriginal peoples" ... did not fade away from the shock of foreign diseases and aggressive culture contact, nor have they been assimilated into the surrounding society and thus given up their desire to survive as separate peoples, as our predecessors assumed would and should be their fate. (P. 17)

In the next chapter, I will present the research methods used as a strategy of inquiry, with the expectation of shifting the underlying philosophical and theoretical assumptions of cultural identity that have been presented above, to the research design that was used to collect information for this dissertation.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Methods of Inquiry**

## Introduction

Within this chapter I will present the rationale for the methods of inquiry used within this dissertation. The approach to the design is eclectic and much of this chapter focuses on the reasoning for using this style and an explanation for the broad range of methods of inquiry from which I have pulled. The two chapters that follow this one will respectively contain the participant narrative and interviews with the Cree participants; at the outset of each chapter a further elaborated justification for the methods used will be forwarded to allow the reader a more in depth understanding of how the research was carried out.

There was a compelling persuasiveness about the famous cry -- "Give us the tools and we will finish the job." One may be forgiven for responding less eagerly to the scholar, be he sociologist or anything else, who says -- "Give me a job, and I will spend the rest of my life polishing the tools." (Marshall, 1963, P. 19)

We shift now from theory to methods of inquiry, noting that Marshall's quote rings true for most graduate researchers who must choose theories and then use appropriate qualitative methods. Although the qualitative approach has many "liberating" characteristics, it can mire the eager researcher, both neophyte and veteran, in often conflicting, posturing and confusing classifications (Wolcott, 1992). Merriam (1998) notes the numerous variances in classifications that scholarly authors have given to the various types of qualitative research, citing Tesch (1990, p. 58) as listing forty-five approaches to qualitative research. Patton (c2002) identifies ten perspectives or traditions and their theoretical roots. Lancy (1993) critically described the confusion he faced when choosing his own research method by comparing the single "mighty oak" model of quantitative research to the seeming "mixed forest" of qualitative research. In Lancy's opinion, it is not altogether a healthy forest as there are "distinct trees representing different species or, at least subspecies. In many cases their growth has not been spectacular and some trees appear to be moribund" (Lancy, 1993, P. 3).

The task of choosing, defining or validating your methods can be consuming and although such methods are meant to assist you in your direction, in many ways the process itself inhibits you from proceeding forward. Merriam (1998) suggests that "(i)deally ... the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the

study in progress. This is not always the case, however, as thesis and dissertation committees ... often require the design of the study to be specified ahead of time" (Merriam, 1998, Pg. 8).

Perhaps Merriam should also add that restrictions are also often self-imposed by the graduate researcher. Consider the distraction the researcher encounters when conflicting definitions and issues of methodological ownership claimed by various theories hinders his/her ideas. There is a certain security and ease in steadfastly attaching yourself to a single methodology and accompanying theoretical foundation when carrying out your research. In reading the autobiography, Participant Observer (1994) by William Foote Whyte, who is best known for his experimental use of a qualitative field study approach in Street Corner Society (1943), I found myself envious of the excitement that must have been present when, during his graduate studies at the University of Chicago and working under such scholars as Herbert Blumer, they locked theoretical horns with the academic advocates of quantitative research and qualitative research began its ascent.

Oddly enough, as Whyte described the setting at The University of Chicago, I also found myself envious of the freedom that must have existed during these early stages of qualitative research as graduate students. After all, the real intellectual discourse was between the qualitative and quantitative supporters and Whyte referred little to the types of posturing that Wolcott describes as having occurred within the qualitative research community. The confusion caused to the present day researcher does not emanate from the variety of qualitative methods from which he or she must choose. Rather, the confusion or frustration derives from the issues of methodological "ownership" of conflicting and staunchly separate theories.

No one "owns" ethnography, any more than anyone owns participant observation or case studies. (Wolcott, 1992, P. 43)

No one may "own" any of the methods of inquiry Wolcott mentions but the various champions of different theoretical leanings certainly make a strong attempt at claiming exclusive knowledge of their use. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) state that "(p)articipant observation is the primary technique used by ethnographers to gain access to data" (P. 109); Merriam asserts that "(c)onfusion results when the term ethnography is used interchangeably with ... *participant observation* ..." (P. 14). In light of all the conflicting classifications, I prefer



the view of Wolcott who warns against academic peddlers "or even ... "hawkers" unabashedly touting their wares" (P. 5). Wolcott suggests that when it comes to theory and methodology, he prefers to work "...on a gentle theoretical "plain" where distinguishing features are not so prominent, watersheds not so sharply divided" (P. 10). Perhaps, this is the strength of qualitative research. Where a researcher can, as Wolcott describes, carry out research in a manner in which we are at liberty to commence with one perspective of inquiry, but are encouraged to draw from others as best suits our research question.

### **Observation within in a Cree village**

I began my research while teaching and living in Cree territory during the spring of 1996, in part, to make sense of the rich and sometimes challenging life within the community of Mistissini. What began as an attempt to make sense of my new surrounding through journal writing quickly grew into a narrative case study of the experience. All of my notes were typed on an old Windows 3.1 operating system computer and with a word processing program that was antiquated even by 1996 standards. As I wrote my observations, I became increasingly aware of the narrative aspects of my writing and the richness of information it revealed. In this case, it revealed the struggle of trying to accustom myself to an unfamiliar cultural environment. Initially, this narrative was accumulated through the participant observation framework I had utilized in my Master's thesis. I should add that I was not journal writing for the sake of a possible publication or dissertation; rather I was trying to be a reflective teacher, trying to make sense of the new teaching context I had entered. When I made the decision to draw upon the journals in 1999 for the use of a dissertation, it became problematic to retrieve the data from the 5.25 inch disks, a model of data storage that had become obsolete. Luckily I found a computer that had both a 5.25 inch and 2 ½ inch disks and with some software wrangling I was able to "cut and paste" my writing from the old word processing format to the more modern Microsoft Word processor. As I did so, I further detailed each entry by titling them with headings that were appropriate to the content.

In 2000, I began the progression of succinctly organizing my participant observation notes within the framework of Pedersen's (1995) Five Stages of Culture Shock; not because of any theoretical or methodological connection that we had in common, but because of the

remarkable similarities my own experiences had with the progression of culture shock Pederson advanced. The descriptive titles that I had given to each one of my entries fit almost seamlessly within Pederson's five stages. A narrative form of participant observation would be the methodology I would employ to conduct and reflect on the research; Pederson's stages provided the scaffold to present it.

Participant observation is defined as "research characterized by a prolonged period of intense social interaction between the researcher and the subjects, in the milieu of the latter, during which time data, in the form of field notes, are unobtrusively and systematically collected" (Goetz & Lecompte, 1993, P. 3). The function of this methodology is to "elicit from people their definitions of reality and the organising constructs of their world" (Goetz & Lecompte, 1993, P. 110). To explain this concept of examining the subjects' "world" from their point of view, most experts turn to Herbert Blumer (1962). Blumer states:

Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them (...) Meaning of such things is derived from, or arise out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows (...) Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he encounters. (P. 2)

Blumer's theory of actions, events and things having different interpretations for various groups substantiates the need for a methodology that allows, or encourages, the researcher to observe from the subject's perspective (Spradley, 1980). Empathy and reflection are the hallmarks of participant observation (Bogdan, 1972). Through the use of this methodology, these attributes allow researchers a partial glimpse into the world they are studying from their participants' perspective. Perhaps the "studying" of people is an inappropriate way to look at participant observation. It would be more appropriate to say that participant observation means "*learning from people*" (Spradley, 1980, P. 3). In Participant Observation, Spradley refers to a study on the mountain people of the Appalachian Valley and states: "In order to discover the hidden principles of another way of life, the researcher must become a *student*. Storekeepers and storytellers and local farmers become *teachers*" (P. 3).

Although participant observation does have its strengths, in that it advocates intense and prolonged immersion within the environment the researcher is studying, it is deeply rooted

in what many who study in the Indigenous setting consider to be a colonial ideology. Tuhiwai Smith argues that research derived from the dominant, mainstream Western schools of thought are entrenched in colonial beliefs that distort and silence other ways of knowing and being. The type of research that Tuhiwai Smith is challenging is inspired by imperialism and the research it encourages and is seen as a means of oppression on Indigenous people. Central is the notion that "(r)esearch has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other. Objectification is a processes of dehumanization" (Smith Tuhiwai, 1999, P. 39). Moreover, research that has been carried out within Indigenous settings have been what Tuhiwai Smith considers to have been, for the most part, "... worthless to ... the indigenous world ... It told us things already known, suggested things that would not work ..." (Smith Tuhiwai, 1999, P. 3). In short, Tuhiwai Smith asserts that research benefited the careers of the researchers and dehumanized the indigenous people that were being "studied" through perceptions of superiority fuelled by a history of colonialism.

### **Indigenous Concerns regarding Methods of Inquiry**

After I became aware of Tuhiwai Smith's perspective, I did find that my readings for this dissertation changed and couldn't help but reflect on colonial influences in research I was studying. Take this quote by Spradley (1980) as an example: "Each social situation is a laboratory where some aspect of social life can best be studied because there it is best illuminated" (P. 12). The very suggestion of a community's social setting as being a laboratory can convey the image of its citizens being dehumanized research subjects.

Another quote from Spradley (1980) states the "...active participant seeks to *do* what other people are doing, not merely to gain acceptance, but to more fully learn the cultural rules for behaviour" (P. 60). There is much controversy over the idea that a "foreign" researcher can ever learn the intricacies of the cultures s/he studies. Tuhiwai Smith argues that whatever information would be gathered would either be obvious to the indigenous or "created" by the researcher. I lived in the Cree village of Mistissini from spring of 1996 to the summer of 1997 and during part of that time, my family shared a home with a Cree couple, but the experience never led me to assume that I could possibly "do" what the Cree "do" as they "do" or ever fully understand what it means to be Cree; just as I believe that Native people who live in non-

Native communities and with non-Native couples do not assume that they have become non-Native experts either.

Therefore, through a narrative account of participating, I can accurately reveal only my own perceptions. I make no illusions of discovery of that which has always been apparent to the Cree people. My observations are my own: they are the reflective narrative of my experience teaching and living within a Cree community. The challenge was to tie my own narrative to some of the relevant voices within the Cree community so as to understand the issues regarding cultural identity. Combining these two perceptions together acknowledges another one of the challenges forwarded by Tuhiwai Smith. She encourages researchers, both non-indigenous and indigenous, predominantly trained in the western tradition, to actively work alongside Native communities, recognizing their expertise, voice and knowledge and advances an ethic of accountability towards the indigenous peoples and the areas being studied.

Tuhiwai Smith's work undoubtedly gives the researcher studying within the Native context much to consider. At the very least, reading her work has provided me with a more sensitive perception to the methods of inquiry. It has certainly allowed me to review the research I have already completed and recognize its weaknesses and strengths. For example, the participant observational notes that I accumulated during my residence in Cree territory became more of a narrative of the experience of culture shock than the cool, detached descriptions I provided within my Masters' thesis. Both share the desire to richly describe the situation, the people and the environment, but my observations from Cree territory speak greater volumes of the perceptions of the foreigner within a foreign environment than they do of the Natives because only they know what they perceive.

### **Perceptions through Narrative and Interviews**

Developing the narrative aspect of the participant observations created a more in-depth account of my life in Mistissini. Writing the reflective narrative brought out a more comprehensive description of the experience of living outside of my own cultural milieu and I hoped that encouraging a greater narrative voice from the interviewees would provide a richer account of their experiences as well. Aspects of the narrative were already introduced within the initial interviews but were given greater encouragement as the interviews progressed. The

choice to include the interviews along with the participant narrative stemmed from the fact that the interview is "...designed to reveal how participants conceive of their worlds and how they explain these conceptions" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, Pg. 126) and I wanted to compare the two perceptions. I conducted over thirty interviews with Cree students, who studied at the CEGEP/higher education level, focusing on their perception of self within a foreign culture. Interview lengths varied from one and a half hours to three hours.

Interviews were chosen so as to represent each of the nine villages in Cree territory, the nearest of which is 850 kilometres north of Montreal. Time restraints, traveling distance, participant availability and the sheer cost associated with the research all played a role in dictating the development of the single interview format. Experts within the field such as Seidman (1998) concede that a single interview format, although not the best-case scenario, is an allowable option (P. 15). N.B. Barroe (1988), author of Indian and White: Self-Image and Interaction in a Canadian Plains Community, wrote that this type of research allows the researcher to "...assess the participants' definition of social situations and recognize the images of selves contained in these definitions" (P. 20).

Peregoy (1990) employed a similar interview format when he sought to reveal stresses within the Native students' academic world, stating, "(g)iven a symbolic Interactionist perspective, participant observation and open-ended interviewing were most appropriate research techniques for this task" (P. 55). The interview format used was grounded on an interview-based qualitative format, following the guidelines of such authors as Goetz & Lecompte and Seidman. Although Seidman's qualitative interviewing format, as specified in the book Interviewing as Qualitative Research (1991), was the model for this study, Katherine Kohler Reissman's work, Narrative Analysis (1993), was a tempting interview format to follow and I adopted her influence within the actual interviews. In retrospect, I wish I had come across Reissman's writing regarding respect for the interviewee as a storyteller earlier on in the interview process, but at least the latter half of the interviews do reflect her outlook

When transcribing the interviews, it became clear to me that when interviewees slipped into a narrative recollection, the information that could be drawn from their stories and of course the ways in which they told their stories in their own particular way, were extremely rich. The interviews are full of many incidents when participants' stories provided excellent insight into their experiences within the CEGEP system. An early example:

*"... I found that I found something kind of weird when I got into college. Within the first few days they pulled me into an office and they told me that my course load was too heavy. And, I said, "Why is it too heavy?" And they said, "Well, because you're Cree." "So?" 'Cause I had seven classes I think. And they said, "We can bring it back to five classes" and I said, "no". (inaudible) I didn't like that, it, it, ... I don't know, they probably thought that, like, I wasn't able to perform without that. And, they were probably thinking about the, uh, poor old school systems over there. But, I don't know, but, I didn't like it! ... After I kept thinking about that. I was like, "Why did they ask me that for? I can do seven classes!" (MIII)*

Throughout each interview, it became evident that the Cree students saw themselves to be perceived as very different from those who resided in the south and that the most telling part of the interviews occurred when they slipped into the comfort zone of storytelling. I therefore undertook to understand the participants' perceptions of cultural identity within the CEGEP environment by delving into the narrative manner of dialogue through the use of their lived and retold stories.

Hilde Lindemann Nelson (2001) recognizes that personal identity is derived not only from how people view themselves but also from how others view them using the theoretical assumption that identity is "...understood as a complicated interaction of one's sense of self and others' understanding of who one is..." (P. XI), Lindemann Nelson calls for the use of the Narrative to repair group and individual damaged identities. Many would argue that the Indigenous peoples suffer from such damaged identities. Her work, developed from a Feminist perspective, concentrates on the stories of social and cultural groups whose identities have been defined by those who have the power to speak for them, thereby defining their identities. This is a situation in which a dominant group constructs the identities of certain people through socially shared narratives. To repair the damaging narratives, Lindemann Nelson calls for oppressed groups to confront them by developing their own "counterstory" narratives. These narratives "...are, then, narrative acts of insubordination" (P. 8). By means of placing the "counterstories" about the groups in question alongside with narratives, Nelson believes that damaged identities can begin the process of redefining themselves.

Over twenty interviews throughout Cree territory were carried out in addition to the reflective narrative commenced while living and working within Cree territory. I sought to not only investigate the Native perceptions to educational issues of cultural identity but to elicit

their narrative counterstory to what they perceive as being the problems and solutions to these issues. These interviews included Cree graduates of higher education, CEGEP and university and Cree individuals who attempted to secure a degree of higher education but either failed or dropped out. In addition to these one-on-one interviews, I carried out group interviews with my students from CEGEP de St-Félicien and another group interview with high school students from Mistissini, in order to develop my understanding of what studying within the community meant to my students and the possible fears and anticipations of high school students who were considering pursuing higher education degrees. I sought to be forthright in posing questions that facilitated their answers on the subject. Their voice came through on this matter, and to their expertise and experience I have added my own narrative. When considering the combination of both these perspectives, the subject of "voice" when dealing with Native issues must next be addressed.

### **Issues regarding "Voice"**

Nowhere is our cultural disorientation better captured, or the ambiguous transitional moment in which we find ourselves more clearly underlined, than in the complex issue of voice appropriation. The issue of who can speak for whom, and who can write about whom, is a major contemporary issue in the social science and humanities. (Cairns, 2000, P. 14)

Tuhiwai Smith raises the issue of voice appropriation, curiously enough, by quoting Edward Said (1985), an American of Palestinian descent: "Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances? These it seems to me are the questions whose answers provide us with the ingredients making a politics of interpretation" (P. 7). That "'A' can represent 'B' is now a controversial statement, rather than a taken-for-granted assumption ..." (Cairns, 2000, Pg. 15). It is encouraged within this type of research to forward the researcher's identity as much as it is to forward one's own presuppositions to certain theories or methods. I agree with this format, because I do not think that it is being done in a prejudicial manner. Rather, I think that it enriches the reader's understanding of who is writing for whom.

I do not forward my own cultural identity and ethnicity with any feelings of fortuity. In fact, I envy those who come from a monolithic culture and have often, foolishly, imagined how easy it would have been to have just simply been white or black or Indian, for example, I am a

product of a mixed-ethnic marriage (I purposely avoid the subject of race) so complicated that my siblings and I sometimes observe that even we are not the same between each other. My father's parents were British and Italian, each holding onto their respective Methodist and Catholic religions. My Mother is an Iranian, whose parents' ancestral roots ultimately differed with religions of Judaism and Islam but who were fiercely loyal and loving to each other. My father, the result of his British father's steadfast belief in Imperialism (he was after all an officer in the British army), was born in colonial Egypt and enjoyed all the advantages of a privileged young gentleman's life. He would go on to fight in three wars (those who did not fight in Suez, Cyprus and Korea might call them conflicts) for Britain and, seriously injured twice, suffer the physical consequences of defending the interests of a country he had never even seen. My mother is his polar opposite. We used to always joke about how my father didn't know the difference between Arabs and Iranians when he married her, fantasizing of Said's Oriental image of the submissive Arab woman. Instead, he had to deal with the sharp tongue of a politically savvy woman who was very aware of how England, the Soviet Union and the United States of America were all fighting for possession of her country's precious resources. It was an interesting mix that, growing up in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon neighbourhood of the West Island of Montreal, left us with many challenges.

As I deal with issues of "voice", I am reminded of a Vincent Craig (1977) cartoon that Nagel included in her book, American Indian Ethnic Renewal. It depicted a garish woman, who we assume is a member of the ethnically dominant White group, babbling to a Native woman that her "...great-great grandmother was a Cherokee princess ..." and the Native woman is politely smiling back, thinking to herself, "I wonder what's for supper?"<sup>21</sup> The point is, many Natives have heard from non-Natives that they somehow have a connection with or an understanding of the Native community because somewhere in their lineage, someone was married to a Native. It somehow presumes a proprietary link to Native issues and identity when it is advantageous to the individual but that are then lost when they no longer suit them.

Perhaps one of the few advantages I have as an individual of mixed ethnicity and culture is that I am always in the position of being a participant observer. I have almost always played the role of being within a group where I am *somewhat* accepted by the group but always see the surrounding events and interaction from a different perspective. In this

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<sup>21</sup> As reproduced in Nagel, Joane. American Indian Ethnic Renewal. P. 52



research scenario, I had the advantage of having grown up with an Iranian mother who always discussed the issues of Imperialism that plagued her Native country and with a British-Italian father who, born in Egypt, has often had difficulty seeing how colonialism could ever be perceived as negative.

I have, one too many times, witnessed the dance between the colonial soldier who would inadvertently fumble out words that presumed well-meaning but misguided notions of how indigenous people might be somehow “guided” and the proud, indignant and rebellious reaction of my “eastern” mother who would seethe at such comments, fuelled by thoughts of her own country’s history of imperial manipulation. Most of the time, my mother would laugh off the idea that people from the “east” were somehow perceived as less-than-human by people of the “west”, but sometimes she would ponder that perhaps it was true that this was how they felt. Now that I am a father, I realize she did this with the intention of not wanting to validate her children’s uncertainties about their own self-worth and identity.

However, the constant sweeping depiction of “people from the East” within film, television and other forms of mass media may have been too powerful for her to have succeeded by using such subtle tactics. In compiling an exhaustive review of the portrayal of people from the East within the media, Shaheen (2001) noted that only Native Americans have been more relentlessly smeared. Having experienced this ethnic slurring from an eastern perspective, I have a great deal of sympathy for the unfortunate group that would have the dubious honour of receiving even worse treatment. As a result of this ethnic background and heritage, I have some understanding for North American Native issues of cultural identity, but I do not claim them with any feelings of good or bad fortune. They are simply there.

### **Conclusion: Telling What You Know**

I have thus forwarded my foundation of cultural identity, my methods of inquiry and revealed my own identity so that the multiple voices herein are an understood presupposition. “Value-free research is impossible” (Denzin, 1989, P. 23), was the motto during my graduate studies at Concordia University’s Department of Education. Most professors at the time were espousing the principles of Elliot Eisner (1990) and his stress on the importance of acknowledging one’s values and subjectivity within one’s research. The idea that all

researchers, be they professional or student, bring their preconceived notions or theoretical leanings on the subject to be studied with them has become understood and researchers are acknowledging this by revealing their background to their readers so that the experience will be that much richer. It is after all, not scientific facts we are seeking, but well thought out insights to an educational dilemma. With respect to Clifford's (1986) citation of a basic rule of qualitative research, such notions were reaffirmed in the statement of a Cree elder who was asked to speak the "truth" in a Montreal courtroom during the initial attempts to block the James Bay Hydro Electric project in 1971:

In the courtroom the round-faced, cheerful Francois, deeply serious as he was asked if he would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, placed his hand on the Bible. Before answering he began to talk to the translator. After some conversation the translator looked up at the judge and said: "He does not know whether he can tell the truth. He can only tell what he knows." (Richardson, 1975, P. 46)

There are many theories that can address the educational dilemma that is being discussed herein, but there is an intrinsic value to any research when the individual researcher reveals his/her own background, experiences, prior knowledge and theoretical beliefs within that research. Much like the Cree elder, Francois, the "truth" may not be revealed within this dissertation but through the perspectives of cultural theories and methods of inquiry that have been advanced, I strive here to reveal what I have learned. Presented within the next two chapters are the participant narrative and interviews with further elaborations on how the research was carried out.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Participant Narrative**

## FIVE STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK

When you want to describe an experience ... the best way to do it is to tell stories (...) ...to illustrate the profoundly personal process of culture shock ....  
(Pedersen, 1995, Pg. 2)

This chapter is a narrative of my experience within the Cree village of Mistissini. It is an account that has been developed from notes I took during the academic semesters of summer 1996 to fall 1997 when I was employed as a full-time lecturer by CEGEP de St-Félicien, within the Department of Native Early Childhood Education (NECE). During that time, I was hired to teach a wide variety of education courses to a class of students who, in turn and upon graduation, were expected to work an assortment of jobs within the field "education" (anything from Daycare educator, Daycare Administrator, elementary after-school program coordinator and local social services worker for newborns and their families). The intention of the program was to deliver a CEGEP education to Cree students within their Native land, thereby alleviating many of the social and cultural barriers that would otherwise impede them from obtaining their degrees.

The position itself took my family (my wife, Melanie, and then eleven month old daughter, Farah-Roxanne) and me, some nine hundred kilometres north of our familiar setting of Montreal to a Cree village, Mistissini, with a population of approximately 2500 (plus) people. At some point while teaching and living in Mistissini, I developed a desire to question the effects that tertiary education had on Cree people who were attempting to study at the "higher education" level. My questions grew from my professional and personal experiences during my (just under) one and a half years living and working in Cree territory.<sup>22</sup> The question themselves were the outgrowth of extended non-formal observations, conversations and encounters that stemmed from the process of being immersed in a foreign culture. The research questions that were ultimately developed from this experience relate to identity and perceived cultural differences (imagined or real) and the difficulties that one experiences when immersed in a foreign culture and the barriers one develops in achieving goals, in this case, educational goals.

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I have since spent many additional months of teaching time for the Cree School Board (under the supervision of Université du Québec) and McGill University (OFNIE) and carrying out interviews in all the villages save Wemindji and Whapmagoostui

After an initial series of critical incidents, characterized by Peter Pederson (1995) as significant stories that occur when someone is in the process of dealing with culture shock, it was suggested to me by my wife that I use my recently developed skills, used in my Master's thesis, as a participant observer to assist with the process of coming to terms with my surroundings. Alone and in what I perceived to be a very foreign environment, critical incidents were occurring frequently and I attempted to make sense of them by writing them down. Although my initial endeavour was to document the experience as a participant observer, it soon became evident that what I was documenting was very different than the participant observation notes I had taken for my thesis; they were far more personal and narrative-like in nature, far more "participatory" and far more laden in personal perception than the participant observations I had made in the familiar Montreal elementary school settings used for my Master's thesis. This time, I was documenting my own struggles to make sense of my surroundings. It is from these struggles and ensuing narratives that came the idea for further research. My task was to make sense of what had already been experienced, present it in a manner that was revealing and then use it to direct the research questions and the methods which would best investigate it.

As I reviewed my notes from my time within the Cree village of Mistissini, I had a great sense of embarrassment over my early perceptions of the village and, moreover, I continued to worry about what my Cree colleagues would think of me when they read of the unease which I struggled with internally. These were raw personal perceptions; accounts of situations in which I initially felt continuously unfamiliar and sometimes socially and emotionally intimidated. Having admitted to this, I hope that my Cree colleagues and friends will not judge the non-Native people who were observed too harshly and will not try to put forward names and faces to those whose identities have been protected. Moreover, I can not emphasize enough that there was also a good amount of non-Native personnel who were extremely positive about their experience of living in Mistissini.

Perhaps even more awkward were my first perceptions of the community and its home-grown citizens. My own initial perceptions, no matter how open-minded I felt they were, were still as much of product of a media that continuously bombards us with negative and stereotypical images of the "Indian" (Shaheen, 2000) than any other person who grew up in North America. For the sake of broadening knowledge and dialogue to take place, I've tried to

be as honest as possible about the immediate perceptions I had at the moment; even if it does mean me looking back on the entries and feeling a pit in my stomach as I reread how ridiculous and, yes, even prejudice I was at that time. If not for the formatting boundaries that are imposed on you in a dissertation, I would have highlighted this sentiment and paragraph in bright colour and put the font in bold so that the reader does not forget this.

It is important to remember that when these incidents occurred, there was no intention of writing a doctoral dissertation on this subject matter; therefore, some incidents that are given obviously do not contain "knowing" participants. As I write this I am reminded of a rather rambunctious "stag night" of a Cree friend in which I participated: While sitting in the back seat of a mini-van as we drove from Mistissini to continue the festivities in Chibougamau, one of the other Cree participants stared at me for an extended period of time, smiling all the while and said something to the effect of, "look at professor Stonebanks, he's probably writing this all down in his head for some future book!" We all laughed and I thought, "maybe".

There are many Participant Observational accounts that include unknowing subjects. Only a select few in Whyte's (1943) Street Corner Society were aware of his intent for research, but the location of this description makes me uneasy due to the relatively small population of the Mistissini community. Consequently, I have anguished over including many of the observational notes that included overt bigotry or anger. Some I could not exclude because they revealed too much about the perceptions that led to my research question. As I struggled with my observational notes, I often turned to my wife and peer, Melanie, who unselfishly gave up her teaching post for a year to join me with our infant daughter in Mistissini, and Kathleen Wooton, academic peer, a veteran of the Cree School Board, educator, advocate, researcher and, in the spirit of many ethnic traditions, my elder who also happens to be Cree. Kathleen's view was that I had a unique opportunity to reveal perceptions within the Cree education milieu that would otherwise remain secret. This opinion echoed that of Bogdan's (1972):

The observer is passive in the sense that he does not change the situation in any way that may affect the data. He conducts himself in such a way that eventually becomes an unobtrusive part of the scene - someone whom the other participants take for granted as belonging, and whom they consider to be all "insider" in a special, nonthreatening role. (P. 21)

My wife and Kathleen's advice was simple: tell the truth as I saw it and try and to protect people's identities as best you can. Although it is a privilege (and fortunate) to gain a certain degree of acceptance and a lot of hospitality within a foreign culture, in my own mind, there is a greater comfort in narrating that experience within the role of a social scientist than within that of a "spy". However, I cannot hide the fact that these observations were written, at the time, without the direction of a research question or advance permission from "gatekeepers", members of authority and participants. Moreover, the notes were written because of my prior experience in writing as a Participant Observer: it was an excellent way to make sense of an educational dilemma and this was a situation in which I was a direct "participant".

The question of how much the researcher should actively participate is one that all educational researchers ponder and I take solace in Bogdan's view that "(t)o try to understand social life by standing back and being emotionless in the interest of objectivity and refusing to assume others' roles is to risk the worst form of subjectivism" (P. 45).

For these reasons, I forward my narrative observations with the hope that it will reveal some of the intense culture shock one feels when submerged in a foreign environment. Even if that now reveals, with the gift of hindsight, initial perceptions of new circumstances that may be truly embarrassing. Briefly, the incidents described below follow the guidelines that Pedersen (1995) established regarding the "Five Stages of Culture Shock". This narrative case study focuses on the effects that culture shock has on the individual's perceptions of his or her identity and on the relationship that individual has with the foreign culture in which he or she is immersed. The stages follow the individual's journey from extreme cultural disorientation to, hopefully, acceptance of his or her new environment. Each significant incident has been chronicled within Pedersen's stages. The only main deviation from Pedersen's format is that he suggests a reflection at the end of each critical incident. Instead I have woven the reflection within the narrative. All of the names within this narrative have been changed.

### **HONEYMOON STAGE**

Most if not all descriptions of culture shock indicate a progression of attitudes regarding one's self and others from a lower to a higher level of development. (...) The first stage describes experiences where differences are intriguing and

perceptions are positive. The emotions are typically excitement, stimulation, euphoria, playfulness, discovery, and adventuresomeness. The behaviors are typically guided by curiosity, interest, self-assurance, and the collecting of interesting experiences or impressions. ... There is very little seeming regard for the effect or impact the visiting student author might have on this new environment, and little attention is paid to the consequences of this encounter. (...) The visitor has retained the security and stability of a back-home identity without having to follow all the back-home rules and regulations. (Pederson, 1994)

### The Job

Upon graduation from a Masters of Arts in Educational Studies, I was fortunate enough to receive an offer of full time employment as a CEGEP level instructor. The initial telephone conversation to arrange the job interview gave me absolutely no clue as to what the job entailed, besides the fact that it would be within the field of “teacher training”. At the time I had sent out a great deal of applications for employment and had lost the original add for the job opportunity; so I played along with the voice on the other end of the telephone, trying my best to emit a confidence in what the position demanded. The prospective employer was CEGEP de St-Félicien, in Lac-St. Jean, the heartland of the political French Quebec nationalist party, the Parti Quebecois. My initial concern was that I would be asked to teach in the French language and I anguished over my own perceived shortcomings in this area. The job interview format was arranged in the standard manner with the two potential supervisors sitting across from the job candidate, all designed for maximum nervousness. The two interviewers were Jean<sup>23</sup>, a large white man of French descent with white hair and similar beard and sparkling blue eyes (whom my wife would often refer to as “Santa”) and Lily, a woman of dark complexion, long, straight black hair and an initially quiet disposition that grows much more animated once she has assessed you. Jean’s position was that of the CEGEP’s “Coordinator” and Lily was the “Coordinator” on behalf of the students.

To my surprise, the job interview was conducted in the English language and we began with simple questions about my education and work experience, most of which were asked by Jean. The tone of the interview was dry and impersonal with Jean taking notes and

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<sup>23</sup> “Jean” is not this person’s real name of this person and all other names, with the exception of the names of the Cheechoo’s, have been changed to protect people’s identities.



reviewing his questions. Lily, who up to this point had not asked many, if any, questions, suddenly, inquisitive and in a polite manner asked, "I'm just curious, are you Mohawk?" It was a disconcerting question and quite frankly I recalled being so confused that I didn't simply say, "No", instead I asked, "Why?" It was then that they revealed that they were interviewing for an intensive teacher-training project that would take place in "Native territory" and that Lily herself was Cree. I reluctantly explained my multi-ethnic background and then joked that when you mixed all those cultures together you could practically be anything, "given the proper lighting". I've been asked if I was Greek, Italian, Arab, Iranian, Pakistani, and even "Black-Irish" and, in fact, Native on a few occasions, but for some reason this question surprised me. Lily and Jean laughed and laughing along I internally assessed what this job would possibly entail.

Lily admitted that when they were going through all the applications for the posted position that my Curriculum Vitae stood out, not only because of my qualifications but because my last name, Stonebanks, was uncommon and due to its "literal" meaning she associated it with some of the southern Native names. I then blurted out, "like Hawkeye", and then felt foolish for saying that but Lily laughed and said that once she saw me and saw my relatively dark complexion that she became more convinced that perhaps I was a Native as well.

With my foot in the door, due in part to earned qualifications and in part to the luck of a "literal" name, the interview continued in a lighter manner. Lily then asked, "What do you know about Cree communities?" I remember feeling anxious over my lack of knowledge and then feeling ashamed that, in truth, I knew nothing. "The Cree?" I drew a blank. In my head, I raced through my high school Canadian history class and could only remember the Algonquin, the Mohawk, the Huron, and nothing more. Even of these ethnic groups, I could recall no more than their tribal names. Except, the Oka Crisis. The Oka Crisis was a Native issue that I had heatedly argued over with friends and colleagues. And I had played hockey in the Mohawk village of Kanawake a couple of times. So, that's what I told them: the truth, I was ignorant. The only time Natives ever remotely came into my life was when I was playing hockey with men I never really talked to and arguing for their rights to their territory during the Oka Crisis. Perhaps a little bit from Matthew Coon-Come's hydro-electric conflict on the news, but I associated that more as an "Indian" issue as opposed to a Cree one. I told them "what I knew" and the truth seemed to make both Lily and Jean quite happy.

The project was described as a unique opportunity to bring CEGEP level instruction to Native students in Cree territory. Originally, as I was led to understand, the project had commenced six months earlier, shortly after Christmas, and had nine instructors rotating within each of the nine communities. Again, from what I understood, the idea was that each instructor would develop one course and specialize in that area, then travel from community to community, rotating with other instructors. Apparently, this format didn't work well because the students and instructors complained that, as soon as they developed a comfortable relationship with each other, they were forced to leave and then commence the entire process of developing trust with each other again.

Jean then asked how I would feel about living in a "remote, northern community". Before I could answer, Lily expressed her displeasure to the term "remote" and argued with Jean that it was an unfavourable reference to the villages. Jean steadfastly held to his description and stated, "To us, these villages are remote." Lily looked away from Jean, looked at me while smiling reassuringly and restated, "It's not remote." At that point I became a non-participating third party in their minor, but polite and friendly, argument as our interview was wrapped up.

I left the interview slightly excited over the job opportunity of perhaps being a full-time unionized CEGEP instructor so soon after graduation and also feeling somewhat anxious over what it meant to be living in a place that Lily described as "Cree territory." Shortly thereafter, I received a phone call from the CEGEP offering employment as one of the nine instructors (there would be one full-time instructor assigned to each of the nine villages) in the Native Early Childhood Education program.

### Orientation

Prior to our departure to our respective village, we spent two weeks in a "training and development" session where we were introduced to the "competency based" teaching method we were encouraged to implement. This session was also part of the development of the teaching content. We informally discussed cultural differences that we would expect to see within Cree territory, both within the classroom and outside of it. Two of the instructors, another

recent Concordia Masters of Arts in Educational Studies graduate and I, were new to the program and were both quite eager and “wonder-eyed” about what we would encounter. Many times during our meetings, breaks and lunch hours we were both told stories that would occasionally fill us with a combination of dread, fear and the anticipation of something very foreign. In truth, neither of us knew what to expect.

During one meeting, one veteran instructor shared a thought that would prove to be prophetic in a way she didn't expect. Many non-Native professionals complain about the solitude and loneliness of living in Native communities. This peer with prior northern experience whispered, in a cautioning tone into my ear, “You're going to go nuts up there unless you like lots of cold, snow and hockey!” A smile grew on my face from ear to ear; nothing could have been more enticing.

At our final meeting in Montreal, we were all asked to meet with Jean individually. We were all to be told in which village we would teach. Some instructors who had taken part in the initial training project voiced their displeasure that they did not have first choice of the village in which they would be teaching and residing. As I was told by other instructors, some villages were more desirable than others, depending on: population; comfort of dwellings; comfort of the teaching environment (both physical and mental); class size (at the time I was told class size varied from 4 to 13 students); perceived “openness” of the residents; pre-established relationships with Native and non-Native locals; conveniences (such as grocery stores, general stores and convenience stores, known in Quebec as *dépanneurs*); proximity to non-Native towns; and perceived dangers.

On the subject of “perceived dangers”, one instructor warned me of the risks of certain communities. “Mistissini is known as a “Rock and Roll town,” I was cautioned. I am unsure whether the term “Rock and Roll town” was a descriptor that was given to the instructor by a Native of another community or one that was coined by the instructors. Apparently, it suggested that it was a town with a significant population of youths who enjoyed regularly rowdy, disorderly partying that would directly affect and invade one's quality of life. It was definitely the intent of the instructor to convey that there was a risk of physical danger by residing in Mistissini.

On the other hand, villages such as Ouje Bougamau (often referred to as simply “Ouje”) clearly were valued and sought after by some of the instructors. I came to understand that Ouje was a relatively new Cree community, therefore one would benefit from the comforts of a recently built dwelling, plus it was relatively close to larger non-Native towns. Furthermore, its smaller population meant that the instructor had a smaller class, which would facilitate and optimize one’s teaching. It became obvious that some villages were valued and others not. The criteria, which may have slightly varied from instructor to instructor due to personal preference and priority, was fairly similar.

When I was called in to see Jean, he sat alone in front of a large desk with a map of Northern Quebec spread out atop of it. “Because you have a family with a young daughter, I think you would be well suited to teach in the village of Mistissini. It has all the conveniences, a big grocery store and a medical clinic in case anything happens and it’s within driving distance to Chibougamau. Plus, it’s also a very liberal community so I think you and your family would fit right in.” We discussed the “whens” of teaching (start date of June 21, 1996 until, with no guarantees, mid August, 1996), the “wheres” of where exactly I would be living and the “hows” of physically getting there.

Because the CEGEP would not cover the air travel expenses of my wife and daughter, it was decided that we would drive to the village. Jean showed me the routes that would take me from Montreal to Mistissini and I wrote down the highway numbers and towns I would pass through: Sherbrooke, Chicoutimi, La Tuque, Lac St. Jean, Chibougamau and then on to a road to Mistissini that didn’t even exist on the map we were looking at. I smiled to myself and shook my head in disbelief: “Chibougamau,” this was a town on a weather map that my friends and I used to laugh about, wondering why the heck weathermen always told us the forecast for a town called “Chibougamau.” Now, I had to find Chibougamau to get to my first real higher education teaching job. I was assured that the drive would take no more than eight to ten hours.

Jean’s review of Mistissini stood in direct opposition to what I was told by some of my new peers. Who should I trust; whose assessment was right? Had some of my fellow instructors not forewarned me, Jean’s assessment would have made me very happy. Instead,

as I stood up and left from the meeting, I did so with a great sense of confusion and, in all honesty, a good deal of anxiety.

### The Journey

During the next few days leading up to my anticipated date of arrival, I made all the expected hurried plans to live and teach in Mistissini. As I was to begin teaching in early June, my wife (who is an elementary school teacher) could not join me with our ten-month-old daughter until mid-July. So, early on the Friday morning of June 21, 1996, with my 1994 Dodge Colt car packed, I began my first approximately 800 plus kilometre drive to Mistissini alone.

The drive to Chibougamau was, quite simply, a culture shock. Little things amazed me. For example, the *dépanneurs*<sup>24</sup> looked like throwbacks to the 1970s, with large signs advertising beer by showing the silhouette of the “stubby” bottles that have not been used since the very early 1980s. Curiously, there was also an abundance of establishments flying the flag of France. Being from Montreal, I was used to the political overtones of flying or raising the “Fleurs de Lys” as opposed to the “Maple Leaf,” but couldn’t recall a time I actually saw flags of France or England. It struck me as very curious. (Only later did I realize this had been done as a special occasion for tourists arriving in the area from France).

As I passed into the Lac St. Jean region, the geography and demographics of the small towns changed as well: they were dispersed and more rural than I was accustomed to seeing. When I made my brief stops for gas, coffee or a meal, I became increasingly aware of a culture that was unfamiliar and subsequently more self-conscious of my French that was developed from my bilingual education in the predominantly Anglophone West Island of Montreal. Moreover, I was having an extremely difficult time understanding the accent of those with whom I spoke. I felt embarrassed when forced to ask people to repeat themselves. Sometimes, I would just nod in agreement when I simply could not comprehend. I felt like a child.

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<sup>24</sup> “Dépanneurs” is the French word referring to a corner or convenience store and is widely used by Quebec’s Anglophone population as well.

The physical appearance of the regions changed as well. I became very aware of the grandeur of our country and province as I drove through it, dissecting the northern passage. I am by no means a geographer or a geography enthusiast, but it is hard not to notice the majesty of this land as the distinct physical geographic traits change before your eyes. By the time I drove past St-Félicien, the northern-most town in the Lac St. Jean region before heading into the Ashuapmushuan Forest, the types of trees in the woods begin to change. The forest itself is divided into two zones: to the south are stands of balsam fir and white birch mixed with deciduous trees, which gradually change into a coniferous forest composed of black spruce and jack pine (Société des établissements de plein air du Québec, 2001). All the change in scenery added to the sense of differentiation between my accustomed surroundings of Montreal and that to which I was heading.

The drive through Ashuapmushuan was long and laborious; the tree-line is repetitive and if you drive the speed limit you must endure its hypnotic repetition for at least two hours. Often, I had to fight off the dangers of sleep. However cyclical, the initial drive was punctuated with incidents that left me startled: at one point, I had to stop my car for a black bear that sat right in the middle of the road. From a distance, I stared at it in disbelief. "Is that a bear? Holy crap, is that a f\*\*\*ing BEAR?" I said out loud to myself. I slowed my car to a dead stop, not more than thirty feet from the bear, foolishly rolled down my window and nervously laughed and screamed at the bear, "Holy crap! You're a f\*\*\*ing BEAR!" The bear, more polite and less impressed with my presence, pulled itself up to its paws, groaned at me and walked into the bush. I pulled away, keeping my eye out for further animals, half expecting to see a moose or a beaver sitting in the middle of the road at any moment. Although I did not see any other seated animals, a lone wolf stood majestically at the side of the road near the exit of the Ashuapmushuan forest. This time, I slowed the car down, marvelled at his (I am of course assuming his gender) size, grace and power and refrained myself from spoiling the moment with further expletives.

When I drove into Chibougamau at approximately 8:00 pm, I noticed that the sun was still quite high in the sky. After filling up with gas and asking for directions to the village of Mistissini, I made a short journey to the by way that would take me to my destination. As I turned onto the road, I noticed that the path ahead was not paved (no metaphor intended). Unexpectedly, it was gravelled. The ensuing drive ahead in my small city/highway designed

family car would shake off any doubts as to whether I was heading into a way of life that was very different than my own.

### Reflection: The Honeymoon Stage

Mander's (1991) account of his children's high school education and the absence of any genuine teaching about Native peoples; their history, traditions, politics, or any number of issues they face that would make them "real" to us, reminds me of my initial thoughts entering this professional phase of my life. Although I had knowledge for the content I was about to teach, I was completely unprepared for the context and learner (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000). I believe much of the anxiety I felt came from the lack of meaningful education I received in my formative primary and secondary schooling about Native peoples. Certainly nothing I was taught compares to Zinn (2003), Chomsky (c1993) or Churchill's (1994, 1995, 1998) account of Native history. And, without a doubt, the media's depiction of the North American Native (Shaheen, 2001) did not help either. In my mind, I had to continuously shake the images of Thunderheart (1992) or Dances With Wolves (1990), never mind the countless Saturday afternoon movie specials of "cowboys and Indians". Kincheloe (1983) wrote of the experience of teaching on a rural reservation, "(e)ven those teachers who retreat to the insulated teacher housing cannot avoid the surrounding culture for long – though, unfortunately, many try, much to the disservice of their students" (P. 18). Soon I would become ensnared in both of these situations: having to adjust to a new culture all the while receiving consultation from those non-Native teachers, unwittingly or not, isolating themselves from that very culture. Although excited about the future employment and financial security that I was seeking, as Pedersen cautions in the "disintegration stage", the disorientation of being submerged into a culture forewarned of a good deal of tension to come.

### DISINTEGRATION STAGE

After the novelty wears off, the host culture starts to intrude on the visitor's life in unexpected and often uncontrollable ways. It becomes necessary to solve practical problems in the host culture and move beyond the role of a spectator.

This stage involves a sense of confusion and disorientation where differences between the home and host cultures become very noticeable causing tension and frustration. The individual often experiences a sense of failure and self blame for real or imagined inadequacies. The individual may experience an acute sense of profound loss and disorientation regarding what can be expected of others and what others expect of the individual. This sense of being different, isolated, and inadequate seems permanent, together with bewilderment, alienation, depression, and withdrawal. In extreme cases this stage can seem to result in the complete disintegration of personality as the former and now inappropriate identity is discarded and the new identity has not yet been formed. (...) Persons going through the second stage experience pain and helplessness. ...The process of disintegration is self perpetuating through self-defeating behavior, and failure becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.  
(Pederson, 1994)

### Arrival

As my small, two-door, Dodge Colt hit the gravel road I immediately started hearing the pounding of flying rocks on the underside of my car. Unaccustomed to such conditions, it was a constant reminder of peril on this path<sup>25</sup>. The road itself was winding, with sharp turns, pitted with potholes and dried ridges from heavy rains and “washouts” and would (again for the unaccustomed), make steep inclines and subsequent declines without notice or warning. “What the heck have I gotten myself into?” I thought in my head and out loud on more than one occasion.

After approximately ten minutes, a large truck appeared in my rear-view mirror and quickly drew near my car. After a minute or so of riding the tail of my car, the driver grew impatient with my slow speed and passed my car, drawing parallel with me. Two local Cree men peered into my vehicle and, not recognizing my vehicle or me, cast me a look that could only be described as unimpressed. With a push to their accelerator, they “floored” their truck past me and pulling in front of me, again accelerated, pushing further ahead while kicking up gravel onto my car. A moment of panic ensued as I slowed my car down to a stop. To me, this seemed like a message that foreigners were either not wanted or that I was driving too slow or both. I renewed my drive and brought my speed up to 70 km an hour, 20 km an hour faster

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<sup>25</sup> Sadly, a number of flower adorned crosses were also at the side of the dirt road; placed there, I can only imagine because of fatal car accidents.



than I was driving before but at least 30 km an hour slower than the large SUVs and trucks that thereafter periodically passed me.

"How long was the drive from Chibougamau to Mistissini and how much of the drive was supposed to be a dirt road?" I would think to myself over and over again. Not designed for this kind of driving, my car was taking a beating and my nerves were as well. I kept on looking ahead, waiting for either the village of Mistissini to appear after the next turn or incline, or for the road to turn back to pavement. After forty-five minutes, I resigned myself to the fact that this road was going to remain the same right into Mistissini, and so it did. My odometer testified that it was approximately an 80 km drive on a dirt road on to a turnoff that lead you for another 10 km dirt road drive into the village of Mistissini.

Although the village of Mistissini does seem to just pop up on you as you drive in, it's not without prior notice: as you draw closer to the village, off to the side of the road are numerous "camps". I later learned that these were where some of the local Cree reside, usually seniors, in a more traditional manner, away from the village but close enough to it to maintain easy contact with family.

I have to honestly admit that there is no other way for me to describe my initial reaction as Mistissini came into sight than to say that I was completely unprepared for the apparent poverty that some live in. It is very different from the manicured homes, streets and lawns of the middle class suburbs of Montreal. There is an odd dichotomy between the pristine forests that surround the village and the state of the man-made structures within it. In fact, during my initial stay in Mistissini, I found hardly any (if any) green vegetation anywhere within the village itself.<sup>26</sup>

Simple things, like the "stop signs" that were dented and pock-marked with the rocks that youths had hurdled at them, stood out. Larger visual features, such as homes that were in various states of disrepair, flooded me with a feeling of guilt that the Native population was living in conditions that were comparable to images within the media of impoverished communities and countries that were always "foreign". How could this be Canada? How could

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<sup>26</sup> It was later explained that vegetation was not planted to discourage black flies. Although villages like Nemaska have a number of green spaces within the community.

our Native population be living in homes that would never be acceptable within our own lower middle-class communities?

It had been arranged by CEGEP de St-Félicien that I would be residing in the house of a non-Native couple that was leaving the community for the summer. As I would come to understand (although there were exceptions to this rule), it was normal for non-Native employees to leave the village during the non-teaching months of the summer and sometimes their vacated, furnished homes would be offered to individuals or families within the community to alleviate the housing shortage. It was expressed to me by many non-Natives within the community that it was much more desirable to have a non-Native reside in your house than a Native family, although this was not expressed to me by the people I was staying with.

When I reached the home of the family I would be living with, I discovered that no one was home. I stood outside the house and took in the unaccustomed images; groups of dogs wandering the streets, far more debris and litter strewn across the ground than I had ever seen, anywhere, and the sun was still, very, very high in the sky at approximately 8:30 pm. A young Cree man from the house across the street came over and asked if I was looking for the occupants of the house. He told me that he was asked to let me know that they were at the high school and that I was to go meet them there. After an explanation of how to get there, I made my way over, anguishing through curious looks from people who inquisitively looked at the unfamiliar new face in their village.

With the assistance of a group of women outside of the high school, I made my way to a fairly large dinner party being held within,<sup>27</sup> and was introduced to the couple whose house I would occupy. From all outward appearances, neither one of the couple seemed to be of Native origin and both seemed to be within their early fifties. They were a married couple and had been living in Mistissini for an extended period of time. Both worked within the community and it suffices to say, for the sake of anonymity, that one or both worked within the educational system. I will refer to this couple as the "housing couple". The dinner party was rather large: approximately 100 people were in attendance, and it was set up buffet style with people

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<sup>27</sup> I am still unsure of the function of this party and when I have since asked those involved I have had responses ranging from an "end of the school year" to a "walking out ceremony" dinner.

serving you as you walked from table to table. Although the vast majority of people were Native, there were a fair percentage of people who were non-Native as well.<sup>28</sup>

Despite my insistence that I had already eaten, I was directed by the “housing couple” to take a plate and eat. Otherwise, I was told that it would be considered an insult to the people who had organized the event. However, I had been influenced by my mother’s Iranian culture, raised to follow the strict rules of social politeness referred to as “ta’rof”. In brief:

As part of the ritual politesse, the guest generally declines the first offer or two, and finally graciously accepts, amid expressions of the host's kindness. ... Therefore, Iranians may be somewhat surprised if a (foreign) host offers them food and takes their first polite refusal at face value. (Lewis & Stevens, 1986, P. 12)

Therefore, my first learned cultural reaction to politely refuse the meal was, apparently, taken as an insult. I had been in Mistissini for just under thirty minutes and I had already made my first cultural mistake. I made my way around the tables and found a large number of meats for consumption. One woman served me beaver, another goose and yet another, moose. Each did so with a smile on her face and anticipation for a reaction on my part. “Do you like beaver?” one woman asked, smiling. “I’ll try it and let you know,” I responded. As I made my way to the end of the buffet table, I carried my meat-laden plate until a woman stopped me and asked, with a kind smile on her face, if I would like some gravy. I agreed, lifted my plate and she drenched my plate with a clear hot liquid that from my perception (and later, taste), seemed to be pure liquid lard or fat. She then handed me some bread, which she referred to as bannock, and I made my way to an empty chair where the “housing couple” were sitting.

I looked at the plate of food and sampled each meat with the pleasant surprise that I found all quite palatable; in fact, delicious! It should be noted that none of the cuisine could ever be confused with the tastes and smells of the common Anglo-Saxon meals, which were traditional to the area in which I was raised. The meats were stronger and were prepared with less salt, and no herbs. To my palate, a distinct iron-like or metallic like flavour was present in

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<sup>28</sup> This gave me the initial false perception that functions would include a large number of non-Natives. Within the ensuing week, the majority of non-Native working staff left the village to summer in the “south”.

the meat, which I was later informed was due to different curing techniques employed by the Cree in which less “blood-letting” occurs than we are accustomed to in the “south.” There was a distinct lack of vegetables and any that were present were not of the fresh variety to which I was accustomed. All in all, I must admit that I enjoyed my first Native meal but I would attribute that to my own natural philosophy of “try everything before you decide”. Again, this was not a meal that could be confused with an average meal in Montreal.

Despite the usual reluctance and timidity involved in the first group encounter between a new individual and a community, my first social encounter with some of my students and members of the community was quite pleasant. When we were preparing to leave, a Cree woman handed me a paper plate of food covered with tinfoil. The “housing couple” whispered that I had to accept it or, again, I would risk insulting her. I did so and joined the housing couple on their short drive home.

### Warnings

Upon returning to the “housing couple's” home, I sat in their kitchen as they prepared and packed for their travel back to the south. All the while, they “briefed” me on life and expectations in this Cree village. I am sure, especially after discussing the topic with Native peer and mentor, Kathleen Wooton, that such conversations would not have occurred between Natives and non-Natives working within the community. From her experience and research, Kathleen likened this to a building of solidarity between two camps; one being Native the other non-Native. In this early instance, I was in the uncomfortable position of being a confidant due to my non-Native status. As that first evening drew to a close and I excused myself to the bedroom, the conversation was concluded with the assurance that, in the proceeding days before they left, they would introduce me to the non-Natives in the community with whom I could socialize. At the time, I knew that it was an odd comment to suggest initiations with those who were not of a specific cultural group but I agreed to meet with these suggested people and I did over the next few days. However, I truly believe that this was done in the best of spirits to alleviate any sense of culture shock that was setting in.

From those first few days, most of the conversations I had with the teaching staff that were leaving the community for summer vacations centered on the negative. "Don't try and do too much, most people around here don't care about their education." Much of the teachers' aggravation came from the recent high school graduation, where some of the staff felt that too much material attention was lavished on students who did not deserve a high school graduation certificate, let alone be rewarded for their poor academic performance. They vocalized a great deal of frustration and much of which could (or should) be contributed to the usual complaining that comes from those who work in the schools at the end of a school year.

Many educators warned me of the general disrespect the community had for "education" and for those who worked within the educational system: how the non-Natives and Natives within the schools suffered from a lack of administrative support; how the students "ran" the schools and that it was futile to try to discipline any of the students because, even if the administration supported you, the parents would always "back their children" and never follow through on punishment objectives; high school students, in essence, could be a physical threat and that, due to the lack of support, you were better off to avoid than to confront; how the level of education the students were receiving was far below the level of education students were expected to comprehend in the "south"; and so on. Whether any of those educators realized it or not, a mass of negativity about life in Mistissini was being thrust upon me and in those early days I questioned the sense of having accepted this job and the safety of bringing my family into an environment that was being described so pessimistically. However, I had to note that the housing couple appeared to be comfortable, so this gave me reassurance.

The first two weeks of living in Mistissini was filled with routine: breakfast alone; prepare for class; teach in the morning; lunch alone; teach in the afternoon; correct assignments at home; eat dinner alone; prepare for the next day's class; watch the CBC on television alone; and turn in for the evening to repeat the next day. I still carried the anxiety that had been instilled within me from stories I had been told by non-Natives. This is not to say that life in Mistissini was not in itself so different that it did not cause cultural confusion and a resulting unease. Nonetheless, the opinions of others did influence my self-imposed solitude that I would only later discover could (and would) be shattered through an integration within the

community while at the same time maintaining my own sense of identity. However, it would take some time before I reached this “epiphany”.

### They Sure Can Throw!

One of the first things I noticed when I arrived in Mistissini and was looking at the addresses of each house, was that domiciles that belonged to the Cree School Board carried a plaque that defined them as such. Consequently, whether or not it was an invitation to act like a sitting duck because it was “simply there” or because it represented “the schools”, they were continuously being targeted by the youth in the village. Pelted by rocks, they were usually pockmarked and dented. Therefore, my concentration was periodically interrupted by a deliberate “thunk” as a rock would hit the side of the house.

Initially, when this first started happening, I would run to the window, pull the blinds apart and look to see who had thrown something at the house. After a few days, I became less concerned as I made sure to park my car at a safe distance from the school board sign so it would be safe from damage. On one particularly noisy afternoon, I went outside, leaned over the small porch and silently watched a group of young children, perhaps aged eight to ten, hurl rocks at the plaque or in its vicinity. I can’t be sure if they were throwing rocks at it because it was the Cree School board sign or because it was a convenient target. In any case, I marvelled at their accuracy and chuckled to myself that they would make any baseball scout salivate over their skill. One child noticed I was watching them, suddenly stopped and tugged at his other friend’s shirt as he was in mid-throw. They all stopped and the rock thrower asked, in English, “Are you (the house couple’s) son?” I shook my head and said “No.” “Are you a teacher?” he asked. I shook my head again, “Nope, I’m here to teach your parents how to become your teachers,” I said, while pointing at them. They looked a little confused and then asked, “Do you live here now?” “For now,” I responded, “but I won’t be staying.”

I continued, “Do you guys play baseball?” Polite nods of the head and a few verbal acknowledgments ensued. “Man, you must be really good! I could have never hit that sign when I was your age.” Some laughed but most looked at me with a defiant concern over the matter. “I don’t care if you throw rocks at the house, you know,” I told them. More confused

looks ensued. "This isn't my house, you know. Whose house is it?" I asked. One child quickly chirped the name of the family name of the house couple. I shook my head and said, "No way man, this is your house. One day the (house couple) will be gone, I'll be gone and this house will still be here and so will your family and friends and probably you as well. So, when your mom and dad move into this place, they're the ones who will have to look at the mess you made."

I continued and they listened and some smiled, maybe internally laughing at me, probably suspicious of my little speech and me. I said goodbye, went inside and the children hung around outside for a while and then walked off. I would like to think that I gave them an insight into their civic responsibilities and gave them a sense of ownership over their schools and village but I doubt it. After all, I was just another non-Native educator-type giving them another sermon. Nevertheless, I never did see them throwing rocks at the house anymore, although I still, on occasion, heard the familiar sound of rock hitting metal and thought, "Wow man, they really do have good aim!"

#### Girl on the Stairway

One of the unplanned tasks we had as instructors in Cree territory was to find and organize our physical teaching environment. The CEGEP would leave the job of finding and setting up a classroom to assumed representatives in each village and I use the word "assumed" because, more often than not, most of us found that this was, apparently, a new responsibility placed upon unsuspecting members of the school board. Therefore, if one wanted to have a classroom to teach in, you had to find a solution yourself, usually with the help of your students. Prior to my first teaching day, I found myself with no clear classroom or location to teach in and if not for the help of Charles Matoush and Matthew Iserhoff, two administrators in the Cree School Board's Adult Education, we would have not been able to commence the course at all.

As a temporary solution, Charles and Matthew, with the generosity of the high school principal, set us up in a classroom at the local high school. The building would, for the most part, be empty and after assuring the teacher, whose room we would be using, that everything

would be returned to its original state, we occupied the room. There were still a few activities that were going on in the high school: teachers were packing up whatever belongings they wanted to keep safe, the janitorial staff was preparing for the annual, big summer clean up and, occasionally, some students were in the building (I assumed to perhaps visit a teacher but the students were always shooed away by the custodial staff).

It took us little time to organize our classroom and within two days we were developing a teaching and learning routine and were comfortable within our environment. However, now and then a student would ask if we were going to stay in the high school for the entire program or if we were going to move to the "adult-ED" building. My usual response was that we were to stay in the high school for the summer semester and that I was unsure what would happen for the fall semester. At this time, I was uncertain whether I would be returning to Mistissini or whether I would even be returning to the program itself. I was ambiguous about my return to the village and the students were ambiguous about their concern that they might not return to the high school in September. I figured that, as adults, they did not want to have to deal with all the issues surrounding teenagers. I had a class of eleven students (we started with twelve but one left because she had been offered a job she could not refuse), the youngest students, only two of them, were in their early twenties but most were in their late thirties to early forties. All were women and all except the two youngest were mothers with families ranging from one child to seven children. Three of the students had come from a Nascapi village near Schefferville, some distance away but the rest resided in Mistissini. All, I would soon discover, were wonderful and a pleasure to work with. In time, I would realize that you could not have asked for a better class or met better people.

During the first few teaching days, the students would disperse at our coffee breaks, either to buy a snack from the grocery store or to check on their children. I would go upstairs to sit in the usually empty staff room and collect my thoughts. On the Wednesday, my third teaching day, we broke for our regular morning coffee break and everyone followed their usual custom. As I turned an elbow in the staircase, I encountered a group of young teenage girls, four young women who were approximately sixteen in age. Although I heard them screeching as they were coming down the stairs, their yelling echoing in the stairwell, the speed at which we came into contact took me by surprise.



Suddenly, I looked up and there they were: smiling, joking and rough-housing with each other, half walking down the stairs and half falling as they mockingly pushed each other and subsequently gripped on to the handrails to avoid tumbling. I barely had a moment to smile as one girl half slipped towards me. A bushel of long black hair covered her face and as she laughed and pulled it away she saw that I was standing a few stairs below her and directly in her path. I put my hand out in case she slipped any farther. She regained her balance, half stood up, blew the strands of hair off her face, looked at me right in the eyes, pulled her arm back and took a swing at the direction of my face as hard as she could.

In a moment, I pulled back and the weight of her swing carried her forward as she stumbled down the remainder of the stairs. She caught herself at the elbow of the handrail as I took another step away from her. She composed her balance and stood erect as she spoke in Cree. Although her language was unfamiliar, her tone was not; she was obviously expressing her displeasure. The other girls started laughing and ran down the remainder of the stairs, grabbing their friend and commenced pulling her down the next flight of stairs, but the girl momentarily resisted as she maintained eye contact with me, all the while continuing to express something towards me in the Cree language that, through her tone, sounded less than flattering. In an instant she yielded to her friends and ran down the stairs and out of eyesight as their voices became distant as well.

I stood at the spot, trying to process the fact that a young woman, who I had never seen before, just tried as hard as she could to hit me in the face. Why? Because she thought I was a new teacher? Because she thought I wasn't Cree? Because she thought I was someone else? Was she simply angry and intoxicated (I couldn't tell from our brief encounter but she sure acted as such) and expressing her displeasure at the high school and everyone within? I struggled for an answer and when I couldn't find one, returned to my classroom and waited for my students to start meandering in.

I told them what had happened in the stairway and although I can't say they responded in disbelief, which is what I expected, they responded in sympathetic resolution. One student angrily stated that the custodial staff shouldn't be allowing students to run amok in the hallways and the others agreed, stating that they would talk to the head custodian. No one had a reason for the attempted assault but they became resolved on one issue, summed up

succinctly by a student: "We're not going to stay in the high school for next semester, right?" Although it was posed as a question, it was more a statement.

### Damaged Car and a Good Samaritan

The first Saturday alone in the housing couple's house allowed me the opportunity to catch up on sleep so I didn't pull myself out of bed until 9:00 a.m. that morning. I had been missing quite a bit of sleep from the disorientation of the extra day-time sunlight that would envelop the village until late in the evenings. Dusk in this part of the world didn't arrive until approximately 10:30 p.m., and this creates an inordinate amount of activity that seems to swirl about the house and streets as the youths in the village made up for the early sunset in the winter.

With my coffee in hand, I looked out the large living room window to check the weather and see what the village would be like on an early Saturday morning. Not surprisingly, the streets were devoid of the same hustle and bustle that occupied the roads during the workweek. As I slowly took in the quiet of the village, my eye turned to something that seemed to be hanging off the front end of my vehicle. I couldn't tell what it was from a distance, so I dressed and went outside to inspect it. As I neared my vehicle, it was clear that the corner panel of the car had been dented and the entire headlamp and its housing was hanging loose, being held to the car by only its wires.

I knelt by the damage and saw the distinct image of a treaded footprint within the dent. Obviously, somebody with a great deal of fury had come across the car and kicked it with all his/her might. A flood of emotions and questions filled my head and I mostly had thoughts of persecution, self-pity and feeling like a victim. "Is everybody trying to tell me to leave?" I thought to myself; suddenly the act of perhaps one person became an "everybody" issue. I made a futile effort to replace the broken headlamp but it was too damaged. I thought about the warning a non-Native teacher had given me about having a new car in Mistissini and the risk of having it vandalized.

As the story was told to me, this non-Native teacher had purchased a rather expensive vehicle. Within a matter of days, the individual witnessed one of his students pulling off an exterior accessory on his car. He followed up on the incident with the police and the child's parents agreed to pay for the damages done to the vehicle but the non-Native teacher did not feel this was adequate. He felt that simply paying for the damage was not enough and that some sort of punishment should be part of the resolution as well. He suggested to the parents that the girl should be required to keep his yard clean of garbage for a month or so. In his opinion, this was a reasonable punishment for an act of vandalism and would have been a usual and expected form of punishment that would have been administered in the suburban community in which he was raised. The father was appalled by this suggestion and refused to have his daughter perform any such act and was seemingly insulted. The matter was dropped as the non-Native teacher felt that pursuing the issue would have placed him in further likelihood of having his property damaged.

I continued to look at the damage, assessing the cost of the damage to the vehicle and distressing over the fact that I had yet to receive my first paycheck and I already had to spend it on repairing my car. Unexpectedly, a young Cree woman, no more than eighteen years of age, began to walk towards me from the house across the street. "Is your car damaged?" she asked. I responded that the headlight was broken and the corner panel was dented, pointing to the damage. She nodded her head and said, "I was feeding my baby early this morning and I saw who did it." She described that a young man had walked down the street in an obviously inebriated manner with a few of his friends. As he staggered down the street, she reported, he simply stumbled over to my car and kicked it and then continued on his way.

I waited through a moment of silence and then she volunteered the person's name. I thanked her for her consideration and asked if she would be willing to tell the police what she saw and she readily agreed. I was very impressed by her conscientious sense of responsibility, as she had no reason to put herself in a position of conflict. The police were contacted and she gave her testimony.

After a few days, the young man's father came to discuss the matter with me and offered to pay for the damage in return for dropping all charges that had been laid with the police. Trying to make sense of the vandalism, I asked the father why his son would have

blatantly caused damage to somebody else's property and his reaction seemed very akin to that of the girl's (who had damaged the non-Native teacher's car) father. He was reluctant to discuss any reason for his son's actions and seemed insulted that he would be asked to offer any such cause. Moreover, when I informed him of the cost of the replacement pieces (as I had already contacted the dealership for a quote), he was shocked by the estimated price. He then refused to pay any such amount and said that because his son was a minor that the court system wouldn't hold anyone accountable.

True to his word, that is exactly what happened. I never even knew if the young man received a "slap on the wrist" and he certainly was not obligated to repay me for damages. In truth, I also feared that if I pursued the matter with any great effort that it would simply leave me open to retaliation. Although it struck me as odd that two non-Native people would have such similar experiences regarding parents' attitudes towards their children's vandalism, it was tempered by the act of the "Good Samaritan" who was brave enough to volunteer information against a young individual who seemingly had little regard for the property of people in his community.

### Solitude, Anxiety and Unwanted Visits

Time passed excruciatingly slowly during that first month in Mistissini. Being alone in somebody else's house, located within an unfamiliar land and culture with no family or friends to occupy your interests, a boring routine set in. It was a repetitive, reclusive routine that, in retrospect, I now realize was completely self-imposed. I was cultivating fears of doubt that had been filled within me by others who had, for their own personal reasons, given up on the idea of ever perceiving Mistissini in a positive light again.

Walks back and forth from the high school and my lodging (I call it a lodging because I cannot truthfully define it as a "home") was a particularly isolating experience. I would often get glances and stares from people who, at the time, I felt barely acknowledged me. With the exception of my students, I barely knew anyone on a casual, courteous basis and even fewer people by name. Spending time at the house was like barricading myself from the outside world; I would assure myself that if I could just get through the next few months, I could then

use this professional experience to apply to CEGEPs in the Montreal area the following semester and leave this foreign place. Some incidents were so trying and unfamiliar that they literally filled me with an anguish I had never felt before. A case in point is the group of teenagers who would regularly sit outside the basement window where my bed was situated.

I slept in the guest room of the house, which was in the basement. Because the window to the room was at ground level, anyone within it would be very aware of any activity within close proximity to the house. The rear of the house itself, where the bedroom window was located, was very near to one of the few stores in the village and provided visual shelter from the main roads. This provided an excellent area for a group of teens to hang out, have a couple of beers and then return back and forth to the store to purchase junk food. In the evenings, I would lie in bed and see their silhouettes shadowed against the closed blinds, walking to and fro and hear their roughhousing, screams and laughter. The youths would “party” until 1:00 or 2:00 a.m., disperse and then return in smaller groups to have quieter conversations. In the mornings, I would invariably find empty beer bottles or cans, makeshift benches made out of various materials found nearby and a variety of empty junk food containers. And every morning I would kick apart the benches in a vain attempt to communicate that I did not want them to return there again.

I found the routine to be tiring. After a week and half of enduring it, a student, Penny, asked one morning during a coffee break why I appeared to be so tired. I explained about my unwanted visitors and how they had been keeping me up at night. The group of students who were in earshot, stopped and listened to me retell the evening’s customs. My students stared at me in disbelief and one of them, Christine, looked at me in dissatisfaction and gestured at me, “Look at the size of you! Why don’t you tell them to go away and stop bothering you?” she said. Christine’s statement was less a question than a challenge: a challenge as to why I would allow a group of unseen youths to disturb my life. I had not anticipated this response and spent the rest of the day wondering why I had allowed this to continue.

I thought about Christine’s comment and realized that, had this activity occurred in Montreal, I would have never allowed it to progress. Was I scared? It was difficult for me to accept the idea that I was fearful of a small group of teenagers but that seemed to be the case. The fact that I was fearful was evident from the nature and tone of the phone calls that I had

made with my wife and family at the time. As they would now attest, these calls were always filled with anxiety and the overemphasis on everything that was different.

One call in particular was a warning to my wife on proper attire and presentation. "Melanie", I told her, "women up here don't wear dresses or make-up. So, don't bring anything up here but jeans." As only a partner could, recognizing the unfamiliar anxiety I was conveying, Melanie attempted to reassuringly laugh off my warnings as an exaggeration and my reaction belied her instincts that she could somehow bolster my confidence. "I'm not joking Melanie!" I yelled, "This isn't Montreal!" After a ten minute tirade, magnifying everything negative I had encountered, I hung up the phone with my wife in tears, having filled her head with all the negatives she was now preparing herself to encounter. I had done to her what had been done to me and now she would feel the anxiety and fear of the unknown.

That night, the group of teens returned to their hangout next to my bedroom window. I sat in bed, listening to their unfamiliar language, and wondered what kind of environment I was leading my family into. Subsequently, I thought of what Christine had said to me and then I questioned why I had not gone outside and simply asked the teenagers to leave. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that there was an element of fear involved with simply going outside and confronting a group of teenagers who were so culturally different than me. I did not know what reaction to expect: would they be as openly hostile to me as the young woman in the hallway? I was afraid of not being able to anticipate their reaction: would they make fun of me; be verbally abusive; cause damage to the property or the car; or worse, be physically aggressive?

My thoughts then turned to my wife and daughter and the fear I had put into my wife over what to expect in Mississauga. Moreover, I wondered how our eleven-month old daughter was going to be able to sleep through the noise these youths were making and I thought about the callousness of these youths; I would have never been so inconsiderate in my teenage years. Surely, they must have younger siblings, cousins, and nephews, nieces or neighbours for whom they would have been hushed to silence during naptime or bedtime.

Dressed in a sweat-suit, I jumped out of bed armed with the notion that I may perhaps appeal to any nurturing feelings within them. Outside and turning the corner of the house, I saw approximately four teenage boys and two teenage girls, some of them sitting against the wall

and two boys standing up making exaggerated gestures while laughing, one of them with a baseball cap, explaining something to the amusement of his friends. One of the young men caught eye of me approaching and turned to face me. Everyone stopped laughing and looked at me, save the one young man who was telling his story who simply smiled at me with an innocent, assured confidence as it seemed obvious he was still enjoying whatever he was relaying to his friends.

I said, "Hi, I'm teaching CEGEP courses up here and my wife and daughter will be joining me in a week or two and we will be staying in this house for the next couple of weeks". Blank responses as all continued to look at me. So, I continued, "Anyway, our daughter is just a baby", I said while folding my arms and commenced a mock rocking of a baby motion, "and the noise you guys make will keep her up all night." I paused momentarily and watched for a reaction and received none. So, I continued, "I don't mind you guys hanging around here for the next week or so, but in two weeks my wife and daughter are coming and I'd really appreciate it if you guys were ..." I paused and I wanted to say "gone" but instead I said, "*quieter*".

A moment of silence passed that seemed like an hour but then the young man with a baseball cap turned around, put his finger to his lips and said, "Shhhhhh", and then seemingly motioned to everyone with his hands to be quiet while speaking in Cree. I smiled and said, "Goodnight", some of them smiled back and as I turned around and headed for the door on the other side of the house a young man responded in a high-pitched voice, "Nighty-night!", which was followed by laughter. I had to laugh too, as I realized that I was the typical, old next-door neighbour who complained that "the music was too loud." I turned around again and responded, "Nighty-night" in a similar high-pitched fashion and heard another round of laughter.

As I got back into bed, the voices continued but now they were more muffled. Although occasionally someone would raise his or her voice in laughter, it was always followed by whispered hushes and an increased lowering of voices. The teenagers never came back to that location and when Christine asked me what had happened to the kids who were hanging around the back of the house, she seemed genuinely pleased that I had gone back to talk to

them. But, I think she was even more pleased that the Cree teenagers were respectful enough to leave when I told them that they might disturb a baby.

### Thunderstorms and Threats

Friends and relatives would always ask about the snowstorms in Mistissini and it would always disappoint them when we would explain that, when we were there, snow in the north would fall like a constant gentle reminder of winter. This was unlike the recurrent snowstorms in Montreal that would always be followed by a measure of fallen snow. In Mistissini that year, snow fell in a continuous, soft snowfall that would slowly but steadily amass a huge amount of snow. It would pile up to levels that reminded me of my youth in Montreal, when snow drifts and snow banks grew taller than any of us. That summer's rainfall, in comparison, would either be non-existent or fall with the same fury that would remind me why some children were afraid of thunderstorms.

From my perception, thunder and lightning would amass its strength on the large lake of Mistissini and by the time it hit the village, it would do so with spectacular explosions of sound and light. On one particular night, the second Friday night that I was in the village, the thunder and lightening ignited with such force that it shook me from my slumber. Or at least I thought that was what interrupted my sleep. I awoke to the flash of lightening that illuminated the basement room and an immediate thunder crack that left no doubt that I was indeed in the eye of a storm. I momentarily sat up, tried to process what was going on around me, sleepily acknowledged that it was simply a storm, and lay back down to sleep. In an instant, there was another crack of lightning and thunder and then another but I sluggishly thought to myself that there was something wrong; the noises I was hearing weren't just thunder. A distinct, persistent and forceful banging at the door followed each of the thunderclaps. In an instant I was out of the bed and flew up the stairs, more asleep than awake, unaware, really, where I was but reacting to what I thought was the urgency that was causing someone to bang at the front door. It's the same reaction one would have to the ringing of the telephone that disturbs one's sleep. Depending on your personality, you either dread whatever message the person on the other end has for you or you grab the phone immediately, ready to confront whatever



awaits. It wasn't until I reached for the knob at the door, releasing the lock mechanism, that I fully realized that I wasn't in Montreal anymore.

I quickly pulled the door open, my physical reaction not catching up with my brain, and as God is my witness, to further the drama to the situation, lightning and thunder detonated at the exact moment to reveal the individuals at the door in the exact manner a "b" rated director would envision. It was so tacky and yet it happened. In front of me were approximately five to eight men and the combination of the rapidity in which I opened the door and the thunderclap shocked my visitors more than it did me and they all seemed to simultaneously jump backwards.

The rain came down like pulsating sheets of rain and the men staggered in place, shuffling their feet back and forth assessing me. I continued to stand on the threshold of the doorway, feet planted inside with my hand still on the doorknob. Everyone seemed unsure of what to do next. They were soaked. Furthermore, if it wasn't evident by their physical stance that they were quite drunk, it was made more so when the man standing directly ahead of me spoke in slurred speech.

"We don't like teachers!" he yelled over the rain. I stood silently, trying to assess the situation but was still fighting the fog and disorientation in my head from just waking up. Then he said, "We came here to stab you!" I looked around from person to person. Most appeared to be looking at the ground, too inebriated to follow what their friend was saying and some were looking in my direction.

Perhaps this is an appropriate time to give a "rich description" of these men and especially the one standing in front of me, without falling into traps of ethnic generalizations. As a man who is a smidge over six foot and, depending on how much sports I am involved in at the time, weighs between 220 and 230 pounds, I have always felt like a physically bigger person than those around me. It's safe to say that when I play hockey in Montreal, I am one of the bigger men on the ice; in Mississauga, however, I am of average size. Needless to say, the men who stood in front of me were, for lack of a better word, "challenging" or perhaps "intimidating", in all respects.

They were still two steps away from the front door and myself and the rain continued to pound down obscuring their movement. Was that a glimmer of metal in his hand, a knife or a

can of beer? I wasn't sure. Suddenly, before anyone could say anything, I said, "You came here in the pouring rain to tell me you're going to kill me? Why don't you come back again tomorrow when you're sober and I'm awake and then we'll fight." And then I simply shut the door like somebody shuts the curtains of movie screen halfway through the film.

I started to walk down the stairs and halfway down stopped and sat down. What the hell just happened? Were they serious? What did he just say? *What did I just say?* Only then did my heart start to pound as I started to realize where I was and that I was completely alone. Moreover, I just responded to a threat with a threat, a stupid, stupid reaction that smacked of the kind of bravado and posturing that I may have indulged in when I was at a Montreal bar, surrounded by friends. But this time I didn't have any friends around me to make sure that things didn't get out of control. It all seemed ridiculous, like a typical, cliché scene from a Cowboy and Indian movie when the "white-guy" is woken in the middle of the night by the Natives looking to drive him off their land. I couldn't believe this was happening. It was all so ridiculous and formulaic. Moreover, after living my entire life as an ethnic "other", how did I suddenly become the "white-guy" in this context?

I continued to hear rustling outside and nervously made my way up the stairs and peered out the window. The group of men were milling around in the rain and I hoped that somehow the rain would discourage them from hanging about. I was starting to fully grasp the real danger of this situation and I had no idea what to do next. However, in an instant two shadowed figures ran from the house across the street and started to grab at the men, shoving them into the street and pushing them on their way. Through the rain I recognized one of the obscured figures as the son of one my students, whom I had met earlier. They physically handled the inebriated men in a way that suggested familiarity; had they not known them, such action could have been construed as being aggressive. With persistence, the two young men sent the midnight visitors on their way to stagger down the road until the rain shrouded their receding images.

I went to the door and opened it up. One of the young men stood on the driveway, now soaked by the continuing rain. "Are you OK?" he asked. I thanked him and said yes, quietly admiring his bravery for helping somebody that he did not know. "I think they threatened to kill me," I said laughing nervously, because I didn't know how else to say it. He waved his

hand in a dismissive manner, "No, they're just drunk", he said as an explanation that seemed to make complete sense to him. I thanked him again and then he ran home to get out of the rain.

I do not know how he was greeted when he returned home, but, as far as I was concerned, he should have received a hero's welcome: not many would do what he and his friend did for me. In fact, I wonder if he even remembers doing this or knows what kind of an impact it had on me. Maybe it slipped from his memory; like the person who forgets he/she stopped their car to help someone change a tire, but for the person who was helped on that day, he or she remembers it for the rest of their life. It's all a matter of perception. I later spoke of the incident to his mother and although she seemed pleased with her son, she also appeared very concerned for my safety. I came away from the incident with the conviction that I had brought much of this on myself. I was guilty of acting like a recluse and in doing that I fully believed that I had brought about any "bad fortune" upon myself.

I resolved that I would no longer live the next few months hiding from the community in an attempt to avoid any clashes in culture. I wanted to somehow start living in the community as myself, comfortable in being me but respectful of the differences of the others with whom I would now try to mix into my life. I hoped that in doing this I would never have that feeling of being all alone again, of feeling like it was the village against me, of being the hated non-Native teacher who seemed to evoke such negative reactions. The next Saturday morning, I took the first steps in achieving this goal by joining the local fitness club that was frequented by a number of Cree athletes. I knew that this was a setting that would normally invite conversation and that perhaps I could start to simply make friends with people in the community with whom I shared an interest; that is, as opposed to the suggested friends that I was introduced to because they were simply non-Native.

In epilogue to this incident, I briefly met the man who had threatened me months later in a very non-formal setting. He never ventured his name, perhaps because he thought others had already done that (which they had not) and, furthermore, I never asked. He briefly and sheepishly said that he appreciated that I had never called the police that night and I shook his hand and assured him that we have all done stupid things when we have had one too many beers to drink. It was an awkward moment and it thankfully ended as quickly as it had begun.

In truth, I did not think that his behaviour had been acceptable but I was beginning to understand that to do something like that, to make the semi-conscious attempt to make your way through the pouring rain to confront a “teacher”, there must be some deep-seated resentment there. Moreover, it may have appeared that I was somehow a “good guy” for not having called the police that night but, truth be told, if I had been in the proper state of mind, I probably would or should have called them. Besides, I didn’t even know if I was supposed to dial “911” or a local number.

As I mentioned, that brave young man’s mother (my student) seemed more concerned for my safety and that I be rid of any worries about any further danger. “I told my son to look out for you”, she reassuringly informed me. I have retold this incident on a number of occasions to close friends and a few select relatives and I usually get the same reaction of how bravely I behaved. I am always a bit frustrated by this response because, in my mind, the point of the story is that those two young boys were courageous for having braved the thunderstorm and a bunch of inebriated, rowdy guys to help somebody who they did not even know. I reacted the way I did because I was asleep and was forced to consciousness by a mixture of fear and adrenaline. Those “boys” acted the way they did when they were awake and saw a situation brewing and thought that a newcomer in their town needed help. As I have said, I have retold this story on a number of occasions but I do not think those two boys ever have; probably because they don’t think it was half the incident I do and perhaps because they were simply doing what they thought was the right thing to do.

### The Breakfast

My mind was made up to change the atmosphere and impressions that had been influenced and created towards this village and its people. I made the conscious effort to change my own perspectives: I would no longer hide from the people of this village. Instead, I would try to introduce myself to them and try and get to know them as well.

As mentioned, my first attempt at this was to join the local fitness centre. As the fitness centre was located within the high school, I had numerous occasions to walk past it and watch the activities that were going on within. It was a surprisingly new facility; in general, the club

had all the appearances of a Montreal centre, as it sported modern equipment, similar layout, nutrient supplements, fast paced music and all other relevant amenities. It was not an overly large centre, one that could be compared to the sprawling fitness clubs of Montreal, but adequately matched the population for which it was intended. The managers and supervisors of the fitness centre, with the exception of one, were all Cree and shared the same attributes of fitness trainers in the “south”: they were all very friendly and helpful.

Although I suspected that the non-Natives might have predominantly used the exercise room, it was not the case. The majority of people using the club were Cree men, aged between 20 and 40. There were very few Cree women using the club. However, there were a few non-Native women who made regular visits. The men who frequented the centre were of mixed occupations and interests; it provided access to a wide variety of individuals within the community.

The relatively recent opening of the fitness centre also provided a unique opportunity to mix in a setting that was not altogether familiar to anyone. The hope was that this would be a perfect environment to catch people outside of their social routines and comfort zones.

I quickly developed a daily regimen of attending the fitness centre and within no time at all I began to meet people in an environment that was conducive to initial, small talk. I met many local people at the gym and each one deserves a description and recorded narrative of his own but two local Cree men stand out for having assisted me in accessing the community and developing a sense of security within it. One, Steve, who along with his wife Darlene, later ended up sharing a home with my family. The other was Charlie with whom I had cordial conversations at the gym and one very memorable encounter just prior to the arrival of my family.

Charlie was a shy but affable person; and he was a heavy set, barrel-chested, wide-shouldered man who was quite taken with the fitness centre experience. He would just as easily show up by himself as he would with a friend. When you do not have the luxury of a workout partner, you must often turn to the assistance of another regular at the centre to assist (or “spot”) you when lifting heavy weights. At the gym, Charlie was quick to greet me and if he was working out with friends would politely introduce me. Outside of the gym, Charlie was equally personable and his disposition gave me a sense of ease, in that I was beginning to

develop positive relationships with people who were not necessarily Native, but who “belonged” to the village of Mistissini.

Charlie and I often shared pleasant conversations outside of the gym, in public locations and a few times, he came to the house I was lodging at and shared a cup of coffee with me. Somehow, some of the students in my class caught wind of my association with him and disapprovingly wagged their fingers at me, claiming that I should have better judgement in my friends. All my students were avowed non-drinkers and Charlie was known to “party”. His well-known reputation as a consumer of alcohol brandished him as an undesirable in their eyes. I got the sense that my association with a “drinker” was somehow a blemish on their own reputation as I was their instructor. From my perspective, it was an odd conclusion for them to make since they all knew that I drank alcohol and was only refraining myself in Mistissini out of respect for their values. In any case, their warnings did not dissuade me from my friendly associations from Charlie.

Charlie was never a big conversationalist and really put you at ease more with his demeanour than with any reassuring words. When he came to visit, we would sit and watch television, drink coffee, and occasionally comment on what we were watching. Most of the time we sat in silence. Sometimes, Charlie would ask me questions about where I grew up, what my job was and how much schooling I had and asked him similar questions.

Once, while sitting at the kitchen table, he asked me what my ethnic background was. I am always reluctant to describe my ethnic identity, as I am never sure whether someone will react negatively to either the Iranian/Muslim/Jewish, Italian/Catholic or English/Protestant part of my ethnicity. I explained that I was a complicated mix of ethnicities and cultures but if I had to describe myself ethnically, I would classify myself as being a multicultural Canadian. I continued that if you were keen on getting a classification from me, I would emphasise my Iranian heritage because I had experienced too much racism from the other two other ethnic groups to really feel a part them. He seemed interested in this and as I described what I had encountered growing up in the predominantly white-Anglo Saxon suburbs of the West-Island of Montreal, he smiled, shook his head disapprovingly and shared his own experiences about how he would be treated when he would go into the non-Native towns. We continued to exchange stories and when I made the comment that I did not feel that, in principle, bigotry or

intolerance was directly attributable to the colour of one's skin, Charlie seemed unconvinced that this was possible. I then explained what had recently happened with my "thunderstorm midnight visitors" and as I described the incident, Charlie's expression grew increasingly shocked. He stated that, had they known me, there was no way they ever would have threatened me. I shrugged my shoulders and told him that this was small comfort.

In justification of his rationale, he briefly explained that when he went to school the teachers were abusive, both physically and mentally, and that it was hard not to think of a teacher as an unpleasant person. I expressed my growing understanding of his perception and when he parted he shook his head, smiled and said, "You must have been scared when you opened up the door". I nodded my head and joked, "Yeah, but I was too asleep to know it!"

I did not see Charlie for the next couple of days at the fitness club nor did I see him in the stores or streets. The next time I saw Charlie, he was with two of his friends and pounding on my front door at five o'clock on a Saturday morning. The banging on the door woke me from my sleep and I momentarily had that sense of déjà vu as I sat up in my bed, listening to the furious knocking. I was awake faster than I was when I was visited in the middle of the night and as I made my way up the stairs I was resolute to put an end to any further harassment, assuring myself that if I told them that this time I was calling the police, it would dissuade them from further threats. With my hand on the door knob, I mustered my confidence and opened the door quickly and saw Charlie directly in front of me.

Charlie was accompanied by two of his friends, neither of whom I was familiar with, and they were obviously very, very drunk. Charlie looked at me and then started to walk through the threshold. I put my hand out and stopped him from entering and he took a staggered step or two back. "Do you got any booze in the house?" he asked. We had never discussed the topic of alcohol before so I simply told Charlie, "No, we're not allowed to have any in this house." He seemed unconvinced and again he tried to push past me and said, "C'mon, you have to have some beer!" This time I pushed Charlie back a little harder and if it had not been for the booze I probably would not have been able to physically manoeuvre him so easily. "Charlie," I said, "I don't have any booze but I can make you guys some coffee and breakfast, so you're not walking around in the streets drunk." A moment of silence passed.

Charlie was still looking at the ground and his friends, despite their intoxication, looked a little uncomfortable and embarrassed.

"No beer?" he asked again. "No beer ... but I got coffee and breakfast." Charlie glanced back at his friends. "Coffee and breakfast?" he asked them. They nodded. "OK, coffee and breakfast!" and they all came in and sat themselves around the kitchen table. Charlie introduced me to his friends and they smiled and we shook hands. "Where's the wife and kids?" Charlie asked as he looked around. "They're not coming in until next week. C'mon man! Please don't tell me you came here drunk and you thought my wife and daughter were here. That's not cool, Charlie!" I told him. He put his hands up in the air, as if to say "relax, I give up" and said, "OK, now I know!" I gave them coffee and fried them up a big plate of hamburgers. Charlie's friends ate appreciatively, the way one would eat after a full night of drinking, and periodically smiled in gratitude. Charlie, while garnishing his burgers, made a comment underneath his breath about eating hamburgers for breakfast and then said out loud, "You guys eat hamburgers for breakfast where you come from?" Sarcastically, I responded, "Sorry sir, I forgot to bring you your menu!" We laughed and he resumed his breakfast.

After consuming a number of hamburgers and a few rounds of coffee, Charlie became serious and said, "You know that thing that happened to you with those guys coming here in the night?" Surprised by his question, I reluctantly acknowledged that I did. "Last night, I talked to the people who were here and they won't come around anymore to bother you. I told them that you were "OK" and that I'd protect you!" Charlie declared. I really didn't know how to respond. In many ways it reminded me of the kind of drunken machismo that most men, (including myself probably), display when they are in this state and I have always responded very reluctantly to this kind of bravado, but in a way, I was touched that he would offer such protection. As Charlie continued, he explained that there was a sort of inner circle of, as he termed it, half jokingly, "a kind of Cree Mafia" and that if he offered his protection of someone to the group, no one would touch that person.

Did I think he was just bragging? My instincts said yes, but it did not matter because he was very earnest in what he was saying and he genuinely seemed to be trying to convey that he wanted me to feel safe in his community. Moreover, in a way, I wanted to believe that I



had somehow found a protector in the community, so that I would not have to worry about the safety of my wife and daughter.<sup>29</sup>

I thanked Charlie for his support and told him I would do no less for him if he ran into the same trouble in Montreal. His friends sat silently at the table, every so often nodding their head in agreement with what Charlie was saying or commenting briefly in support of another one of Charlie's statements. "Everyone around this table is a warrior!" Charlie exclaimed with the kind of boldness that most men have after a couple of drinks. "And we are all ready to do what we have to do! Do you know what that means?" "I think so," I responded; lying. Charlie nodded in silent agreement. The conversation then continued on to discussing local politics, the plans he and his friends had for protecting the sovereignty of Cree territory and a sometimes heart-wrenching, sometimes funny declaration by Charlie and his friends that they were all "going to be drinkers until Jesus caught up with them". Charlie may have been drunk but it was the most opinionated and animated I had ever seen him.

They stayed in the kitchen until mid-morning and then all got up and made their way to the door. Each man shook my hand and thanked me for the hospitality and one of Charlie's friends made a joke about having me stop by his mother's house for a hamburger breakfast next time.

Charlie ended up getting a full-time job at the local mining operation and I saw him less and less frequently. True to his word, following the arrival of my wife and daughter, although he did come by to meet them, I never saw him inebriated at my front door again and I was never again woken up in the middle of the night by people threatening me. I don't know, perhaps he was telling the truth.

### Moose Hides

After three weeks of intensive culture shock experiences, the "shock" part of the experience started to reduce in intensity. My perception was beginning to change and this was due to the conscious effort I was making to force myself to experience as much as I could

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<sup>29</sup> It would be months until I ever met the man at the door who had threatened me and reconcile any feelings of victimisation.

within the village. Incidents in the village, from the common to larger celebratory events, I would actively avoid. For instance, one of the men “working out” in the gym inquired if I had ever played baseball. I acknowledged that I had and he invited me to come play a “pick up” game. I experienced a sense of nervousness that I had never felt before; one would think that a “game”, with all its common and pre-established rules, would be a comforting environment. But, I wasn’t at that mental point and I secretly worried that, perhaps, I would be out of place and that the game would have a different interpretation of the rules of conduct and action to which I was accustomed. I feigned an excuse of a commitment to grading tests that night and then sat at home feeling weak for not having taken advantage of the opportunity to mix more fully with the men from the community.

Early that evening, I received a phone call from a colleague in Montreal. As we talked, I tried to describe the environment in which I was living in. Half-heartedly, I communicated what I saw as I looked out the window. Scanning across the visual plane, I saw and detailed a teepee; a group of snowmobiles that were covered with tarp for the summer; a stretched moose hide, left to tan in the sun; and the endless stretch of trees that surrounded the village. My colleague reacted with impressed shock as I continued my description. Often I would be interrupted, as he would repeat my description, “Are you serious, they have tee-pees up there?” His excitement was apparent as he revelled in the continued existence of articles such as teepees and stretched animal hides. His perspective, from his home in Montreal, was one of wonder. As I hung up the phone I thought about my friend’s excitement over the Native objects I described to him and considered how I, immersed in a foreign culture and homesick, was tainted to the point that I was barely noticing the beauty in such rare objects.

With the sun, from my sensitivity, still too high in the sky for that time of day, I watched as an elderly Cree man approached the stretched animal hide and began to work on the large piece. The animal skin was stretched out in all directions, bound to long pieces of wood that were tied together in a rough square shape. I had seen him working on the hide for the past few days and on a number of occasions had walked past him working on his pelt as I went to and from work, the fitness club and the grocery store and thought of looking over his work more closely. However, the same hesitation that kept me from participating in a simple baseball game kept me from even approaching an elderly man working his craft.

Feeling somewhat ashamed of my earlier reluctance to participate, I resolved to investigate the event. I left the house and approached the elderly man. I made the conscious effort to approach him from within his range of vision, as I wanted to make eye contact with him before to gauge if I would be a welcome visitor. As I walked off the beaten path and onto his property I waved at the elderly man and he stopped working momentarily and smiled and nodded at me. I took that as an invitation and I walked closer and stopped ten feet away as the man kept labouring. The elderly man was thin and shooting out from under his cap in wisps was "salt and pepper" hair that matched perfectly with his sun-rich skin. When he made eye contact with me, his eyes were warm and kind and he would smile, reminding me of the way my elderly Iranian relatives would silently assure me when language was a barrier. He didn't give me the impression that I was intruding and would periodically smile, which gave me the notion it was alright to watch.

The hide was a tan colour and by the large size of it, I assumed that it was perhaps moose. I asked the man if it was moose and he smiled and nodded but I could not be sure that he understood me because he never spoke to me in English. The elderly man was hitting the hide with the blunt side of an axe. Slowly but methodically, the elderly man raised the axe and swung it with surprising force at the hide. The hide would bounce and stretch with each blow and I was amazed that the skin did not tear. The elderly man continued his work and periodically would stop only to inspect the bindings and seemingly tighten the borders and corners. I watched him work for about ten minutes as he continued his work but, from my estimates of watching him from the house, he had been working at it for over an hour.

As the elderly man checked the bindings of hide, I approached closer to inspect the hide in greater detail. The smell of the hide was not unpleasant and reminded me of the smell of salty bacon. I smiled and said, "It's very nice". The old man smiled in return and then picked up his axe and began to make his way to the house and I took the cue to head towards my residence as well.

I returned to the house with a feeling of satisfaction; satisfied that I was not bound to the confines of the residence and satisfied that I was not confined by my own uncertainties. It was interesting that at no point did I feel any distaste for the fact that I was looking at a dead animal skin. I had spent a year of my life, during my CEGEP studies, as a vegetarian and have always been known as sympathetic to animals and their welfare. I would have vehemently

argued that hunting, in itself, was a cruel and senseless act and yet, I didn't have any of those notions as I watched the elderly man work on the animal hide.

Many of the physical characteristics of the village that seemed so different (for instance, the over abundance of garbage strewn about the ground or the noticeable vandalism) were becoming less of an irritant. Other qualities, that had been somehow lost to my attention like white noise in the background, were starting to come to the forefront of my perceptions.

### "Nos Enfants"

At the end of the third week in Mistissini I had an unexpected phone call from Marc an associate with some of the projects going on in the region, who informed me that he had to come to the village to carry out some work and asked if it would be alright if he stayed with me for a few nights. We made arrangements and he enthusiastically told me that he would be bringing his boat with him, as he knew that Lake Mistissini was renowned for its excellent fishing. Although I did not know Marc very well, I looked forward to the opportunity of spending a few evenings in conversation with someone after having spent so many weeks in relative solitude.

On the day that Marc was scheduled to arrive, there was an inordinate amount of children playing in the empty lot between the house in which I was residing and the local store. The group of children were mostly boys ranging in age between nine and twelve years old. The children's activity was noticeable as the ruckus they were making could easily be heard inside the house as the noise poured through the open windows. As had become my custom, I sat at the kitchen table correcting class assignments and periodically peered outside the window to watch what was "going on". On this day, I saw the children roughhousing and checked to see if Marc had arrived or not. After looking back and forth from the student's work to the window, I caught sight, out of the corner of my eye, of a large vehicle pulling a pristine motorboat behind it.

After approximately three weeks of living in Mistissini, it had become easy to notice when "things" looked out of place, especially when it's a slow driving vehicle pulling a boat behind it. I surmised that it was probably Marc and that he was lost in the village, trying to find the house. I ran outside and tried to wave him down but he was too far down the road. I

decided to wait outside until he drove past again and stood at the end of the gravel driveway. The children continued playing and I watched them as they roughhoused with each other.

Although the children did stop to watch Marc's car drive by and noticed me trying to wave him down, they quickly returned to their play. Their fooling around consisted of the usual kind of mock fighting that young boys usually occupy themselves with. Despite the difference in language, it was obvious that the children were imitating the overacting and exaggerated movements of television wrestling. They also appeared to be re-enacting some of the "good-guy vs. bad-guy" story lines that are so common in the wrestling shows: often, children would band together, work themselves into a mock frenzy and then chase after another group of children and initiate their battle.

The play continued in this manner, with groupings of children moving back and forth according to their role. One child in particular, however, was consistently on the outside of both groups and would hang around the periphery of roughhousing children and would occasionally jump in to start fighting with one or two children. The response from the other children was usually to decisively shove the child away disapprovingly and then rejoin in the foray of children with whom they wanted to play.

I remembered the "child on the periphery" because he was pointed out to me by a couple of my students as a particularly aggressive child with whom they discouraged their children from playing.

The children's play then took a different thematic twist, as the majority of the group seemed to turn on this boy. They all appeared to be teasing him and surrounded him while continuing to shout at him. The boy was in tears and was yelling back at them in Cree, visibly upset by what appeared to be a group decision to push him entirely out of their playgroup. The "peripheral child" started to pick up rocks and throw it at the children, a seeming attempt to lash out at them for their verbal berating. What started off as children's squabble changed in an instant, as the "peripheral child" picked up and hurled an almost baseball sized rock at a young boy who was no more than five feet in front of him.

The impact on the child's head made an audibly distinct and horrible "thunk" and blood immediately started pouring from his head. I ran over to the bleeding child, who was now lying on the ground, momentarily motionless and then began to writhe and wail. The boy who threw the rock ran away as soon as he realized the severity of the cut to the child's head and the

other children circled the boy and stared in shock and disbelief. A quick inspection of the child revealed that the cut was at least three inches long, bleeding profusely, and appeared to be quite deep.

I guided the child to the house while placing my hand on his hand and pushing it against the wound to slow down the bleeding. I left him alone outside for a moment and ran into the house to grab a hand towel to stop the bleeding. The child was sobbing quietly and the other children were standing around him communicating quiet concern that could easily be recognized by the expressions on their faces. Wary of moving the child, I asked one of the children whom I knew spoke English, to call the local ambulance or police and the child quickly ran off. The young boy kept crying, his eyes cast to the ground, as I continued to apply pressure to his head and the other children continued to look at him with a mixture of disbelief and concern. There was an awkward moment of silence, with the exception of the child's quiet crying, as we all stood there. It was broken by Marc's honking of the horn as he made his second circle of the village and probably spotted me standing outside the house.

Marc pulled into the driveway with a large smile on his face and jumped out of his car with an outstretched hand to greet me. With my hands still applying pressure to the child's head I sarcastically excused myself, saying that I was a little preoccupied. Marc looked down at the bleeding, sobbing child and asked what happened. I explained the situation and he momentarily had a look of sympathy on his face but the concern quickly faded and began talking about his drive to Mistissini. I was uninterested in discussing his drive and tried as best I could to nonverbally express that this wasn't the time for small talk, by looking as disapproving and uninterested as possible. Marc then went to his vehicle and started pulling out bags and asked where he should put his belongings and I responded in exasperation, quite frankly shocked by his lack of concern for this child's welfare. Marc was coming and going from the car, asking questions about where he should park, where he should put his bags, and so on. I grew increasingly annoyed by what appeared to me, at least, to be his demand for attention at the expense of the child's welfare but did not say anything as I did not know the individual well enough to do so. Moreover, he was my senior, both in terms of age and professionally.

A police vehicle showed up and a young officer, who was a woman, came out of the car and began attending to the child. She spoke in Cree to the child and he responded to her through his tears. She placed his hand over the cloth on his cut and calmly instructed him to

maintain the pressure. The police officer was formal and although her responses and questions to me were curt, she nevertheless appeared very concerned for the child's welfare. As she began guiding the child to the police vehicle I mentioned that I knew the child who threw the rock and if the hurt boy's parents wanted to contact me they could. As she helped the child into the car she responded with reproach and without even making eye contact, saying, "That's not how we do things here!"

She drove away and the children slowly dispersed as I stood motionless, wondering to myself why the police officer had responded the way she did. Had I said something wrong? Did she feel that my statement was "snitch-like"? Moreover, why would the parents of the hurt child not want to know how their child was hurt and who had done it? This is how we would have handled things in the suburbs of Montreal. I continued to remain in place and was only interrupted when Marc came out and resumed his queries over the upcoming afternoon schedule.

Marc was anxious to do some fishing before he would have to commence work the following day and urged that we both go to the lake after a quick lunch. Although I was not a fishing enthusiast, I complied and we made quick preparations. I had a rough idea of where the majority of locals went to access the lake, but had no real knowledge of where we were supposed to go to launch Marc's boat. After making a few inquiries at the shore, we were shown where we could put the boat in the water. With the usual crowd of curious children watching, Marc placed his boat into the water with great precision. As we prepared to leave the shoreline, I motioned to Marc to look at the children fishing off the dock. They were masterfully catching a wide array of fish and Marc smiled and said, "This is a great lake to fish!"

Marc took the boat out into the open waters of Lake Mistissini and began fishing. Within no time he caught a large Pike and proudly reeled it in and netted the fish. With a broad smile on his face he told me that as far as he was concerned, it was a tolerable size for a Pike but that he had caught bigger. Moreover, he expressed, as he unhooked the fish and released it back into the water, that pike was not a palatable fish to eat. He was after the infamous trout that he was told saturated these lakes. But, after that initial pike, we spent an hour in the boat without a single bite.

Marc trolled the boat about, periodically stopping to cast his rod, but despite his earlier assertion of being an accomplished angler began to grow visibly frustrated. Marc, now more

subdued and sombre, brought the boat into a small bay-like part of the lake and began casting. From a distance, a powerboat quickly approached our location. As it neared, the navigator and passengers were revealed to be two young Cree men. Both wore sunglasses and looked slightly more affluent than the majority of Cree youth did, judging by the stylish nature in which they were dressed. The driver brought his boat parallel to ours and gave Marc's boat a scrutinizing look over.

Marc was altogether uncomfortable with the attention we were receiving and repeatedly told me to tell them that he had a licence to fish in this lake. Before I even considered repeating what Marc had said, the young man spoke in English with a small, impish smile on his face, "You're not going to catch any fish around here". His friend quietly laughed and shook his head behind him. "There's no fish around here. You have to go over there," he continued pointing to an area further away from the shoreline, "'cause you won't catch anything here." "What are they saying?" Marc asked impatiently and I translated the young man's advice. "They're lying! There's fish here!" Marc responded with irritation. "Why would they lie?" I asked with the timber of my voice raising an octave. "They don't want me to catch any fish," Marc chided as he continued working on his fishing tackle and then quietly muttered, "They're trying to make us look stupid."

"What did he say?" the young Cree man asked. Annoyed by Marc's aggressive reaction, I simply blurted out, "He doesn't think you're telling the truth and he thinks you want him to fish in another area because you don't want him to catch any fish." "OK" the young Cree man laughed, shaking his head in disbelief. He then restarted his motor and as his boat started to move on he said, "Have fun not catching anything!"

True to his prediction, some two hours later, Marc had not caught anything. During the time after the two young men left, Marc continued to complain how he felt the Natives thought they "owned" the lake and were trying to keep him from catching anything it held. He expressed how he had all the proper licenses to fish in this lake and that no one had the right to tell him to leave. All of his sentiments seemed odd to me because, as far as I was concerned, although it was obvious that the teenagers were laughing *at us*, they were not making any overt suggestions that they did not want us to fish in the lake. From my perspective, I felt they were simply trying to "show up" our lack of knowledge on where to fish.



Resigned to the reality that we were not going to catch anything, Marc brought the boat back to shore. We had quite a few “looks”, smiles and a couple of chuckles from the locals who could not help but notice that we had not caught anything. In the meantime, as we fastened the boat onto the boat-hitch, children walked past with small fishing poles in one hand and a multiple baited string in the other hand with numerous fish attached to them. The irony was not lost on Marc, but he did not seem to find it very amusing. With the boat secured, we headed back to the house and prepared supper.

I was surprised by Marc, who produced a cooler of beer: I was pleasantly surprised. Although I was truthfully delighted with the idea of having a couple of beers after three weeks of abstinence, I was also nervous about a surprise visit from one of my Cree friends from the fitness center, whom I did not want to see me with the unusually controversial beer. To Marc's confusion, I closed all the curtains in the house and then giddily sat down to take guilty pleasure in a beer or two. After Marc and I finished our dinner and enjoyed a few beers, we sat down at the kitchen table and philosophized over the nature of the work that was being undertaken in the Cree villages.

Marc's educational philosophy within Native contexts was not unlike my own developing beliefs: primarily, to provide a quality education that was applicable to their manner of learning and to make sure that the end result was of the highest quality possible. As Marc spoke, there was a genuinely affectionate manner in which he discussed providing education to the Native communities. However, as Marc discussed issues and methods of providing education, he also spoke of providing “direction” to the Native people as well. Furthermore, the term “nos enfants”, French for “our children”, was used often and repeatedly to refer to the Cree.

Ever aware that Marc was my senior and I felt that in this uncertain first job that I desperately needed he may have influence, so I continued to listen to Marc's beliefs and tried to convince myself that I was resigned to his questionable language. I was not altogether unfamiliar with the use of paternal terms for indigenous people. I had heard them from others when discussing people from the “Middle East”, as well as from my British and Italian relatives, who were colonials living in the “Protectorate” of Egypt prior to the evacuation of the British in

1954. I was uncomfortably used to the manner in which Europeans felt Natives were somehow children in need of guidance.

But Marc continued to refer to the Cree as “nos enfants”. I finally made the comment that the term was really offensive and that he should consider simply referring to the Cree as “Cree.” Marc was quite taken aback by my suggestion and once he recovered from the implication that he could be offensive, he explained that in the French language, “nos enfants” was a term of loving affection for the Natives. I shook my head and maintained that it was a paternalistic manner to talk about a people and that no matter how he may justify it, the term was demeaning. Marc became indisputably insulted and again explained that it was an endearing way to refer to a people that needed guidance and love. He was very earnest in his belief that it was not a debasing way in which to refer to the Cree. Perhaps it was the beer or perhaps I was transposing my own feelings of frustration at having been sometimes seen as somewhat of a lesser person in the eyes of people like Marc because of race, ethnicity or skin colour, but I refused to back down from my assertion that the expression was wrong. As we argued the matter, Marc grew increasingly irritated at my growing insinuation that “nos enfants” was revealing his deeper conviction of bigotry and the rightful subservience of a people as opposed to the loving parent and child relationship.

Finally, Marc strongly expressed that I simply did not understand the subtleties of the French language enough to pass judgement. Realizing that I may have gone too far with my argument with a relative stranger who I perceived to have some say in my employment opportunities, I acquiesced to the suggestion that perhaps it was a cultural and linguistic misunderstanding but remained secretly suspicious that this was a paternalistic view of Natives that had been fuelled by sentiments of ethnic superiority.

### Reflection: The Disintegration Stage

How many countless schools in North America have sport teams called Braves, Chiefs, Indians, Warriors, Redskins or even our own McGill Redmen with a preceding descriptor that always includes a word to instil fear, like “fighting”, for “fighting (fill-in-the-blank)”? How many military weapons are given Native names, like the Apache attack

helicopter, the Tomahawk cruise missile or the Canadian navy's Iroquois-class destroyers: HMCS Algonquin, HMCS Huron or the HMCS Iroquois? How many films, television shows or comic books do we passively consume that continuously portray Native people in a hostile and threatening manner (Shaheen, 2001)? Is not this exactly what Alexie's (1993) writing conveys? That he knows the negative stereotype of the Native is so entrenched in the North American collective consciousness and ever present that it usually sets up the stage for fear? Alexie writes, "He knew this dark skin and long, black hair of mine was dangerous. I had potential" and continues, "He swallowed hard like a white man does in those situations" (P. 183). This is the essence of culture shock that is derived from miseducation and the image of the "Other" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004).

Despite whatever culture shock I was experiencing at the time, it did not cloud my own insight of the Kipling-like (1899) "White Man's Burden" view of non-whites as akin to disobedient children that was being fed to me. Many, not all but many, of the non-Native educators had a perception of the Cree as fundamentally decent but in need of a disciplined hand and parental guidance; in essence not veering far from Kipling's description of "Half-devil and half-child". When I read Holmes' (1950) account of the relationship between the French and Native population during the early years of Nouvelle France's history, I couldn't help but think of Marc. Holmes wrote, "(t)he attitude of the French was more like that of an older brother who might coax, scold, punish, deceive, or seek to impress his primitive kin, but who never attempted to enslave him or behave contemptuously toward him" (P. 311). Hampton (1993) writes, "(t)he white man's burden is heavy indeed, composed as it is of a complex denial of the reality of political, economic, military, and educational oppression and the assertion of paternal superiority" (P. 298).

I can not help but wonder how far non-Native perspectives have changed since the time of O'Callaghan & Brodhead's (1856-1861) writing of early attempts to subdue Native peoples with efforts to show the natural superiority of European military strength, lifestyle and scientific achievements. Was not this view of Natives as "nos enfants" simply a return to the Kipling idea, if indeed, the notion has ever really gone away? Comparisons of a return to the paternalistic imperialist view of the world has become increasingly apparent and the editors of the *Monthly Review* (2003) journal (Foster, Magdoff, Sweezy, and McChesney) note the significance of how openly pundits, politicians and journalists ask if the United States and its

allies must take up the mantle of the "White Man's Burden" in the Middle East. Cairns (2000) writes that Canadian history is packed with policies towards Native people in which "they were described as wards, likened to children, and assumed to be unready for full citizenship" (P. 21). Cairns, Salisbury (c1986) and Richardson (1975) remark that Quebec's Premier Robert Bourassa's government's management of the James Bay hydro project was filled with notions of paternalism towards the Cree and little, if any, consultation was given to the Cree until the Cree nation demanded it. This is the relationship between many Native and non-Native groups and George Erasmus is quoted within Cairns:

With the coming of the Europeans, our experience as a people changed. We experienced relationships in which we were made to feel inferior. (...) Those who presented themselves as "superior" began to define what was good for us. They began to define our world for us. They began to define us as well. (P. 22, 2000)

Has this relationship changed? I don't think so. Experience dictates that it still permeates in the relationship that many North Americans, either of French, English or other power bloc (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001) communities have with or towards Native people. Given this, I can't help but remember Bobbi Sykes, who posed the question at a conference on post-colonialism, "What? Post-colonialism? Have they left" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, P. 24)?

## **REINTEGRATION**

The third stage is the beginning of recovery ... Persons coming out of the second stage of disintegration toward the third stage sometimes resemble persons emerging from depression. The anger directed inward during the disintegration stage of culture shock is now redirected outward at "others" who are to blame for the situation. (...) The individual is likely to depend on stereotyped generalizations to evaluate and judge the host culture person's behaviors and attitudes. The individual is likely to disregard both the similarities and differences between the host culture and the individual's own home culture identity. The hostility an individual in this stage experiences is outside that person's reference points of previous experiences. The individual will perceive herself or himself to be vulnerable or under attack and will be likely to defend herself or himself and take a self-protective position toward the host culture. The host culture people are the scapegoats for all real or imagined inadequacies resulting in typically defensive statements and strategies. (...) At least there is a growing awareness of contact with the host culture and an ability to express feelings about the experience. The

rejection of host culture patterns becomes the foundation for a new identity based on cognitive and emotional experiences with the new culture. (...)The host culture is judged less desirable than the more familiar home culture ways.  
(Pederson, 1994)

### No Closer than the Driveway

On one occasion, a rather large “feast” was held on a Saturday night while I was still alone in the housing couple’s summer-vacated home. With all my course preparation finished, I resigned myself to another Saturday night with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s programming, as this was the only television channel available within the house. But the repeated honking from a van at the edge of the house’s driveway eventually caught my attention and I peered out a window to see one of my students motioning me to come to her. I opened the front door and stood on the small porch that led to the stairs and the ground and saw that she was holding out a plate covered with tin-foil through the van’s window.

“I brought you supper!” she giggled. I smiled and waved her to come over. “Come in!” I returned. “No!” she forcefully responded while still chuckling *at me*. The van continued to idle and I walked over to her. “This is my sister-in-law”, my student informed me as she introduced me to the driver. We exchanged pleasantries and I again asked them if they would come inside for coffee or tea. She politely declined the offer. I thankfully accepted the “care” package and they drove away.

The dinner was a heaping serving of the traditional Cree food; mainly goose, beaver and moose meat with the usual staple of bannock and assorted side dishes that must have been contributed to the “pot-luck” supper. Perhaps because I had been living on my own, on a money and time saving diet of frozen hamburgers every night for dinner and instant macaroni and cheese every day for lunch, this meal had extra meaning and taste. I appreciated the sentiment as I wolfed down the food. I was quickly growing fond of Cree cuisine.

### Wife, Daughter and Visits for Coffee

Initially, during my first few weeks in Mistissini, I slowly developed a professional and amicable relationship with my students. I had quickly learned that humour, coupled with an earnest approach to teaching, was the key to breaking down the barriers that initially exist between cultures. Teaching my class introduced me on a professional level to a group of dedicated and hard working students who, given time, gained trust in me both as a person and as an educator. The trust was definitely mutual. Although my teaching was going very well, I must admit that with the arrival of my wife and daughter in Mistissini, the barriers related to gender differences between my female students and me were removed. Thanks to the presence of my family, I gained knowledge, understanding and insight from numerous conversations with my students over coffee or tea. These students became my teachers, explaining and discussing the many aspects of their rich and often complex lives.

Prior to my family's arrival, the relationship with my students was easy-going and the class progressed diligently, with all assigned tasks being completed with the utmost of their attention. Yet, however congenial our class time and break-times were together, there was always a barrier that excluded me from social integration with them outside of the classroom. Besides the occasional waves from a passing car or the single occasion when a student brought a meal to me, I had no social contact with any of my students. In retrospect, I think that the arrival of my wife made visiting with their male teacher more acceptable.

My wife and daughter arrived on a Saturday. My parents and sister had driven them halfway from Montreal to Mistissini so that we met in Lac St. Jean. We stayed overnight with my parents and sister who returned to Montreal, and then I drove my wife and daughter the rest of the way alone. It was a quiet drive; my wife could tell that I was stressed from the pressures of a new job and accustomizing myself to a new surrounding. After the four-hour drive on the two-way highway, we hit the dirt road to Mistissini and my wife reacted with quiet concern as she repeatedly looked back at our baby daughter who was still blissfully asleep. As we drew closer to the village, I kept looking towards my wife, checking for some kind of reaction; some kind of approval or disapproval. At one point along the dirt road, I swerved the car to avoid a case of beer and its broken bottles that were strewn across the road. It was a violent movement that sent our little red Colt swerving, not in an uncontrollable manner but enough to make your knuckles go white. Once the car was out of the swerve and in full control I turned to my wife and made mention that "the road is bad, eh?" She nodded in agreement

and kept her eyes firmly straight ahead on the road. After a few minutes, I impatiently asked her, "Aren't you going to say something?", expecting some kind of voiced concern...not for her, but for our sleeping infant in the back seat. "The flowers are beautiful", she said. "What?" I responded. "The flowers. The blue flowers that are growing on the side of the road. They're beautiful", she reiterated in an almost deadpan manner. It was clear, to me at least, that she was going to see this event through in a positive way, no matter what. We entered the village and into the house with little fanfare and organized ourselves as best we could in somebody else's home.

The next day, during the early afternoon while we were sitting in the living room drinking a cup of coffee, we heard a knock at the door. I went to the door, expecting one of the men from the gym that I had begun befriending, and found myself surprised to see one of my students standing at the door. In the month that I had been in Mistissini, I never had any of my students visit me. Christine stood at the threshold of the door and peered around my shoulder. In a serious tone that belied her good nature and spirited personality, she asked in more of a statement than a questioning manner, "Your wife is here?" Melanie stood up from the couch and Christine unapologetically pushed past me into the kitchen and smiled at Melanie. As she and Melanie were exchanging pleasantries, she immediately noticed our eleven-month old daughter, Roxy, crawling about the floor. Christine's smile broadened as she lowered herself to Roxy's level, simultaneously talking with Melanie and fussing over our daughter.

In no time she was seated in the living room with my wife and daughter, enjoying a conversation and a cup of coffee; and so it began. With the arrival of my wife and daughter, it appeared to me that the gender barrier that covertly disapproved of women going to the house of a man who lived on his own had been thwarted. Christine's official welcome to her little town signalled the beginning of an acceptance into the social circle of women who were connected through the CEGEP degree they were seeking to achieve. In short time, another student, Denise, would venture past the driveway and then so did others. Melanie's social life would become more active in Mistissini than it ever had been in Montreal. Melanie described her relationship with the women in Mistissini as a "sisterhood" that she had never experienced, not even within her time at an undergrad sorority. Her relationship with these caring, kind and genuine women proved to be the greatest mediating factor that convinced us to stay with the

NECE program until the very end and make ourselves a home, for just over a full year, in Mistissini.

### Arab Eyes

It was during what would ultimately be the final, exclusively non-Native social event that my wife and I would attend that I would start to gain a greater insight into the difficulties that cultural differences can play as a barrier to educational achievement. This event occurred during a “dinner-party” at the home of a couple who had been working and residing in Mistissini for the past three years. There were two other couples in attendance of this small function and we were sitting in their living room as the subject of “education” came up. Questions of where had we studied, what had we studied, what level of education was achieved and so on were asked and answered. The subject of the nature and function of the CEGEP courses I was teaching was a particularly repeated conversation as there was much curiosity as to whether or not this was going to be a “real” degree and what levels of education my students would be allowed to teach following graduation.

The conversation then turned to the cost of undertaking such an educational endeavour. A member of the educational system within Cree territory advanced his belief that it was a “waste of taxpayers’ money to have CEGEP teachers in each village” when they could have sent the students directly to a CEGEP in Montreal. I brought up the driving notion behind this program, which was to provide the cultural and social security of being able to study within one’s environment and we bantered on the concept for a short while. One of the women in attendance sympathetically brought up her own experience of having to leave her small town community in rural Quebec to attend a CEGEP in the Montreal area and agreed that it was difficult for her to accustom herself to all the differences.

Intrigued by her statement, due to the similarities between what she had experienced and the research idea I was starting to grapple with, I asked her to explain what she meant. She admitted that one of the greatest difficulties she had was attending a CEGEP that had so many “foreigners” in attendance. She continued that when she applied to the CEGEP she anticipated and expected going to school with other non-Natives of European descent, like herself, and was not prepared for the amount of foreigners that attended and hung around the



school.

With some coaxing on my part, she gave me an example of what she was talking about and described her unease at having to eat in the cafeteria of the school. She explained that a large group of what she perceived to be “Arabs” would always sit at a group of tables near the exit of the cafeteria cash register and that she would always have to suffer through their leers as she passed by them. “They would always look at you with those *Arab eyes*”, she said. “You know, that look that said “I want to *rape* you!” she emphasised. There are few times in my life that I do not have a quick response; this was one of them. As she continued explaining how the “Arab eyes” would “touch her whole body”, I stared at her in stunned silence, thinking that, since my time in Mistissini, I was beginning to understand that if you were going to flourish in this environment you had to do so with the greatest cultural respect and sensitivity. And yet, here was somebody who was overtly making such a bigoted generalization that I was repulsed by the idea that she was working in a position of influence in Cree territory.

As I stared at her in quiet disbelief, there was a moment of uneasy silence as she and the other guests tried to process my obvious shock. At that moment, my wife, Melanie, started to laugh and said “Are you worried about being attacked by my husband right now? Because everyone thinks he’s from the same part of the world as those “Arabs”!” My wife clapped her hands and continued laughing and the woman asked her what she was talking about. Melanie explained that my Mother was from Iran and half-jokingly and half-accusingly asked if my eyes made me part rapist or not. The woman was obviously embarrassed and explained that she thought I was Greek and awkwardly said that she did not mean any disrespect in her statement. But, as is usually the case, we had the sense that although she was embarrassed by the fact that she had openly stated her bigotry in front of a person from the “East”, she was not ashamed of the comment itself.

As we left the dinner and were driving home, I discussed with my wife that I was now resolute in ceasing to attend any more social functions (or otherwise) that excluded Natives.<sup>30</sup> In part, my irritated rejection of the non-Natives stemmed from my own recollections of incidents in school when I was all too often painted with the broad brush of a foreigner from the

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that there were other non-native people in the community who shared this belief of avoiding segregated events as well.

"East" and endured all the stereotypes that stemmed from it. If, as Bogdan (1972) suggests, empathy is the hallmark of observation, that evening was paramount in developing a sense of rapport with Natives for having to deal with stereotypes in organizational settings.

My wife and I also discussed that, however bigoted the comments were by the woman who feared "Arab eyes", her story was telling in that it revealed *her own* perceived difficulties within an educational setting due to the slight cultural variant that she had not anticipated or was willing to discover. If a non-Native was so affected by a table full of men of Arab descent, then what were the perceptions of Cree students completely studying outside of their own cultural community altogether?

### Building a Classroom

The second term in which I taught in Mistissini brought about a whole new set of problems. As we were initially left without a classroom and it had been unanimously decided by the students that we did not want the location of our classroom to again be in the high school, we were left at the beginning of the second semester without a classroom.

One of the more conscientious supervisors at the CEGEP quickly contacted the appropriate individuals within the village of Mistissini and within twenty-four hours the reverend of the local Anglican Church arrived at my house to discuss a possible classroom location. The reverend was a kind, gentle and quick-witted older man; tall, with grey hair and a jovial laugh, it was easy to approach and socialize with him. Moreover, because he was exceedingly knowledgeable in areas of politics and social issues, I soon learned that conversations over a coffee with him were both entertaining and informative. After my introduction to the minister, we drove over to the church so that he could show me the proposed site and, upon my agreement, would organize rental payment with the CEGEP.

At the time, I knew there were a number of churches in the village. If memory served me correctly, besides the Anglican Church, I knew there was a Baptist church, a Pentecostal church and a Roman Catholic church. However, I would not have been able to tell you which one was which. I knew that they were of varying quality and states of repair or disrepair and I quietly hoped that the Anglican Church was in good shape. As luck would have it, the Anglican Church was in the centre of the village, close to the conveniences that the village had to offer,

and was in relatively good shape. The state of the room we were going to use was very important, as it was not only going to be a classroom, it was also going to be the location of our practicum daycare. Therefore, it had to be a suitable and functionally feasible location for a learning daycare.

A closer inspection of the room, which was the church basement, revealed that much work would be needed before it could be used as a classroom or a daycare. The minister turned on the light to reveal a clutter of miscellaneous objects, most of which should have been discarded long ago but were preserved due to the packrat environment that seems to exist in every church basement I have ever seen. I pointed to an area of the large room that was sectioned off by old, dusty partitions, the colour of which could have been created only in the late sixties and said, "Look, a clean spot!" The minister laughed and responded, "We were thinking of having a rummage sale but maybe we should just have a fire sale!" He was a good-humoured, good-natured man and that was enough for me to make the extra effort needed to make do with the accommodations.

We made our way around the boxes and various discarded objects to assess what needed to be done. I pointed out that aside from the massive clean-up, the floor would need to be painted, a carpet put in and the ceiling repaired. The list seemed endless. An adult education woodworking and home renovation class had carried out a practicum of their own within the basement and had built a modern and well laid-out kitchen within it, which was fortunate. "We do use the basement for pot-luck dinners and besides, that sectioned-off area in the back is where we have Sunday school", the minister informed me, and so it was obviously a serviceable space within the community. But I told him that the standards for a practicum daycare would have to be high and that the work would have to be done. A moment of silence passed, the kind of uneasy silence you feel with a salesman when you are considering buying a big-ticket item, and then, the Minister broke the silence by simply asking, "Are you up for the work?" I had put myself through school by doing renovation work so, I thought and said, "What the heck, we're desperate for a classroom anyway!"

First, I had to convince my students of the suitability of the location and found myself "selling" them the idea of using this space. I told them that we would start class on the upcoming Monday. As it was a Tuesday, one student asked, "What do we do for the rest of the week?" I told them that class would start on the Monday and that I would be preparing the

space until then. The students turned in towards themselves and began speaking to each other in Cree. When I returned to the church the next day, I found out that they were organizing “clean-up” duties for the day. Always diligent, the students showed up in the morning with various cleaning tools and products and started making work for themselves. After a full day of cleaning, the room was in good enough condition to begin the renovation work. The next day brought new pleasant surprises as the students refused to be left out of the process of putting this classroom together. They either volunteered their own services or, if they felt a family member was better suited to a task than them, they offered that person’s services instead.

We worked through the weekend, and by Monday we had the class in an amazing state. We were all pleased with the work we had done and the minister marvelled happily at the transformation of the room. Ironically, I received a rather confusing fax from the CEGEP professor’s union that week informing me that there had been complaints from some of the members about having to perform duties within the classroom in the south that were construed as “janitorial”. Out of respect to both the CEGEP professor’s union as well as the custodian union, we were therefore strictly forbidden from doing things like stacking tables or washing blackboards. I chuckled, recalling my actions over the weekend, seeing myself covered with epoxy floor paint, and wondered how they would react if I had sent them a picture! It was yet another reminder of the differences between the two worlds and I thought to myself that I was happy to be having such experiences by having accepted, embraced and shared such moments with my students in this Cree community.

### Who Comes from a “Third World”?

A visit from my sister and mother to our new home in Mistissini for the Thanksgiving long weekend provided me with a unique insight and an opportunity to further affirm my perceptions of the living conditions in which much of the Cree people find themselves. After much warning of the state of the roads leading into the village, I convinced my sister to drive up to the town of Chibougamau, where a local Cree friend was kind enough to arrange parking for them, so that I could drive them the rest of the way in my newly acquired Jeep. Despite the forewarning I had given them of the fifty to sixty minute drive between Chibougamau and the

village, their reaction when we hit the dirt road was pretty much what I had expected: surprise and, on the part of my mother, nervousness.

In many ways, watching the reaction of people who were not used to this drive validated my own experience of disbelief when I first arrived in the village. I wanted to see their reaction, to see if they were as amazed and shocked over the living conditions that Native Canadians lived in as I was when I first arrived. I realize that "political correctness" can temper one's reaction when first seeing this village: you do not want to seem too traumatized over the living conditions, the state of some of the homes and the overall lower standard of living. The reason for this is that you do not want to insult someone else's home and town. When I drove in with my wife, I kept an eye out for her reaction and, despite her initial "Pollyanna" approach to the location of my teaching assignments, we did, eventually, end up spending quite a bit of time discussing the unjust aspects of Cree life. Now, it was my chance to see the reaction of my sister and my mother and, as I had anticipated, their reaction validated my own but in a different way.

Before we even left for the village, they showed their amazement at the sharp weather change from Montreal. No matter how we may joke about our long and harsh winters in Montreal, we do not expect snow on our Thanksgiving weekend<sup>31</sup>. It took much cajoling on my part, prior to the two of them driving up to Chibougamau, to convince them to put snow tires on their car and now they understood why. My mother, in particular, could not get over how cold it was and, in her usual "motherly" fashion, constantly complained that I was not dressed appropriately for such weather conditions.

On our way to the village, I had my mother sit in the passenger side of the Jeep and my sister in the back seat. I therefore had a better view of my mother's reactions as we hit the gravel road towards the village. The bumping, jolting and constant, methodical battering of rock against the underside of the Jeep interrupted my mother's concern over climate and my inappropriate dress, and I could tell that she was actually fearful for our lives. The usually talkative mother that I knew was replaced by a tense woman who swallowed her breath with each jolt of the vehicle. Her silence and tense demeanour spoke volumes. My sister, on the other hand, was analytical of the drive and we discussed the dangers of the road. I relayed stories I had been told of the large number of deaths that have occurred on this gravel

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<sup>31</sup> Canadian Thanksgiving is in the second weekend of October.

highway. I am sure that none of our conversations pleased or reassured my mother. As the long drive came to an end, and as we reached the village, my mother's demeanour grew from bad to worse.

She looked around at the village, trying to take in the sights she had not anticipated. This was, after all, a community unlike any that she, or I for that matter, had ever seen in Canada. The astonishment on her face was obvious as she became teary-eyed. My sister sat quietly in the back seat, trying to take in the environment, and occasionally trying to make positive comments and observations to comfort my mother. I briefly took them on a short tour of the community, which in retrospect was probably a mistake. We passed the church in which I taught and I pointed out that this was where I held my classes. My mother stared at the church in silence and then commented on the decaying quality of the building itself. I took another look at it and silently thought, she was right, in comparison to the standards in which we would expect churches to look like in our community, it *was* in poorer shape than I had come to notice.

As we drove towards my home, my mother's tears continued building as she questioned everything that was indicative of poverty: why was there so much debris strewn about, why were some of the houses in such poor upkeep, why don't they have paved roads, and so on. All good questions: some I had the answers to, and others I did not. I tried to explain what I understood the problem to be, mostly based on an economic standpoint and describing a people trying to reclaim or come to terms with their misappropriated way of life. But nothing I said comforted her. At this point, as we pulled into our gravel driveway, my mother was now noticeably upset and she tried to wipe away any tears that came. In an effort to contain her expressions of grief before she entered our home, she momentarily composed her emotions and said angrily, "I thought I was the one who is supposed to be from a third world country!"

Until that moment, I thought that my mother's distress over the condition of the village was solely based on her concerns over the comfort of living conditions for her son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter. Although her concern probably was precipitated by this, she was mostly upset over the living conditions of the Native people. Once we got inside the house and my mother had a chance to compose herself, we tried to discuss the problems that the Cree had described to me as having contributed to their current situation. My mother agreed with

these but continued to express her belief that she had somehow been misled by the Canadian illusion that the Native population of Canada shared in all the privileges and standards of health and lifestyle that the non-Natives enjoyed. From my mother's perspective, this village was not something that she expected from a "first" world country like Canada.

At the time, I did not really think about the prior exposure that both my mother and sister had having lived in "third world" countries. My mother's life experience in Iran would have surely exposed her to villages that were similar in condition to Mistissini, and probably much worse. And my sister's exposure to India, through her post-graduate degree in International Development Studies, should have been far, far worse than anything she would have seen here. I believe, especially after talking with my family, that the shock comes from the fact that we are totally unprepared for the idea that our Native population would be living in conditions that are substandard to our own middle-class lifestyle. It is definitely not the image that we are given in Canada of how well "we" treat the Native population.

Without a doubt, both my sister and mother were reassured that any concerns they had over our choice to spend a year in Cree territory were erased over the long weekend by the constant visits from my friends and students. For example, the day before they returned for Montreal, the husband of one of my students dropped by to express his concern about a freezing rain weather advisory for our immediate area. Because of my inexperience on the road between Chibougamau and Mistissini, he did not like the idea of my driving them into town alone. So, that morning when we left, at about 6:00 AM, he was waiting in his truck in front of our house and insisted that he drive into town with us, just to make sure nothing happened. The genuine friendliness, concern and warmth that my sister and mother saw being shown to us by the friends we had made in the village left little hesitation in their minds that their son/brother, daughter/sister-in-law and granddaughter/niece were in a safe and secure place. But their visit to the village provided them with a rarely experienced insight into the living conditions of the Cree, which, I am sure, has changed their attitude towards Native issues.

#### Reflection: The Reintegration Stage

During the first three months of teaching in Mistissini the recurring temptation was to find an excuse to leave the position and return to either Montreal or another "southern" community

where I did not have to deal with issues of culture shock. In the Cree context I now realize that Pedersen's (1995) description of culture shock as being the loss of all the familiar cues to reality on which each of us depend to function came true. These experiences of culture shock were profound and real and had great parallels to the stress that Perego (1990) described was felt by Native students entering a non-Native context that is "alien to them" (P. 8). Moreover, I can sympathize with the fact that the stresses of commencing a new job, in this case a CEGEP instructor, were magnified due to the acclimatization of a new and unfamiliar culture. Edgewater's (1981) statement that...(T)he Indian/Native student is faced with the dilemma of cultural beliefs, values and self concepts as well as the same stresses faced by the White students" (P. 28) has similar meaning for my own situation. Had I started my teaching career within my own familiar surroundings, I would obviously never have thought about quitting my job due to issues of culture shock. Adding to the stress that one feels by being placed in a foreign culture are issues of racism. Although I can confirm that I did not have to deal with any significant issues of racism directed towards me by the Cree, I can confirm that I heard a considerable amount of negative comments about the Cree by non-Native staff working in the community.<sup>32</sup> Mianskum (1999) writes that teachers in Cree communities "... fear the unknown elements of community life which are often based on secondhand information garnished by peers and union representatives (P. 20). There is little doubt that this type of second-hand information is readily available.

## **AUTONOMY**

The persons who emerge from the detachment of stage one, the self-blame of stage two, and the hostility of stage three are in a position to build a new perspective between their former identity and the new host culture. The person begins to establish an objective, balanced, and impartial view of the whole situation. It is now possible to experience both the positive and the negative aspects of the host culture situation. (...) There is a new sensitivity resulting in new skills and understandings about the host culture and the person's own identity. (...) The person is now able to move into new situations with greater awareness of self and others. The person demonstrates an increased competence, and an ability to relax and enjoy the host culture, and is able to articulate this new understanding to others. (...) The emotions of this stage tend toward self-assurance, a more relaxed

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<sup>32</sup> Again, I can not emphasize enough that there was also a good amount of non-Native personnel who were extremely positive about their experience of living in Mistissini.



attitude, increased warmth in one's relationships to others, and an ability for empathic caring.  
(Pederson, 1994)

### "You People Love Dogs More Than Children"

One characteristic of life in Mistissini that is particularly difficult for non-Natives to accustom themselves to is the condition in which dogs live. Regardless of any differences that one may have had with any of the other non-Natives, you could always agree on one thing: it was extremely difficult to witness the treatment of dogs within the community. Shortly after I had arrived in Mistissini, I asked a non-Native teacher why there were so many apparently malnourished and abused dogs roaming the streets. He sadly joked, "The people in this village love puppies, hate dogs!"

The dogs in the village have more in common with the dogs of their pack animal heritage than the domestic breed to which we have become accustomed. They usually group together and roam the strict confines of their territory, ever conscious of not proceeding past their borders and vigilant that no other dog invades the borders that only the dogs seem to recognize. The dogs patrol the streets in packs that one would never see even in rural areas near Montreal. Interestingly, the breeds of dogs that roamed the streets were remarkable as well. My wife would comment how you could tell what children's movies had been recently popular based on the breeds of dogs you saw abandoned in the streets: the movies "Beethoven", about the "zany" exploits of a St. Bernard, and "101 Dalmatians", obviously about a hundred and one Dalmatians, had been recent successes. Sure enough, these pedigree dogs could now be found wandering the streets, seemingly uncared for and belying the huge price tag someone must have paid for these animals.

The majority of dogs were malnourished, in poor health and had seemingly very limited options for survival. Furthermore, it was not uncommon to see children throwing rocks at the dogs and on more than one occasion, my wife and I saw elderly adults casually walking down the street, stop at the approach of a dog and ward the animal away with a speedy throw of a rock. Suffice to say, on the surface, the treatment of many of the dogs was disturbing to most non-Natives in the community and I am sure, to some of the Natives as well. Although we had

discussed this observation with other non-Natives, we had never raised the subject with our Native friends or colleagues. The subject eventually came up inadvertently, in the course of an afternoon visit.

During a long weekend holiday break in the fall semester, we had the pleasure of having the family of one of my students over for lunch on a Sunday afternoon. As we sat in the living room, enjoying yet another round of coffee, I glanced through the large windows overlooking the front yard and the main street. I noticed a puppy that my wife and I had assumed belonged to a family that lived a few houses away from us. Weeks earlier, we had noticed the children of that family had either received the dog as a gift or, perhaps, procured it from a litter. When we first noticed the puppy, my wife and I were concerned about how young it was; it could barely walk as the children tried to coax it down the street and, from where we watched, we were certain the poor creature could not have been old enough to eat anything but its mother's milk and wondered how it could survive.

The image brought to mind an earlier episode that had occurred during my wife's first weekend in the village. She had called me into the living room in distress because she had seen a group of children dragging an almost lifeless puppy down the road with what appeared to be a makeshift collar and leash. The children were seemingly oblivious to the infant dog's plight and were joyfully pulling the dog along as they would a stuffed toy. My wife was near tears when I saw the "teacher" in her start to take over, composing herself to go outside and "educate" the children on the subject of compassion towards "all creatures, great and small". Before she could, I pulled the blind and told her that it was not our place to "educate" these children and that in this situation, it was better to just look away.

Reflecting on that moment and the impotence we felt, I now looked at our neighbour's young dog, staggering in the street, alone, malnourished and helplessly abandoned against the increasingly hostile weather and spoke out loud, "How the hell can people be so cruel as to leave a helpless animal in the streets to die!" It was only after the words came tumbling out of my mouth, I then realized that I was in the company of my student and her family. I stood, looking out the window, very aware of the silence that filled the air behind me. My student walked over to the window glanced at the dog and then said, "You people love dogs more than children". Although her statement was almost a mutter, her intent was unmistakably accusatory

and harboured a deep sense of resentment. Initially, I was shocked that, after building an environment of trust, I was suddenly lumped into the “you people” group. I responded to her accusation with hurt feelings but nonetheless resolved to understand how she could have made such a wild accusation, I implored her to justify her statement. She did so readily. She made a strong argument that, throughout all the imposed hardships she had lived through while growing up (forced residential schooling, deplorable living conditions, high child mortality rates, and so on), all non-Natives could ever talk about was about how bad the dogs have it. As I listened to her rationale, I briefly looked around the room. Her children were ambivalent to the conversation, fixated on the television, her husband was nodding his head in approval of his wife’s argument and my wife looked on with a body language that indicated, “You are on your own with this one!” She continued with her argument, and with her husband’s input and support, retold and revealed personal stories of hardship that I was amazed had not been public knowledge.

Her observations left me embarrassed. They revealed a people’s history and life that had been completely ignored by the people who had subjugated them to it. In the face of that abuse, all she heard was compassion for the animals. It was also revealing in that it demonstrated that she continued to harbour the feeling that non-Natives still show more compassion to animals than to the children within the schools, hospitals or streets. The resolution of her perspective was visible from her tone, clarity of words and body stance.

In my heart, I knew she was right. I had often more than suspected that all cultures and ethnicities rank humanness on a scale with, more often than not, the dominant group on top. While I was in Mistissini, the American and British backed sanctions on Iraq were in full force and the United Nations was beginning to disclose that 100 000 children were dying a year as a result of them<sup>33</sup>. It drew to mind the comparison that somehow, in the West, these were not really lives, not human lives in any real sense. When I heard these mortality numbers, I was repulsed and angered by the callousness and casualness that the media, our political leaders, my peers, friends and neighbours displayed towards these horrific numbers. Now I was being accused of the same thing. Was I somehow superseding the suffering of a dog over the quality of life that some Cree children had by making mention of it? My student and her husband could tell that their argument left both my wife and I a little perplexed but more so

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<sup>33</sup> Although, at the time, the numbers were not so concrete.

contemplative over their perspective. We both accepted their argument. We remained resolute that our sympathy for a single dog did not preclude our care for human life but began to reconsider our own perspectives and rethinking how we prioritized things.

Her arguments did indeed change our view, and, personally, I even began to look at the sympathetic way in which I described the dogs within this observation. For instance, I noticed that in my initial observational notes, I described a young dog as an “infant puppy”, as if placing a human aura around it. My own perceptions were undoubtedly shaped by my upbringing. This upbringing was removed entirely from the struggle that the Cree have endured, and even from the responsibility of participating in any way in the slaughter and preparation of the animals I eat, besides purchasing the packaged, bled and shrink-wrapped meat from the grocery store cooler. I have the luxury of “humanizing” the animal because I have never had to worry about my loved ones having to struggle to simply eat and live or being forcibly separated from each other.

It was difficult to come to diplomatic terms with these issues. I could sympathize with the Native perspective that animals in this Euro-centred world do seem to garner more sympathy from the majority of people in North America than does the physical plight of non-white children around the world. There have been many occasions where I have wondered how a newsroom could feel that the story of a “puppy mill” could take precedence over that of a thousand lives lost during monsoon season in the east. With that in mind, I could understand why any subjugated people could feel that they were perceived by those in power as being less than human. It was an important lesson that a person from a suppressed minority group may truly feel as though she is perceived by the dominant group unjustly, unsympathetically and as being less than human. Although I must confess that this newly appreciated realization did not change any feelings of compassion that I have towards animals, it did teach me to put my comments in perspective.

### Hollywood and Self-Image

One of my fondest leisure moments in Mistissini was the long discussions I would have over coffee with a friend of mine named Peter, the husband of one of my students. Peter was approximately ten to fifteen years my senior and, from all accounts, a respected member of the

community and a source of invaluable information about the Cree community and its people. Peter would probably describe himself as simply someone who was accustomed to life in the bush but, with all due respect to the jobs that entail working in the bush, he was much more than that: at the time I was in Mistissini, he held a representative position in one of the local professional associations and often wore the hat of politician, teacher, advocate, councillor and/or elder.

Peter was the first person who took the time to explain Cree culture to me. One evening, he showed up at my house and presented me with two books: The James Bay Experience (1990) and Cree Trappers Speak (1989). As I reflect on the moment, I realize that these books were not presented to me as a simple gift but were a gesture indicating that he truly wanted me to learn as much as I could about the Cree people. Often, when his family would visit our house, he would casually ask me about the books he had given me. Peter would never quiz me on the books but always appear to be genuinely appreciative when I would ask a question concerning them. When we would discuss Cree or Native issues, we would mostly talk about history, politics and social issues from a Native perspective. Peter would try his utmost, in his patient and thoughtful manner, to explain Cree culture, life in the bush and the traditional manner in which the Cree would (and he felt *should*) teach. Sometimes, if Peter was willing to divulge such personal information, we would talk about his life in residential schools and the impact it had on his life.

One evening, while our families were watching television, Peter and I sat at the kitchen table, enjoying a cup of coffee and discussing "the media". Our wives were watching a sitcom and every so often, I would make a joking, pleading remark that they watch something a little less apt to "rot our brains". Of course, they ignored me and Peter and I started discussing our favourite movies. I forwarded some of my own favourites and confessed that I used to be particular to Science Fiction films but now found that as I had aged, movies didn't have the "wonder" they used to possess. Peter nodded in agreement and began to reminisce about how much he enjoyed movies when he was in residential schools. Without referring to a single film, he talked about the escapism that Hollywood movies would provide him with while he was in an environment that he found so confining. He had a broad smile on his face as he mused over certain actors and scenes in certain films. "Yep", he said whimsically as he lifted up his coffee cup, "I really liked the movies." As an afterthought he then said, "Hollywood was so good, I

cheered for the cowboys”, and then took a sip of coffee. The smile left his face as he revealed the impact that the image of the “Hollywood Native” had made on his self-image when he was a child.

We sat in momentary silence as the background noise of the television filled the air space. I then began telling Peter the deep impact the media had on my own self image, filling the television and movies with images of the “middle-eastern”, foaming-at-the-mouth terrorist and the stark contrast it played to my own experience with a loving, doting Iranian grandmother. Peter then started to talk about the terrible feeling he had when he first realized that all those “cowboy and Indian” genre movies had given so many Native children such low self-esteem. Furthermore, he really seemed amazed that the images portrayed on a screen could so influence his own feelings and perspectives of his own people.

Peter smiled and went silent, which was usually his signal that he would rather talk about something more pleasant, so we changed subjects. It was a revealing story about how fragile a child’s self-image is and how easily it can be manipulated by such vehicles as the media. Often, students and friends would reveal small but telling glimpses into the experiences of the young Cree within non-Native settings. They were not all negative but some were heart-wrenching and too personal and too private for me to retell here.

### Rocking, The Cree Way

The obligation of teaching courses for CEGEP de St-Félicien sometimes put some of the educators into the undesirable position of having to teach subjects and techniques of childcare to women who had often raised more children than we were used to attending to within our own daycare classes! There were, of course, variables within the class; two of my students had no children and one had seven. Between these family extremes was a wealth of information. There were many times that I would apologetically introduce our next lesson, anticipating having to teach something that was painfully obvious to my students. Had it not been for the close relationship I enjoyed with my students, you can imagine the comedy and difficulties I would have had as a young man, in his late twenties, with a young and small family, teaching and demonstrating to a woman who has seven children the “proper” way to diaper a baby. To the credit of the students, only rarely would I get a disapproving look and

when I did it was usually more related to weariness than frustration. Inserting humour and empowering the knowledge that existed within the classroom saved me from having to be the foreigner who would explain to the mothers what it meant to be a “Mother” or explain to the Natives what it meant to be a “Native”.

My professional obligation was to introduce the theories, practices and standards chosen for the Quebec government’s daycare program, so we dutifully covered them. Often, when we discussed aspects of theory, such as child development (cognitive, physical, creative and/or social) the students reacted with the same manner as would any student anywhere in the world who was dedicated to the subject: with enthusiasm and interest in the discussion of ideas. Certain issues, such as those regarding to classroom discipline or safety, would from time to time evoke healthy debate and would often reveal the imposition of a Euro-centred view of child rearing on a culture that already had its own distinct methods.

Occasionally, I realized, the difference in perspectives were a function of the rural-versus-urban influences more than a cultural one. For example, I had insisted that, “from now on”, everyone within our class had to promise when they transported any children within their vehicles, that they would safely restrain them. This became an issue when I mentioned that it was a daycare instructor’s moral and professional obligation to inform parents who were leaving and arriving at the daycare to properly secure their children within their cars. I believe that the resistance to this proposition was more related to rural life than to cultural differences because I had myself noticed that I was becoming used to the idea of driving around the community without “buckling up” and was becoming increasingly accustomed to the sight of children being unrestrained within cars as well.<sup>34</sup> My own ability to ease into this habit demonstrated to me that some differences between beliefs may be more relevant to the mentality that permeates a rural environment than it does to a cultural predisposition. However, some subjects were certainly decidedly cultural in nature and made for moments of unease within our classroom.

Discipline and classroom control was a difficult subject that clearly infringed on the Cree way of dealing with children. In comparison to centres of child education in Montreal, there was definitely a greater sense of permissiveness, in general, towards children in the Cree

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<sup>34</sup> To the credit of the peacekeepers, they would often have clampdowns on improper or lack of child restraints to try and curb this behaviour.

way. Whether this was a backlash reaction to the strict methods of forced residential schooling, the natural manner in which the Cree raised their children or a combination of both is debatable, but there is little doubt that there are observable differences.

Whenever the subject was raised, I would find myself in the unenviable position of defending a method of child management that would often be in contrast to the Cree way and it would always leave me with a sense of having imposed another Euro-centred standard upon my students. I therefore decided that, when it came to issues that were culturally related, I would give them all the room to manoeuvre within the curriculum that they needed. However, if the culture infringed on issues of safety, then I would enforce the standards that were prescribed by the Quebec government's daycare program. Culture is culture and would be respected, but safety was safety and that would be the grounds upon which I would choose to make my case; to stand my ground, so to speak. I thought to myself, one cannot argue with physics, science or safety. It only makes sense that a child would have to be in a child seat: it is physics, it is universal and it is "black and white".

But, there were so many issues that were "grey zones". I often felt that I was imposing the cultural norms that had, for the most part, formed so much of my own socialization process. Problems, such as teacher-student ratios and fire and/or car safety were easy, but issues such as infant swaddling or simply rocking a baby to sleep became highly contestable: these matters became contestable only because they highlighted the differences of perception and the self-importance that we placed on certain aspects of the program.

One such cultural difference arose when I was lecturing on safety standards within the daycare and focused on products that were suitable for use in an "infant room". It is important to note that many of these guidelines had to be enforced as the daycares within Cree territory fell under the provincial daycare subsidy program and therefore had to comply with its standards. One of the many guideline manuals we referred to specified the required standards of a baby's crib, noting the space between the bars, age-related problems of older designs and so on. We discussed the dangers of some of the older products and I concluded that it would be prudent to look for a recent Canadian Standard Association seal or marking on any of the furnishings within the infant room, and to employ common sense. Some students expressed concern with the manner in which the guidelines were being presented, noting that much of what was being discussed was not relevant to common practices of infant care used within the



community. One student asked whether the hand-made rocking cradle (which she referred to as a “mem-nep-soon”) that she used to soothe her own children to sleep would be allowed. She described the cradle as a type of hammock that rocked back and forth by a piece of string that the mother or caretaker would pull into motion. I had never seen such a thing in my own experience, so I did not know how to respond. However, it was my opinion that if it was not approved by the standards put forth by the Quebec government, then it should probably not be used. A visible displeasure grew in the room as my comments had obviously struck a negative chord with the majority of the students. “I put my children to sleep that way and my mother put me to sleep the same way”, one student said, and all agreed.

I really did not know what to say, but I encouraged the class to discuss the matter in an objective fashion, and we did. Some students brought up the idea of swaddling, which was described in a much more binding manner than I had ever seen it done, and that seemed to create another dimension of cultural infringement. There were, simply, no easy answers. Oddly enough, we had made provisions to respect Cree food menus within the daycare, but other aspects of traditional Cree child-rearing had not yet been addressed in a concrete, written manner. I felt extremely guilty, but I had to admit to the class that if I was sent by the provincial government to rate a daycare on its compliance with their safety standards, I would probably tell them that they would not be allowed to use a home-made “child-rocking” hammock device that was attached to the wall by string. We ended the debate with the students agreeing that they had never heard of any child being injured using their “mem-nep-soon” and that they could not understand why it should not be used. It seemed to everyone to be a cultural imposition.

A few days later, while the students carried out an observation assignment at the daycare, one of my students called me over to the entrance of the infant room. The room was dark, as the shades had been pulled for the infants’ afternoon nap. Silence permeated the air, save for the methodic sound of what turned out to be a dense chord rubbing against anchors on the wall, while a daycare instructor pulled a chord attached to the “mem-nep-soon”. In one hand she cradled an infant while adeptly rocking back and forth in a rhythmic motion that kept the cradle rocking and soothed the other child. To add to the serenity of the moment, she softly sung a melodic lullaby to the children; it was an unknown tune to me, perhaps because it was in Cree or perhaps because it was the type of sing-songy humming an experienced mother

knows will comfort a child. Nothing seemed “unsafe” about the moment; in fact, it seemed to epitomize the kind of security parents would hope would be given to their babies when entrusting them to a daycare.

The next day, I mentioned to the class that, after having seen the “mem-nep-soon”, I agreed that it did seem to be a beautiful way to put a child to sleep. But, I said, I was not convinced that an inspector from the provincial government would take the risk of allowing its use. Despite my appreciation of this Cree crib, my comments regarding safety standards had already made an impact on my students. Indeed, they had already relayed them to the conscientious daycare supervisor. By the time my students began their stage, a few months later, the traditional “mem-nep-soon” was gone and replaced by standard rocking devices that were probably purchased through a department store catalogue. I carried a little bit of guilt that perhaps I was responsible for the removal of a traditionally Cree way of caring for children and hoped that that influence only spread as far as the daycare and did not reach anyone’s home. Hopefully, there are still mothers or grandmothers in Mistissini who lovingly rock their child or grandchild to sleep in the traditional Cree way.

### Why Vote?

When my father arrived in Canada in 1969 he was automatically offered the possibility of a Canadian citizenship; such were the benefits in those days for subjects of the United Kingdom. Although he accepted his Canadian citizenship, he made a choice to allow his three children to decide, once we became adults, which citizenship we wanted to hold. So, although I was raised in the West Island of Montreal from the age of two, I carried a British passport for most of my adult life and simply had the status of “permanent resident” within Canada for years. I had lived through too many incidents of racial discrimination as a child, teenager and young adult to feel a part of what I perceived to be the “greater” Canadian culture or to even want to belong to it. It was as if my siblings and I were always a shade away from being outcast/accepted within the community in which we were raised. I felt that our actions, our opinions and everything about us always seemed to be a reflection of our perceived “Eastern” background. In defiance, I was content to hold on to my British passport to distinguish myself from what I thought was a culture that did not accept me based on its perceptions of race.

It was only after an extended trip to Europe in my early twenties, my marriage to my wife (a West Island Anglo Saxon) in my mid-twenties and the birth of my daughter in my late twenties that I decided to become a Canadian citizen. When I made the commitment to citizenship, I also decided that I would become an active agent of change in the perceptions Canadians had towards their supposed "multicultural" policies. The first way I was going to do this was through the voting process. The first opportunity I had to vote was during our stay in Mississauga, when the federal elections of 1997 were held. As a resident of the area, I spent quite a bit of time reviewing my choices for political representation and familiarizing myself with the voting process.

I learned through a fax from a CEGEP peer that one aspect of the electoral process included my obligation to let our students off for the last few hours of class for the purpose of allowing them adequate time to vote. I mentioned this to my class early on in the election and received passive responses of acknowledgment. On the election day, as planned, I wrapped up my lesson by mid-afternoon and reminded the class that, once they had finished their short assigned in-class task, they were free to go vote. Again, this announcement was met with little enthusiasm. The students put the final touches on their work, handed in their work, put their books and jackets together, talked amongst each other and prepared to leave. I suddenly realized that I had no idea where my wife and I were supposed to vote. Before the students left, I asked them where the voting booth was located. The question was met with a mixture of ambivalence and uncertainty. The students questioned each other in Cree; the intonation of question marks at the end of their sentences to one another was unmistakable.

Finally, in English, Charlene provided me with two possible locations for the voting station: the high school or the band office building. Now it was my time to be confused. "Which one is it?" I asked. "We don't know!" Charlene laughed as the other women chuckled knowingly along with her. "What do you mean, you don't know?" I laughed along with them, more out of affection than from any inkling of their inside joke. "We don't vote!" Charlene said, emphasizing "vote" by lowering her tone of voice in rasping disapproval. Most of the students were still smiling and laughing as she said this, some nodding in approval. I sat back down in my chair again and motioned if they would do the same. Having been so excited over the idea of casting my first ballot, I asked with genuine earnest and confusion, "Why don't you vote?" Charlene responded, with a smile that was a little less pronounced, "We don't vote in provincial and

federal elections. Why vote? Our vote doesn't count for anything."

A few things struck me about this revelation: first, no one was discussing this in an angry manner. Second, they all seemed unified and resolute. And third, it was the first time they had ever discussed a political issue with me. We had discussed social issues before but this was the first time I had ever heard them taking a political position on a social issue. Charlene calmly explained that, as far as they were concerned, the Native vote did not count. She described the electoral map to me, pointing out that the voting district they lived in was part of the same voting district as a number of large non-Native towns. Because they would always be out-numbered in votes, their "Native" concerns would always be overshadowed by the demands of the non-Native towns. So, "Why vote?"<sup>35</sup>

Having recently gone through my Canadian citizenship exam, I thought I remembered reading that all distinctive regions of Canada and its provinces were given equal representation, regardless of population. As I mused over these political philosophies, thinking of the popular belief in Anglo circles in Quebec of rural over-representation, I wondered about the tiny pockets of populations along the "Lac St. Jean" route towards Cree territory and asked if they felt they had greater political power. Some students nodded their heads, resigned to the hidden fact that they were left out of this type of direct representation. "That's why we don't vote", Charlene echoed seriously. "Because it doesn't matter who we vote for."

Upon reflection, I guess they were of course justified in their perception if they had indeed been effectively removed from the voting process. If so, it would seem then the electoral voting lines had been drawn so as to demographically quell their political voice. It almost seemed to be such an overt, unabashed way to take the vote away from the Cree people that I wondered why the media gave this problem no coverage. I could not argue with their rationale. That evening, when I cast my first vote, I have to admit that the feeling was a little less empowering than I would have expected.

### Reflection: The Autonomy Stage

Few incidents shaped my perceptions towards the relationship between non-native and Native community as much as the comment my student made to me about "loving dogs

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<sup>35</sup> It is important to remember this was Charlene's understanding of the voting map.

more than children". From personal experiences regarding growing up as the "other" within a homogeneous cultural context (Stonebanks, 2004), I've always had my beliefs about the reality of being ethnically, religiously or racially ranked as lesser by those around me. My student's perception on the non-Native fascination with the welfare of dogs superseding the apparent interest of the needs of the community members demonstrates a similar view of her sense of self while interacting with non-Natives. Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) judgment of research of indigenous people creating a tone of their subjects as not "fully human", Said's (1985) writings of the process of generating the "other" that is different from the West's true civilized man or Zinn's (2003) historical account of the slaughter that occurs when one group dictates the other as less than human validates the understanding of this student's observation. Consider the sentiments of two prominent presidents of the US: George Washington wrote that Native people "...were wolves and beasts who deserved nothing from the whites but 'total ruin'" (Stannard, 1992, p. 241) and Andrew Jackson, urged United States troops "...to root out from their 'dens' and kill Indian women and their 'whelps'" (p. 240). Although Washington and Jackson are not portrayed as the racists they obviously were, I wonder how much of these dehumanizing sentiments still reside in the consciousness of Native people across North America.

I was quite taken aback by being placed in a role I was unaccustomed to, that being the representative to the "European" non-Native. Despite all of my efforts not to do so, in part, I believe this was due to the Eurocentric view of education that I was unconsciously imposing on all of my students. My episode with the "mem-nep-soon" and my attempt to "teach" my students the "proper" way to provide sleep care for their day-care babies is an example of imposing a European standard of knowledge through schooling (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Battiste & Barman, 1995). Continuing in this manner risked alienation from my students. Wolcott (1987), for instance, wrote that the native Alaskan students he taught did not see the relevance of education within their cultural context, therefore saw the "Teacher as the Enemy". Through critical incidents, such as Peter's account of watching Natives in Hollywood films as a child, I grew to realize the depth of assault created on the Indigenous image of self and the media (Shaheen, 2001) and promised myself to be more conscientious of my own interactions and teaching.

## INTERDEPENDENCE

The last stage in most descriptions of culture shock aims at the goal of a bicultural or multicultural identity. In this almost idealized target goal ... the individual has moved from alienation to a new identity that is equally comfortable, settled, accepted, and fluent in both the old and new cultures. There is a sense of belonging to several cultures at the same time. Even though the individual is still different from the host culture in a variety of ways, those differences do not dominate or control the individual's identity any longer. A mutual adaptation has occurred that defines the profoundly significant common ground between visitors and the host culture. (...)The person will exhibit a high level of trust and authentic sensitivity to the conditions of the host culture. The person will express humor and creativity and will accurately interpret the meaning of events in the host culture. (Pederson, 1994)

### Checking Beaver Traps

The winter of 1997 brought more snow to the village of Mistissini than most locals were, in a good humoured way, willing to admit. Time and again, my wife and I would gasp at the sheer volume of snow that accumulated outside. We would rhetorically ask, "I'm sure this isn't a normal amount of snow!" This would always cause our Cree friends to smile and say, "Oh, yes!" They would later reveal their deception, however, when they showed up at our doorstep for a visit, exhausted by the trek through the snow, exclaiming, "I can't believe how much snow is out there!" The snow drifts and piles of ploughed snow on the sides of the roads and at the end of your driveway reminded my wife and me of the kind of snow accumulation we had only seen as very small children in the early 1970s. Oddly enough, we never actually saw many snowstorms in Mistissini. Rather, as mentioned, a peaceful, continuous, light snow fell constantly on the village.

It was in this wintery setting and upon the invitation of Joe, the husband of one of my students, that I had a glimpse of the traditional lifestyle of a Cree hunter. One Friday, at the end of a school day, Joe showed up at our class, much to the surprise and disapproval of his wife. Her disapproving look made it clear that this class was her "territory" and that she did not appreciate Joe infringing on her space. Seemingly ambivalent to this, Joe walked past his wife and, with a big smile on his face, asked me in broken English if I wanted to go with him, the next day, to see his "hunting line".

I was not surprised by Joe's friendliness; we had played shinny hockey together on many occasions and, despite our language barriers, I enjoyed his company. I was pleased with the idea of going to see the "bush". One of the initial bits of advice I was given by non-Native people who worked within the Cree community was to appreciate any offer by locals to participate in their activities, which, according to them, was a rare honour. I happily accepted his invitation but his wife, Debbie, immediately intervened. Although I could not understand their conversation in Cree, it was clear that she was now vocally expressing her displeasure with his incursion on her "space". A brief argument ensued. She turned to me and said, "He's bothering you, you don't want to go with him!" It was then Joe's turn to intervene and insist in broken English that I wanted to go. "I want to go," I assured them both. Joe smiled victoriously at his wife. Debbie's eyes narrowed at him as she "harrumphed" at us both and turned away.

The next morning, Joe arrived at the door with his wife trailing behind him. Now it was Debbie's turn to smile and Joe's to show displeasure at his wife's intrusion. "I'm coming with you!" Debbie announced. I told her she did not have to come and that we were fine. Debbie sarcastically remarked that she was worried that her husband would leave me behind in the woods and that she would be unable to finish her CEGEP degree. This brought about a sheepish look from her husband and shrieks of laughter from my wife, with whom Debbie had been spending quite a bit of time.

Debbie's accompaniment made Melanie feel better about this excursion into the bush. Early during our time in Mistissini, I had previously gone with a group of non-Natives on a canoe trip that, through our lack of knowledge in the rapid water, nearly resulted in my drowning. I had been bruised, battered and humbled by an untouched environment that could have swallowed me up whole and without a trace. Indeed, one of my most vivid memories of living in Cree territory was being caught in the undercurrent of the rapids that would not let me go. Beaten and dragged along the bed of the river, I remember frantically trying to grasp at anything at all, trying to stop my descent into the water but only grabbing at handfuls of small rocks as articles of my clothing were being ripped off me by the strength of nature. Finally coming to peace with the feeling your lungs get when they are beyond the ache for oxygen and with my hands outstretched, I saw my wedding ring slip off my finger. As I instinctively tried to reach out to grab it, I caught a leg hold on a firm piece of rock and then found myself above water and in a more hospitable part of the rapids. I managed to pull myself to shore. I always

half-joked with my wife that I had to appease the spirit of that lake with my wedding band for my life.

Consequently, Melanie was not very happy with the idea of my going back into the bush. In truth, I think Debbie recognized this and wanted to make sure that I was going to be alright. It was not because she did not trust her husband but because she, by nature, always seemed to exude a deep concern for everyone that surrounded her. After that early incident on the rapids, I was heavily reprimanded by my students for going into the bush with inexperienced people. I recognized that Joe was the kind of expert in this field that I did not have to worry about, so I was very comfortable going with him.

Resigned to the fact that our "guy-time" was going to be infringed upon by Debbie's watchful eye, we made the best of it and made our short journey to Joe's "trap line". We left the vehicle on the side of the road and made our way from the beaten path towards the open bush. As we made our way into the wooded area, Joe led, breaking the path through the knee-high snow, expertly avoiding any higher snow through a knowledge base that was completely unknown to me. As Joe and I pressed forward, Debbie started to fall behind, walking in the snow prints that we left in our path. I followed Joe closely, enjoying the scenery and the sun-filled sky, and as I walked I admired Joe's ability to make his way through the snow. He did it with such ease that he reminded me of a jackrabbit; as he seemed completely unburdened by his obligation to break the way for us through the fresh snow.

Slung on Joe's back was a marvellously embroidered sack; it was a deep red with intricately designed bright floral designs, the beauty of which belied the fact that it contained a rifle. In his other hand was a simple axe. I commented to Joe how beautiful the craftsmanship was on the sack and Joe smiled appreciatively. He then handed me the rifle and told me that I could carry it. As he handed it to me, I felt like a son who had just been given the honour and responsibility of carrying his dad's gun and in many ways, this was true; in comparison to Joe's knowledge, my own was that of a "babe in the woods". The rifle felt light and judging from past experience with my father's rifle collection, it was probably a 22-calibre gun. I slung it over my shoulder and asked Joe what the gun was for. He searched for the words in English and when he couldn't find them, yelled back at his wife, who was still trailing twenty or thirty feet behind us. She translated for him and yelled, "For birds". Joe looked back, a little frustrated, perhaps because he wanted to be more specific and gave his wife a look that suggested, "If I wanted to



say "bird", I would have said "bird""", but Debbie was oblivious to his stares as she ploughed her way through the snow. I interjected, "Oh, like ptarmigan or pheasants?" "Yes", Joe said, relieved that he got his message across.

As we made our way through the snow, it became obvious that the route Joe was traveling was well known and, although covered with deep snow, well- trodden. This was indeed his family's land and he was familiar with it. Relieved of carrying his rifle, he made his way through the snow with his axe in hand and in full motion. Like a person mindfully arranging a table for company, Joe would periodically stop for a moment and expertly wield his axe to cut away the branches that he knew existed under the coverage of snow and that impeded the route. From time to time, Joe would mindfully stop to check a tree and point out an old cut that I assume had been made two or three seasons ago, either simply to clear a branch away from the unseen path or perhaps as a marker. In retrospect, as I doubt that he needed a marker to know where he was going, I think that he was probably pointing out where either he, or a family member preceding him, had passed before.

The walk was quiet, and as we followed in single file there was little talking between us. The only sounds that filled the crisp, bright air was that of the snow being disturbed by our heavy boots. It was a good long while before we reached a slight slope in the landscape that was more densely wooded than the trail we had walked until now. We seemed to hang on the edges of the more forested area of the bush. At the centre of the incline I saw the unmistakable shape of a beaver's home. The silence that permeated the air was broken by the babbling singsong of rushing water that defiantly broke between the cracks and splits in the ice. It seemed as though the two elements of air and water were bickering between fluidity and freezing.

Joe made his way to the beaver dam and pulled out a trap that seemed designed to catch the beaver without damaging its precious pelt. I was momentarily repulsed by the idea of a beaver being caught in the entrance of its home and the method of its death; drowning in an environment that would otherwise have provided it with security from predators and nourishment. The moment quickly passed as I remembered that, when it came to hunting, I have never encountered a people who were so complete in their use and respect for everything that the animal provided; nothing went to waste. Could the same be said for the

animals slaughtered for my own consumption in Montreal? How could I be sure of how humanely those animals were killed when I am so removed from the process?

Joe quickly checked each of his traps, inspecting them and then resetting them. In the end, none of his traps contained any beavers and he shrugged and smiled apologetically for not being able to show me the fruits of his labours. Quietly, I was happy that the “little symbols of Canada” had thwarted my friend! We sat by the beaver dam for a short break as I soaked in the moment. Debbie and Joe talked about the different seasons they spent with family on this land and I romantically wondered how many generations of Joe’s family had gone through Joe’s routine of checking their traps. How much had changed since the days before the Europeans’ arrival and how much had stayed the same? I could not say, but I could tell that Joe and Debbie were still very, very close to these wonderfully rich and heritage-soaked roots that were, although foreign to me, very admirable in their honesty.

Later in our stay in Mistissini, another family invited us to join them on their trap-line for the annual “Goose hunting” week that came with every spring migration of the Canada geese. I respectfully declined the offer as Melanie and I had already planned to use the time to visit our much missed family and friends in Montreal. I realize now that I missed a unique opportunity to expose myself and my family to an experience in which most North Americans will never have the honour of being invited to participate. The only solace I can take in having lost this opportunity is that I at least have enjoyed the experience of having joined friends like Joe who allowed me a few cherished glimpses into their traditional life.

### Giving and Sharing

Housing in the village of Mistissini always seemed to be a precious commodity; my wife and I would always be astonished at the sheer number of people that would have to live in a single home. It was not uncommon that several generations of a family could be found within the single standard split level dwellings that were normally found within the village. When we would compare the cramped living condition of our Native friends, colleagues and neighbours, we would always feel extremely guilty that only three of us lived in the four-bedroom house that the CEGEP had procured for us through the generosity of the Cree School Board. Initially, after the first summer semester of teaching, we had been presented with the possibility of rooming

with another teaching couple but we frowned upon the idea because, if we were going to live in the village for the year, we wanted to shed ourselves of any ties to the notion that we were part of a separate “professional” community within the village.

When the opportunity presented itself to share our home with a local couple, who were Cree, with whom Melanie and I were growing increasingly close, we embraced the idea. Darlene and Steve were in the unfortunate bureaucratic predicament of anticipating that they would be without a dwelling between the months of April to August as Darlene was returning from her undergraduate studies and was between positions within the school board where she worked. The shifting of jobs was going to temporarily leave them without the umbrella of housing privileges until the school board would be able to provide them with a home. Certainly, the school board would have made room for them within another household, but Melanie and I jumped on the idea of sharing our living space with them. After all, the lower half of the house we were living in had two finished and furnished rooms and a full bathroom that was completely unused.

One of the best things that ever happened to us during our time in the village was sharing our home with these two people. As we shared our living space, we came into greater contact with the differences and similarities of our cultures. Certainly, what made our co-habitation easier was the fact that both Darlene and Steve had previously spent considerable time living within non-Native communities, so whatever idiosyncrasies we possessed were not unfamiliar to either of them. Melanie and I benefited from the arrangement for several reasons, such as by having the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of life on a “reservation” through our long and in-depth conversations with Steve and Darlene.

We had our differences of course. For example, Steve and Darlene are strong believers in Christianity whereas Melanie and I are, although spiritual, are non-religious. Also, Melanie and I grew up in a middle class environment in suburban Montreal whereas Steve and Darlene were raised, for the most part, on a Cree reservation in Northern Ontario. Still, beneath the cultural façade, we discovered through our discussions that we shared common values, social and political perspectives. Our relationship grew so strong with them that when we later had our second child, Cyrus, we asked them to be his Godparents (or perhaps “Guide”-parents would be a more appropriate term for us) because we respected them so much.

There are no “single incidents” to relay that would provide a critical example of precisely when this couple living with us made such a large impact on our lives. Rather, it was the constant giving and sharing between us that made life so pleasant. In turn, our strong relationship with our friends inadvertently sent a message to others within the community that common values, shared interests, respect and honest dialogue can overcome any merely physical ethnic differences. Mostly I will always remember Steve’s good humour and Darlene’s generosity and kindness.

When people within the community learned that we were now sharing our home, we received mixed reactions. To some it was simply a non-issue, just friends helping out friends. To others it was a point of delight. A secretary within the school board, of whom I was particularly fond as her dry, sharp wit reminded me so much of my mother’s sense of humour, chuckled in satisfaction and said, “You guys must be “ok” if Indians will live with you!” (She cunningly used the word “Indian” on purpose for effect.) A minority of non-Native residents (and it was a minority) believed that it would set a bad precedent because most of them were occupying large dwellings with small families themselves.

On a completely selfish level, Melanie and I benefited tremendously by being rid of the guilt of living in opulence compared to the rest of the people in the community. More importantly, what was simply an invitation to people we truly liked became more symbolic to others within the community that we knew how to share.

Sharing, as I have come to understand it, is a cultural trait that is very particular to the Cree. My mother’s Iranian culture prides itself on its tradition of hospitality and generosity but it still does not compare to the sheer act of selflessness, giving and sharing that many within the Cree community habitually displayed. It was not uncommon, even far before Steve and Darlene came to live with us, for relative strangers to come to our door with offerings of good tidings. Once, an elderly man came to our house and handed me a large chunk of fresh meat, neatly wrapped in cellophane. As I held the deeply rich crimson package he said, “My daughter says you like moose meat”, and then smiled and walked away. In honesty, as we did not know who the man was, the mystery meat was placed in our freezer until the next school day, when I asked the class if they had any idea of the identity of our secret provider. A giggle broke out when one of my students realized that she had mentioned to her father, after hearing that he had returned from a hunting trip with a prized moose, that Melanie and I always enjoyed the

meat whenever we had the chance. So, just like that, when he was dividing up his catch, some went into his own freezer, some to his relatives, some to neighbours and friends and “some to that couple down the road that my daughter says likes moose meat”.

Sharing and giving seemed to be a natural part of the Cree way of life and evidence of this philosophy surfaced often. When one of my students realized that our one-year-old did not have a crib, she brought one over to us. A secretary, within the education setting, overheard how much I appreciated the colourful and delicious rainbow trout that had come from the lake, so she sent her husband out to catch some for me. The husband simply showed up the following evening at our home unannounced with a sack full of gorgeous fresh trout. These incidents happened all the time. These examples of the Cree sense of giving and sharing are, I believe, indicative of their culture and are definitely one of the traits that my wife and I tried to embrace and integrate into our own way of life.

### CEGEP and Disneyland

In his 1991 book, Home Game, the famous Hall of Fame Montreal Canadiens goalie and subsequent Canadian author Ken Dryden referred to the sport of hockey as the “tie that bound Canada together”. In my opinion, and based on my experiences, Dryden’s perspective (although very much a male one), rings true. Contributing my meagre hockey skills and abilities to the Cree ice rinks provided me with a means of accessing Cree life by breaking down many social and cultural barriers of inhibition. Initially, playing shinny hockey with the locals within the community of course allowed me to make friends with a wide range of adults but volunteering as much time as I could as an assistant coach for the bantam hockey team of Mistissini introduced me to the teenagers of the village. For a brief time, this allowed me to make contact with an age group that I otherwise never would have had the pleasure of knowing.

The bantam hockey team comprised of approximately 20 boys (and one very brave girl) between the ages of 13 to 15 years. My duties were similar to the hockey coaching duties I had in Montreal: a couple of nights a week of practice and the periodic weekend game. The big bonus was spending extended time with these youngsters during one long drive from the village of Mistissini to the town in which we were playing.

It was during this “road trip” that I first began formulating my research questions for this dissertation. The questions came to me while driving with four boys to Chapais, a town approximately 140 kilometers from Mistissini. Much of the drive was on logging and dirt roads. On this particular winter day, the weather conditions were quite poor, so our time together in my Jeep was well over six hours. During that time, we mostly talked about the things that almost all young Canadian boys tend to talk about: hockey, girls, and music. Somewhere in between fighting over control of the tape-deck (I had had enough of listening to rap music!) and the boys complaining that I drove as slow as their respective grandmothers, we began to discuss matters of a less superficial nature. The weather *was* particularly bad; the very clouds that were producing the poor weather hung low, and seemed to be mixed in with the snowfall and light freezing rain that surrounded us. It produced an eerie visibility that seemed to simultaneously absorb the light from the headlights and bounce the radiance on our immediate periphery.

It was a spooky environment. With the scene set, a young man who spoke particularly good English said, “I shouldn’t tell you these stories because you’re not Cree. So if I tell you, you have to promise *never* to repeat them again!” I agreed and he began to weave his many tales; stories that his friends had heard before, maybe by him or perhaps from their own relatives. As he spoke, we all listened intently; with the other boys seriously nodding their head in agreement and periodically chirping in a descriptor or fact, in Cree, that they felt the storyteller had missed. They were absolutely chilling stories and when I gave him accolades for having recounted a legend well, they all assured me “It’s not a legend, it’s true!”

It was great! I enjoyed the fact that they trusted me enough to tell me these narratives. Who knows if they were really traditional or not, if they were not, they deserved to be published! Some were so good that I begged that I be allowed to retell some of the stories to my close family and friends. They agreed, but I could tell that the tales should not go any farther than that. As their narratives continued, I felt proud that they were allowing me even so slightly into this part of their world, teenage or otherwise.

Eventually, as the course of the conversations ebbed and flowed from subject to subject, the topic of *exactly* what I did for a living surfaced. I explained that I taught CEGEP courses. This was met with silent nods. One of the young men asked if I had actually gone to

CEGEP myself. I laughed and stated that as a CEGEP teacher the least I could have done was gone to CEGEP. A few minutes of silence followed and then the boys started asking me questions about CEGEP: where did I go; did the CEGEP have girls as well as boys; was it harder than high school; did all my friends go; did I have to leave home; was it a big party and did my brothers and sisters attend CEGEP?

They were excitingly asking questions and eagerly listening to my responses. I was happy that they were showing such an interest in higher education, even if it was only a youthful interest in the “partying” aspects associated with it. Then, from out of the back-seat, two more questions: “Have you ever been to Marine-Land?” “Have you ever been to Disney-World?”. “No”, I responded, “Have you?”. “No”, they answered, guffawing at the same time as if to say, “What, are you stupid?”

An uneasy, lingering moment of silence ensued while I tried to figure out their collective train of thought. How did this conversation turn from one which I used to have regularly with my friends at that exact age, to this oddly natural turn (for them at least) to Disney World and Marine Land? Was it a genuine connection of thought, an English language shortcoming or just a teenage mind jumping from one random conversation to the next. I decided to probe further about the connection between CEGEP and Disneyland. One young man responded, “I don’t know, they’re both a place to *party!*” Which brought on a series of laughter and high-fives, in typically flippant teenage response. But as we talked, I began to sense that the true relationship between CEGEP and the recreational parks was that all seemed to be as mythical and distant as a commercial on television.

After thinking about the conversation for a few days and discussing the subject with other Natives, I came to the conclusion that attending CEGEP somewhere in the “South” seemed about as likely and realistic to them as going to Disney World or Marine Land; it was a fantasy place to which only a few lucky people could ever get the opportunity to go.

It struck me rather hard that my friends and I were no different than these boys. I knew their teachers and I *know* our marks were no better than theirs, and yet going to CEGEP after high school was simply an expected next step for all of us. To us it was a *reality*, a tangible experience that we received second hand from our family, neighbours and older friends and a visual physical existence. To them it was a fantasy, something they had never touched, encountered and for the most part never even seen.

After casually discussing this subject with other boys on the hockey team, I found that almost none of them had any family members or friends who attended CEGEP and for those that did, the experience ended with the individual dropping out because he or she could not deal with the distance, loneliness and isolation. This was their experience and perceptions of CEGEP. This realization, coupled with the success of the CEGEP de St-Félicien program in which I was involved, initiated my interest in having the Cree develop their own CEGEP system.

I realize that this story concerning the youngsters lends itself easily and naturally to eliciting sympathetic emotions, but having done participant observation in the past, I have made every effort to use the approach in which I was trained to present this experience from an "empathetic rather than a sympathetic point of view" (Maykutt & Morehouse, 1994, P. 25). This incident inspired my initial question "Why do the Cree feel that CEGEP is a distant reality?" I thought about and discussed this extremely broad question with some Native councillors and former and present Native CEGEP students. What were the possible reasons that the Cree youth would feel so "removed", for lack of a better word, from the idea of attending a CEGEP? "Removed" and "distant" became the operative words that I most often heard in the answers I received.

The extreme physical distance of the CEGEP locations seems to play a role in the Crees' perception of higher education in general. A lack of proximity, I was told, fosters a lack of familiarity. This in turn makes attending a CEGEP about as feasible, or real, as going to a completely different world. This was a hard jump in logic for someone in my position. Yet, I thought of how closely I had grown up to the CEGEP I had attended (John Abbott College) and how, every day of my life, I actually saw young students easily making their way to school. The institution and the people that attended it were commonplace to me; it seemed as natural to attend CEGEP as it did to attend elementary school.

It is not hard to assume that a Cree student's decision to attend a CEGEP in Montreal would seem as natural to them as a Montreal student having to pack up and venture off to Whapmagoostui if they wanted to attend university. Imagine the culture shock that such a student would have to overcome. This may be a hard comparison for us to accept, but I am told by those Cree who have made the attempt to study in Montreal that it is fairly accurate. At this moment, most Cree people of Northern Quebec who are interested in attaining CEGEP



level education have little choice but to attend a school somewhere outside of their Cree community. And somehow, this reality now seems to be more problematic than before.

### The Importance of Imagination

At the risk of appearing insensitive, I must confess that in the early stages of teaching, I never really revelled in the type of teary-eyed classroom moments that some of my CEGEP colleagues would talk about when we would meet between semesters. Some relayed stories that suggested that some professors seemingly spent considerable amount of time as “councillor” to their students who revealed their problems in classroom “rap sessions”. When I listened to these stories, I would naively think to myself, “What the hell does this have to do with what we were supposed to be *teaching* them?” Sometimes, they would tell us how they became involved in matters that were so personal that they would find themselves in confrontations with their students’ family members. And then they wondered why they found themselves in trouble within their community!

Perhaps it is because I am a man that I have really tried to avoid the kind of situations where I might find myself not knowing how to console a large group of women. But it is also probably true that teachers who had classes of only three or four students had more luxury to interact in such a “touchy-feely” manner. I had a large class so I could not teach in this way. By nature, I am a very passionate person who always tries to compensate for this tendency by controlling impulse and being as analytical as possible within the professional setting. I expected no less from my students. Whenever we discussed issues that could have induced overly emotional responses, I would caution the class to approach the problems as professionals. And for the most part, to their credit, they did. However, as time progressed, I learned that some Native educational subjects are too personal not to evoke tears from everyone in the classroom, including the teacher.

One such response occurred when we were in the process of ordering supplies for our “mock” daycare. We were to set up a daycare from scratch: a complete daycare that would be in full use for three weeks as part of the program’s practicum. The students had all been given an assortment of daycare related supply lists and, in small groups, they were to compile a list of articles that they would prioritize to be of necessity for our daycare. They were then to write

their list on the blackboard for comparison purposes, debate and justify their choices, and then together come up with a master list that we would submit. As usual, the students dutifully completed their assignments and their tasks. The real point of the exercise was not only to introduce them to budgeting and prioritizing their supplies, but to provoke discussion as to what was really needed within a daycare and why.

After they had completed their tasks, they took their seats and we went over each group's choices. As we went through them, I could not help but notice that each had left out something that my wife and I had prioritized when she had helped me prepare for this class. The students' choices all included toys that were related to either large motor skill development for boys or small motor development skill acquisition for girls. Void from their lists was anything dealing with imagination play. "How come no one put down any of these imagination related toys?" I asked. I pointed out the pages of the catalogue filled with dress-up clothes and toys that related to many different professions such as a doctor's or a mechanic's kit. I tried to prompt the class, "Why would it be important for children at a daycare to dress up like a doctor or teacher?" No one responded. After waiting for an extended period of time, I pressed on. "Why would we want kids to play with toys that are like those of a mechanic or a nurse?" They all seemed to shrug their shoulders in unison. I thought to myself, "Are they being lazy? It can't be they don't know. It's so obvious!" I tried to put the question in a more leading manner. "Why is it important for kids to imagine that they are different people who hold different jobs?" Again, no answer.

"Come on, guys! Don't you remember when you were a kid and your teachers had that dress-up corner where you could pretend you could be anything?" I continued, explaining how important it was for children to imagine that they could be anything and to have their teachers, their significant others in their lives, tell them that they were capable of becoming anything.

For some, they answered that, in their residential schools, they never had such things. Our conversation continued with me stressing the importance of such encouragement and play and then I asked "What about at home? Didn't your parents ever reinforce the idea that you could be anything if you tried?" Silence ensued. Followed by deep thought from the students and then, some tears. "No one ever told me that I could become anything," offered a brave student with shaky voice. Most agreed. Some cried.

The narratives that followed described childhoods filled with teachers who never led them to believe that they were capable of becoming anything other than “Indians who would go back to their reserves”. It seemed to me that their description of their parents were of people who were so tainted with their perception of lacking opportunities for their people that they did not want to give their children false hope. “Why bother telling your child they are going to be anything else but an Indian on a reserve?” I was told.

The idea that a child was raised without the opportunity of dreaming about being anything, an astronaut, a lawyer, a teacher, whatever, was so immensely depressing. Trying to reach for anything at all, I asked, “Didn’t your parents even tell you that you could go to college and follow your dreams?” Silence was, again, the response followed by increased tears.

It was definitely a learning moment, for both the students and myself. They learned how important it is for children to imagine the possibilities of achieving anything they desire, and of the equal importance of parents and educators to encourage this concept. I learned that the absence of such encouragement and role-playing examples can lead to a perception of self that fails to encourage the dream of multiple possibilities for one’s future.

Reflecting back on this incident, it was no surprise that when these students graduated with their CEGEP degrees it was so well attended by their own children. Definitely, they now knew they were tangible examples to the next generation.

### Upside-down!

Certain activities that were familiar to life in Montreal were always regarded as amusing by the Indigenous people of Mistissini. Simple things, like walking your dog on a leash, asking the butcher for lamb at Easter or serving pumpkin pie would certainly draw bemused smiles. In spring, I decided to try to grow grass in our front yard, which consisted of a sandy soil that resisted the growth of anything but local plants. It just so happened that the village was going through a “beautification” process of sorts, depending on your perspective. Sod was being laid on some yards and fences were being erected. Also, a large “True Value” home-hardware store had opened up in the village and I was drawn to the familiar lawn maintenance aisles that seemed unvisited and out of place in the village. I placed a couple of

bags of topsoil and grass seeds, a hose, a sprinkler and a rake in my shopping cart and smiled through the affable smirks and ribbings I received from people I knew within the store.

Raking the small amount of topsoil into the sand, rolling in the seeds and watering the ground in front of the house was the source of good-natured amusement for practically every person I knew in the village. One afternoon after work, as I stood outside in the high sun watering the ground that refused to grow barely any grass, a gentleman I played shinny hockey with drove past the house and slowed his car down to a halt. His Cheshire Cat smile revealed the nature of his following comments and said, simply, "What the heck are you doing?" His family in the car shared in the fun and laughed at the guy from the city spraying water on the sandy ground that could only in the loosest sense be called soil. I nodded, smiling and said, "Laugh at me now, but when this front yard looks like a park, see if I let you picnic here with your family!" He laughed and drove away.

This event marked the increasing level of ease in which we now lived within the village. There was a sense of acceptance and freedom to feel as though one could do as one pleased, as long as one paid the obvious respects to the norms of those with whom one associated.

In the first month that I lived in the community, carrying out simple acts that one would consider the "norm" within Montreal made me feel extremely uneasy. Washing one's car, something that I did with great regularity and pleasure in Montreal, was not a common site in Mississauga, because of the continuous dust and mud of the dirt road into the village. This, of course, is not to say that no one washed his or her cars. It is simply that they did not do it with the same type of fastidiousness to which I was accustomed in Montreal due to the practicality that "It's just going to get dirty again." As my wife can attest, one day during our first summer when we were in the village, I stared out the window at our dust-encrusted car before finally blurting what she knew I was thinking. "That's it! I can't take it anymore. I'm washing the car!" Looking back on it, the ridiculousness of feeling so insecure about doing something so innocuous seems humorous. But, when removed from the security of one's norms, it is easy to stress over just about everything. To make matters worse, when I did finally find a rag, soap and hose to wash down the car, I received a barrage of rocks from children hidden at the bottom of the small incline next to the house that sent me retreating into the house. I made a vain attempt to scatter them, looked at my now half-washed car, and, once again, thought, "Man, they sure can throw!"

By the following spring, I felt secure enough in the surroundings to be the oddball and do as I pleased. I had purchased all the little knick-knacks that accompanies the middle-class obsession with a clean and waxed car and brought them out onto the gravel driveway at the first sign of a sunny weekend afternoon. I would still periodically draw the attention of the local boys who lived in the immediate neighbourhood but the nature of their reaction changed. I no longer had to be worried about rocks. Now I had to concern myself with their desire to lend a hand: grabbing the sponge from the bucket, dropping it on the ground and then unwittingly grinding rocks and dirt into the new car finish or, heaven help us, dipping the sheep skin chamois into the soap bucket! After having played with them in their sleds on the huge man-made hill next to the house or having mailed them a Canadian Tire special "instant ice rink" at Christmas, they had decided that, from time to time, I was an "OK" guy with whom they could briefly hang around. The day that I purchased a pressure spray that attached to the hose and, from a child's perspective, dispensed a high-powered soap filled jet of instant fun, defined the moment when I truly felt like I could act like myself with these kids.

I drew a crowd of approximately six or seven boys when they caught sight of me spraying my Jeep with my newly acquired "soap-wand", a fairly new product at the time. The temptation was too much for them. They stared in deep appreciation at the device, in a manner that only ten-year-old boys can as they imagine the havoc this device can cause. Without thinking, I put the soap wand down and in an instant, one of the more mischievous of the gang had it in hand and was giving a thorough soaking to his friends. They squealed with delight as he braced himself against the pressure, mercilessly hosing his friends down with sheer glee and determination. As I went to grab the wand from him, he had no qualms about turning the soap gun on me and I retreated from his attack. He turned the hose a second time on his friends who were mounting an attack for control of the weapon of fun. They were, of course, rebuffed, and squealed with delight. I made my way to the source of his power. He realized that I was going to turn the tap off and made his way towards me, spraying me in his attempt to ward me away.

As I held up the tap key that I removed from the water valve and the pressure on his hose died, he turned to his friends and said, with a smile on his face, "oh oh!" He dropped the hose and mounted a drama filled attack, screaming in fun, as he tried to wrestle the water key from my hand. As we wrestled, all the children were laughing and I pried the boy off me. I held

him straight out, upside down, as his hands waved frantically. I asked him, "Do you give up?" Surprisingly, he understood me and he defiantly laughed, "NO!" I walked over to the water bucket and held him over it and repeated my demand, "Do you give up?" "No!" he responded, laughing harder and anticipating what was coming. I lowered him and gave his head a good dunk in the clean water. He didn't resist the fun and embraced it as we went through the procedure a couple of times, to the delight of his soaked friends, until he finally "surrendered".

When I finally dropped him to the ground, we were all laughing and for my benefit, one of his friends kept pointing at him, laughing and saying, "Upside-down!" in English. It felt good that despite the gaps we had in verbal communication, we could play together in the same way I would have with my friends' little brothers, or neighbourhood kids, or the students I taught elementary physical education to in Montreal. We were able to roughhouse in, from my perspective, an unselfconscious way. They were simply a gang of boys hanging around an adult they liked, teasing him in a good humoured way and looking for a playful reaction. From my wife's perspective, watching from our window, it was a very natural incident, when I did not worry for a second about cultural misinterpretation or any such concerns. We all had big smiles on our faces and were laughing wholeheartedly. It was another example of feeling like I "belonged" in the community and was able to carry out life in a way that was respectful and yet at ease with my own culture within this cultural context.

#### Reflection: The Interdependence Stage

There was a time, before my experience in Cree territory, when I would silently wonder similarly to Mander's (1991) question, "Where did all the Indians go?" Where were even all these stereotypical Native people we would periodically see in commercials crying over pollution or in television shows and movies endlessly torturing innocent settlers? Where were these Natives that we would briefly hear about in our Canadian history classes, relegated to the sidelines of a textbook history written by the victors? Where were the Native people and why weren't they my neighbours, why weren't they my acquaintances or classmates growing up, or why didn't I even see them simply walking down the streets; where were they? I can honestly say that even until my mid-twenties, I had no idea about the complexity of the Native situation in North America. Perhaps, after living in Cree territory for just under a year and a

half, I have a better, more compassionate and educated understanding than most but I would never assume to fully understand what the Cree or other Natives feel about their situation and experience.

Despite the initial discomforts of trying to grow accustomed to the vast differences in culture, we soon grew to appreciate that there was a stronger common ground that we shared with our Cree friends: respect for each other and respect for our differences. Melanie and I employed a "when in Rome" philosophy to our life in Mistissini and without a doubt this contributed tremendously to our quality of our life. We happily came to the conclusion that we would look at this time as an adventure and that we would explore as much of it as possible. We simply led the life of participant observers; we watched, we joined in, we learned and for the most part, we learned that these were both wonderful people and wonderfully distinct people; especially my students.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Interviews**



## Introduction

"Cultures" do not hold still for their portraits. (Clifford, 1986, P. 10)

In an endeavour such as this, trying to encapsulate the voice of your participant as a reflection of the cultural group you are working with can be daunting, misleading and, depending on your assumptions, even insulting. You always risk believing that your work is a mirror image of an entire cultural group as opposed to the reflection of the context in which the research was carried out and of the interviewees who were courteous enough to spend the time to talk with you. Referring specifically but not exclusively to the field of anthropology, Clifford (1986) has acknowledged that the qualitative tradition's world of research, "... no longer speaks with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves ("primitive", "pre-literate", "without history")" (P. 10). Vine Deloria, Jr.'s (1988) chapter on "Anthropologists and Other Friends", found in his book Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto, left no illusions as to his opinion of anthropologists. The self stated Sioux author wrote, "...Indians have been cursed above all other people in history. Indians have anthropologists" (Deloria, 1969, P. 78)

The dilemma of misrepresentation and voice can risk throwing the researcher into doomed stagnation by being continuously concerned that s/he may generalize or offend. My solution to this problem was to create multiple voices; my own and the Cree individuals who participated in my exploration. I also openly admit the inherent subjectivity in qualitative research. Indeed, the roots of anthropology, ethnography and historical prose are credited foremost with the writings of Herodotus and, to a lesser extent, Xenophon whose subject was that of Persia in their time. So, when Deloria writes that "... (t)he origin of anthropologist is a mystery hidden in the historical mists. Indians are certain that all societies of the Near East had anthropologists at one time because all those societies are now defunct" (Deloria, 1969, P. 79), I can take comfort, as should Deloria Jr., that we Persians (yes, even those of us who are half Iranian), our heritage and pride are still alive and well. Furthermore, we actually learn *something* about ancient Persians from the writings of Herodotus and Xenophon, especially when we learn to read them while taking into consideration their subjectivity.

In fact, I would sincerely and enthusiastically encourage Indigenous and Native academics like Deloria, Churchill<sup>36</sup>, Tuhiwai Smith and many others to assist in the dialogue between “East and West” and add their scholarly voice to the debate. We need them to spend time with people from the East (whether they are situated in the East or in the West); we need their perspectives of West-East relations in this supposed “post-colonial” period. *We need their voice.*

Having cleared that personal ethical hurdle, the Cree individuals I sought out were those who attempted, succeeded or pondered attendance at institutions of higher education. In presenting my interviewees’ perspective along with my own experience, I believe I have created an exchange of thoughts and reflections that, in effect, create textual dialogues. Between 1998 and 2003, I carried out over thirty interviews with participants for this dissertation. My objectives were to create a Cree perspective and voice to add to my own participant narrative. I wanted to see if Cree students who ventured south suffered from the same culture shock as I did as a CEGEP instructor moving to a northern Cree community. Much like the interlaced qualitative method used by Hampton (1993), webbing between the experience of the interviewee, the literature and that of the participants, I can honestly say that the process has truly been inductive in nature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); with each interview forcing me to explore avenues I had not anticipated.

My initial interview questions centred around developing a narrative through open-ended questions on culture, cultural differences and culture shock. But it soon became apparent that the interviewees would themselves take the conversation into areas concerning their perceptions of the school as an institution, racism in schools, prejudice outside of their communities and the history of assimilation through residential schooling and its after effects.

My first intention for this chapter, to create a dialogue between my own experience and that of the Cree student within opposite contexts, was successful in that the interviews revealed perspectives that I had not yet fully appreciated. However, my second intention, to create a Cree voice within this text, was more problematic, as I wrestled with that postmodernist realization that “... all knowledge is socially constructed. Writing is not simply a “true” representation of an objective “reality”; instead, language creates a particular view of reality” (Richardson, L. 1995, P. 199). The challenge then, was to present the participants’

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<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that Ward Churchill has added his voice to this subject.

voice within the text I created, all the while acknowledging and being aware that my voice was indeed intertwined within theirs as I am the one who ultimately makes the decision of addition and/or omission within the final text. Even prior to text creation, the researcher's imprint must be considered when collecting information from the field or from his/her participants.

### **What Relevance is the Researcher?**

Within Preston's Cree Narrative (1975), he relates an early and formative episode while making a "week's getaway" canoe trip with a group of local Waskaganish residents, stating, "Traveling with people is a good way to get to know them" (P. 14). He writes:

I had an unexpected, low-key, but vividly memorable lesson in food sharing. We had gone ashore for a meal, and I brought out a tin of small sausages to heat over a fire. After we ate, I still felt hungry, and noticed that there was one sausage unclaimed in the frying pan. As I forked it out, I saw Eddie watch, smiling. Oops, it was his sausage. So I said out loud, "I guess we could open another tin of sausage," and Willy said he thought that would be good. This time I kept count. (P. 14)

I concur with Preston's supposition that such encounters are excellent ways to "get to know them", but it is also a good way for "them" to get to know you. Preston wrote that he learned a valuable lesson in "food-sharing" from that encounter and my own similar episode I had upon arriving in Mistissini, narrated in the previous chapter echoes his conclusions about the Cree customs and culture:

Despite my insistence that I had already eaten, I was directed by the "housing couple" to take a plate and eat. Otherwise, I was told that it would be considered an insult to the people who had organized the event. From the influence of my Mother's Iranian culture, I was raised with strict rules of social politeness, referred to as "ta'rof". Therefore, my first cultural reaction to refuse the meal was, apparently, taken as an insult. I had been in Mistissini for just under thirty minutes and I had already made my first cultural mistake. I made my way around the tables and found a large number of meats for consumption. One woman served me beaver, another goose and yet another moose. All did so with a smile on their face and anticipation for a reaction on my part. "Do you like beaver?" one woman asked smiling. "I'll try it and let you know." I said smiling back. (P. 122)

So, what did the other “players” learn about Preston and myself in these meetings? As Preston reached for the sausage, did Willy think, “Boy, this guy is great and he sure is famished!” or did he assume, “Typical White guy thinks he can eat everything he wants!” Would the Cree women have interpreted my refusal to eat as an insult to their cooking, culture, and way of life or would they have seen my reluctance to consume their food a sign that I simply wasn’t hungry? We know how Preston and I interpreted their actions, but we will never know what the Cree people in this story thought of our actions. We also know that Preston and I acted upon the meal with a different perspective, governed by our own influences, cultural or otherwise. Preston’s reaction, at that moment, can only be described as not being in common with the Cree culture of sharing, because he doesn’t describe his action as having been the result of his own cultural upbringing. Certainly, the others in similar fashion would have interpreted whatever actions people like Preston and I had, just as we had interpreted theirs. However, Preston and I had different reactions and as a result must have built different initial and long-term conclusions about who we were in the mind of the others. That consideration puts the role of who the researcher is in a greater relevance than he/she may be comfortable.

So, what relevance is the researcher to the study being presented? I believe it is huge. The eventual or initial understanding that I had of myself as being a non-White and non-religious (non-religious in an organized denominational sense) person, the fact that a Cree couple lived with us, and that we ultimately fostered long term relationships with people within the community may have been interpreted both positively and negatively within the Cree community. Just as Preston did, every action I took while living in the Cree community built a reputation with the people with whom I came into contact and who had heard about me; this in turn affected how they responded to me at every level and probably within the interview setting as well. I am fairly certain that the participants who knew me from the workplace were aware of the fact that I considered myself to be part of an ethnic minority and that I was unfortunately familiar with encountering prejudice in the south. I am less sure as to whether participants who were recommended to me had been told by those who were more familiar with me that I could be trusted because my own experiences may have made me more sensitive to the Native experience. I do not consider this to be a drawback; rather, I see it as a fortunate position to be

in as a researcher to possibly being perceived as a likewise and sympathetic individual, and who would thus be privileged to discussions that would otherwise be more guarded.

Therefore, as the Cree account is created for consumption, it is important to remember that I acknowledge my presence within their words and in the text. As Richardson, L. (1992) articulates, "... no matter how we stage the text, we – the authors – are doing the staging. As we speak about people we study, we also speak for them. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow upon them meaning and promulgate values" (P. 131).

### **Participants**

In regard to terminology used for the people who were interviewed, I concur with Hampton (1993) in that "I use the term *participant* because this describes their role of not only defining what is important but actively engaging with the researcher in meaning making" (P. 274). Participants were initially found through the Cree school board's higher education administrators, local adult education councillors within the inland Cree communities and word-of-mouth referrals from those who participated within the interviews. Montreal-based Cree school board administrators made contact with Cree students who were at that moment studying at the CEGEP level in Montreal and asked if they would be interested in participating in these interviews and the names and contact information of those who agreed were forwarded to me. Education councillors were contacted by fax and asked to secure people within their communities who had made the attempt to attain a degree of higher education, whether they achieved their goal with success or not. Further interviews were carried out within communities based on word of mouth referrals, both by past interview participants and administrative recommendations. All nine Cree communities were represented. Over thirty interviewees participated. From these interviews, I chose fifteen based on the depth of their answers, the ease in which they were willing to share their experiences and the clarity in which they could provide them.

A pre-interview questionnaire was handed out to the participants, mainly to provide me with some basic background information that would facilitate conversation (see appendix 3). Because of the relatively small size of the Cree community's population, I assured the participants of the confidentiality of their interviews and explained that although transcriptions

would be made, no one would hear their actual voices. All of the participants interviewed are recognized as status James Bay Cree and although I concur with Forbes (1990) over the dubious intent of researchers in questioning and scrutinizing “blood ratios” amongst North American Indigenous people, I will forward that through the pre-interview questionnaire and subsequent interview, only two participants noted they were half Cree. All, however, perceived their ethnicity as one hundred percent Cree. Of course, as with most other interviews, all participants’ identity is held with the strictest of confidence.

### **Interview Questions, Themes and Transcriptions**

Again, with respect to the inductive nature of qualitative research, the questions posed to the participants changed over time. For instance, questions regarding residential schooling only developed once it became clear that the first half of the participants were repeatedly bringing up the subject. Over time, it became clear that more interactive interviews could be elicited if I used the written questions as more of a guide to facilitate the participant’s narrative as opposed to a strict question and answer session. The written questions would be used simply as a guideline (please see appendix Five), but I would change the wording of the questions depending on who I was interviewing. A series of “prompts” adjoined the base questions to assist me in asking questions that would somehow trigger responses from the participants.

From the responses, subjects common to the majority of interviews were defined and separated, with five clear “themes” surfacing. Further sub-categories falling under the four of the five main themes were then defined to facilitate organizing the interview information. I wanted to create a context in which the voices of the participants were as true as possible, but the sheer quantity of space that I would have to had devote within this dissertation for their responses became problematic. Every one of their statements was worthy of inclusion, but, of course, this was not possible. Therefore, at my discretion, narratives were included based on their depth. (Please see Appendix Six for the themes and sub-categories.)

Fully typed transcriptions were made of the interviews. Sections within the transcriptions were then “pasted” into another word processing document of developing relevant themes and subcategories. Although much attention was given to detailing the

participants' words, I also took into consideration the fact that English was a second language for all the participants.

### **Some Considerations: Silence, Grammar & Flow**

Government and church-run residential schooling could not eliminate a certain fact: the Cree language was and is still the first language of the Cree people and, consequently, the first language of all my participants. Therefore, because the interviews were carried out in the English language, I resolved at the very early stage to make concessions in the transcriptions in order to best respect the intended meanings of the participants. Therefore, if a participant made a clear mistake in the choice of words, because they sounded similar or from mispronunciation, I replaced them with the word that made sense to the context of the conversation; although it should be noted that this did not happen often. Similarly, when the participants were searching for proper words, and therefore had subsequent long pauses or made non-verbal utterances, these were omitted. In the case of extended silence, longer than a simple pause, simple indicators of the description of the silence, for instance (long pause), were noted. Although the non-verbal utterances could easily be determined to be simply searching for words, what one reads into the silence is debatable.

Pederson and Poland (1998) warn against the notion that "(p)erhaps because of the norms of conversation, particularly in directed conversations such as clinical or research interviews, silence may be interpreted as a cue to elaborate further" (P. 296). They note that interviewers often avoid silence by pushing to fill voids through pressing the interviewee with further questions, as opposed to letting the silence reflect another interpretive possibility. The prominence of continuous dialogue, clear of silence, can be seen as a Western way of distinguishing a successful conversation and denoting a Western way of knowing. Pederson and Poland write, "(i)n the West, we tend to value talk and action over listening and reflection" (Poland & Pederson, 1998, P. 297). I found myself guilty of this as well, and remembered an incident in which a graduate professor asked my colleague a particularly difficult question. Like most people in the class, I found the silence of his response deafening and I impatiently waited to put him out of his misery by answering the question for him. I raised my hand for acknowledgement and began to answer the question as soon as the professor made eye

contact with me, only to have the professor calmly and promptly cut me off by saying, "Sometimes silence is an honest effort to come up with an answer. Give him a moment to think." Silence, in non-Western cultures can have an altogether different meaning to that of the Western notion of communication: "(C)ontemplative silence becomes a key element of certain spiritual rituals as well as a key feature of social interaction. This is true of the aboriginal cultures of Canada ..." (Poland & Pederson, 1998, P. 297).

From my own education, silence is seen simply as demonstrative of a lack of knowledge in the question or perhaps unease in the response; however, other cultures see silence as actually having value, promoting introspection as opposed to signifying misunderstanding. Living and working in Cree territory taught me that silence could mean a shared moment of understanding or appreciation for a subject or moment. On one occasion, during a long drive from Mistissini to Chibougamau, a friend of mine said, "I like you. You're not like other people from the South who have to talk all the time." Appreciative of the compliment, I instantly felt more comforted by his expression of this sentiment, and helped me to overcome my own confusion as to the nature of the extended silence that had filled our trip. It was an interpretation of silence that I had to learn and appreciate.

Additionally, because of second language considerations, some interviewees would, as can best be described as, "stop-start" half sentences as they looked for an appropriate way to translate what they wanted to express. In this case, I demonstrate this by using three simple dots, ex:..., for short half start-stop sentences and three dots in parentheses, ex: (...), for full sentences that the interviewee decided to reformulate or when they had become sidetracked while working through their answers. All of these considerations are intended to give a flow and readability that reflect the nature as well as the content of the interview and to ultimately avoid reader boredom.

### **Artistically Setting the Stage: A Story Bound Documentary Format**

I have a confession to make. For 30 years, I've yawned my way through numerous supposedly exemplary qualitative studies. (Richardson, Laurie, 1994, P. 516)



True to Denzin's (1994) warning, ultimately, all researchers are faced with a similar dilemma: assorted piles of notes, tapes, printed transcriptions and pre-interview questionnaires, an overwhelming sense of anxiety over how you are going to make sense of it and, finally, wondering how to present it in a way that does not make people "yawn". Richardson (1994) encourages "writing and rewriting" until our product is worthy of reading; to a great extent, most of us are forced into this process due to necessity rather than the desire to strive for the luxury of literary excellence. Richardson's suggestions resonate with all writers of qualitative research: in the end, we want to compose something worthy of attention. Eventually, after my own journey of writing and rewriting, I took Richardson's simple suggestion of using exploratory writing. This ultimately helped me to find a format of representation that reflected my artistic intentions.

...I consider writing as a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. (...) Writing is also a way of "knowing" – a method of discovery and analysis." (Richardson, Laurie, 1994, P. 516)

With the understanding that creating the text is a process of discovery that we cannot "... neutrally represent but rather that writing itself constructs the reality that it proposes to represent" (Rhodes, 2002, P. 99), it then falls on the writer to write with a comfort of both textual ownership with simultaneous exploration. Considering the entire interview process was one in which I brought ideas to the initial interviews and then continuously modified the questions further as the interviewees brought them into directions that I had not anticipated, after contemplating and re-contemplating, writing and rewriting, I developed a textual documentary format that reflected my learning process. I believe this textual "documentary-style" representation of the interviews best reflects the balance of delivering another's voice while all the while exploring my interpretation of what they are saying. With this in mind, I have also decided to let the participants' voices be the authority and refrain as much as possible from having to refer back to the literature already presented in this dissertation to validate their experiences. Therefore, any citations included within my own textual voice of this interview section are to connect the participants' voices to the dissertation, and not to legitimize their experiences through academics. I also present these voices with the understanding and hope that you, the reader, are actually interested in what these participants have to say.

## The Interviews

Reflecting back on that first time I went to Mistissini, one thing I could be sure of was that, as a takeoff of the old movie cliché goes, “I definitely wasn’t in Montreal anymore”. If the internal unease of being in an unfamiliar surrounding was not enough, the imagined or real continuous glances, sometimes long stares, made me painfully aware that this was not my home. It was a difficult adjustment. Everything seemed out of place and all the taken-for-granted assumptions of norms that I had learned to become familiar with, even as an outsider in the predominantly Anglo neighbourhood where I grew up, were no longer valid. I had the privilege in life to do a great deal of travelling around the world, but I was amazed at the cultural difference of this community within Canada.

My first question to my participants was to ask them to culturally define themselves. In the initial interviews, I simply asked them to describe who they were, but because I received a pattern of responses simply stating “Cree” followed by a description of their employment was emerging, I varied the initial question by asking them to describe themselves individually and culturally. If their answer was simply, “Cree”, I then asked them to try to elaborate their answer, perhaps by describing how they grew up or retell a story that somehow exemplified their cultural identity. In doing this I hoped to elicit both a sense of who they were and commence an ease within them for story telling. I will begin by introducing each of the fifteen participants so as to allow the reader to familiarize themselves, in small part, with the histories and self-descriptions of each participant.

### Self Perception & Brief Description

#### a) Defining of One’s Self & Life/Family History

1) **Sarah** is CEGEP student who defines her upbringing as a mix between traditional and modern and was raised primarily in a non-Native community:

**Sarah:** *“Well, I’m determined. Yeah. I got a lot of determination, when I’m determined to do something I do it. And, I set my mind to it and nothing comes in between. (pause) I’m the kind*

of person who has a strong character and strong values and ambitious. (laughs) It's hard to say. (pause) I guess I would say I'm a friendly, nice person, (short pause) when you get to know me, I guess. (laughs) "A very neat home! (laughs) (pause) I grew up in a very organised, very neat, very strict home. (pause) Even though my mom was a single parent, she had five of us, five children. (SI)

2) **Joe**, a self-proclaimed mature student, is attending a CEGEP in Montreal and he describes himself as having grown up in a very traditional Cree family:

**Joe:** "I like to live in the bush once and a while, like, I go on goose break, but usually I like to go fishing. (pause) I'm an adult who has gone back to school. You know, I've decided to really (pause) build myself up. You know, get an education, (short pause), and become somebody! (laughs) (JII)

3) Currently enrolled in a large Montreal CEGEP, **Melinda** is in her late teens and describes herself as Cree, despite being from a mixed White/Cree heritage. Due to the fact that she grew up within a non-Native community, she describes her upbringing as more modern than traditional:

**Melinda:** "Well, I'm a student in college, in my second year. And, I really enjoy photography, I like to do photography a lot. (...) I'm basically a person who likes to have fun with my friends, (short pause), and, uh, like any other normal person my age. (laughs) I like to finish what I start, and if it's not finished and I started it, I don't like it! (laughs) (...) Well, my mother and father had been married for 13 years before they got divorced. Before that it wasn't always, like, it wasn't always pretty. You know, couples quarrel and they had fights, but not fist fights, you know? Fights. I remember a lot of the fights they had, but we came through, my brothers and I we pulled through good enough. (...) When people ask me, a lot of people think I'm Italian. I just tell them, "No, I'm half Cree and half French, half Canadian". (...) I identify myself a lot with, (short pause), I guess, I guess both of them. Actually, (laughs) Cree! (MIII)

4) **Toni**, a single mother in her mid-twenties who dropped out of her CEGEP studies, comes from a family where both parents are higher education graduates and are presently working in the Cree communities:

**Toni:** Well, I'm not shy! That's one thing and I guess I could say that I'm open-minded as well, about all kinds of issues. I don't speak very much Cree either! (laughs) (...) I think it (makes a difference), yeah, with the interactions within the community; I can't just go talk to anybody in the community (...) It's almost as if you are not as Cree as the others. (...) Because, you cannot express yourself as well as you would want to be heard. If you are having a

conversation with an elder, or with an Uncle or an Aunt, who has been living in the bush for the past, their whole life (laughs), then it's kind of hard to share something with them. (...) (I)t has come up a few times ... when it has happened, it really hurt me. (They would say), "You think you are white!" (laughs) But, it's ok! I'll deal with it! (TIV)

5) After 14 semesters of on and off studying, **Esther** has almost completed her CEGEP degree in a vocational field and is currently preparing to write her final exam to gain entrance into her profession. She has a difficult time describing herself but writes that her parents, who spend a considerable amount of time in the bush, raised her in a traditional manner:

**Esther:** "Well, I was born in the bush and I grew up in the bush until I was four or five, that's when they sent us to residential school. Ten months at school then two months (at home) in the summer. I only spent two months with my parents, in the summer and most of the time we were in the bush; going fishing, getting the camp ready." (EV)

6) **Donna** is a higher education, university graduate who is presently working in a Cree community. She is of mixed Cree and European ancestry, but had no contact with her biological White father. Her childhood life experience is described as difficult, but despite this she has managed to obtain a university degree. She describes her upbringing as more modern than traditional:

**Donna:** "Well, ok, first of all, I identify more as a Native person, because I am a bi-cultural person. I identify more as a Cree person because that's where I spent the majority of my life within the Cree community. In terms of my qualities; I guess I'm outgoing, friendly, fairly outspoken, I think, in terms of as a Native person or as a Native woman who appears Native. (pause) I enjoy watching TV. (...) It seems to me that was how my mother parented me as a child. You know, sit me in front of the tube? Basically, I don't recall that much interaction, as a child, with my mother. I only remember, getting up and going to school, going home, watching Sesame Street and that kind of thing. I only had a short time period to live with my mother. (...) I lived with aunts, uncles, cousins and I was shipped here and there, wherever. Time for a change or a new baby came into the home, or whatever. (...) I had to be very self-reliant; independent. (...) I would describe myself as very grass roots, very traditional in terms of activity. I try and maintain the hunting-gathering type of activities, that we survived on for hundreds of years, that has helped us to survive many years. Just the fact that, you know, your family did it, your grandfather did it and to me that ... I always wanted to do that. (DVI)

7) After a number of attempts, **Christine** is a recent CEGEP graduate, and describes her upbringing as more modern than traditionally Cree and distinguishes herself from many Cree

students by having made the attempt to study in a southern institution of higher education at the age of seventeen:

**Christine:** *"I would say, like, at the beginning I'm kind of shy, but then, once I get to know someone I'm very outgoing. (...) I like to help people ... I like meeting people and going places and I like to travel."* (CVII)

8) **Jen**, who did not complete her CEGEP studies, grew up for part of her life in a predominantly non-Native environment and discusses how she can perceive her surroundings from both the non-Native and the Cree perspective. In her interviews, she states she did not graduate because she fit in too well to her CEGEP surroundings and "partied too much". Her experiences give her a distinctive insight to Cree traditions and definitely counter stereotypes on what it means to be "Native", from both Cree and non-Native sources:

**Jen:** *"I would say I'm very outgoing. I like being around people all the time. I don't like being in my own corner. I like to associate with a lot of different people. (...) I guess I'm a person who's always looking for different ideas; I try not to be stuck on one way. I try to look at all different sides. Like, I'm Native but I grew up with non-Native people, my stepfather was non-Native. Now, it's different because I understand I'm Native, so I understand Native people better. But I think when I grew up with the non-Natives I understood their way of life, their way of thinking."* (JVIII)

9) **Shawn**, a CEGEP graduate and current Band administrator in his late twenties, leaves no doubt within his interview of his sense of humour and why he believes he and his small group of Cree friends successfully navigated their way through southern non-Native high school and higher education, while his other Native friends failed. Shawn also states that he believed in traditional Cree spirituality. When asked to describe himself he quickly states:

**Shawn:** *Who am I? (short pause) The coolest guy in town! (laughs) As a person, I guess as growing up I think I was a very shy person. I was more able to communicate within than on the outside. I did a lot of things with friends, but more or less a follower and an observer. But, I did a lot of activities outdoors; going out fishing and learning the Cree ways of fishing, trapping, hunting, snaring. Actually, even feeding the elders with whatever I caught. Such as, every time I caught ten fish I'd take half to my grandparents and I'd take half home. Growing up like that I felt very confident that I was helping the old people. I think it made an impact of building a foundation as to who I am as an individual. Going out of the community, I had to go to school in Chibougamau, for two years. I was in grade six and seven. That's when I started to learn (...) about what's out there, on a daily basis. Living with non-Native people and learning to go to*

*school and them trying to teach me what they wanted to teach. But I still felt I was a shy person at the time, but I wasn't really aware of where I was going and what I was doing at the time.*  
(SIX)

10) **Doug's** parents both worked in the field of education and encouraged him to find his education in any location, both formal and non-formal. He prides himself on being open-minded and ready to learn something new but despite this he wasn't able to stick with his CEGEP studies. He began CEGEP at age 19 and three years later he dropped out and is taking some time off to refocus his future, although he states he fully intends to return to school one day.

**Doug:** *"Well, I'm a person who likes talking. I like talking, you know, I'm in communications. I really enjoy talking to people and I always take the time to talk to people, listen to people. I'm not the type of person who argues, just to argue. I'd rather listen than argue. I have a lot of self-confidence and I really enjoyed learning new things. The way I was brought up was that I had to learn how to respect people in order get respected. So, that's one of the most important things I find in life: when you give respect you get respect. So, in terms of education; the more knowledge you have the more you can gain from it."* (DX)

11) **Karen** is a university graduate. Despite having spent the better part of her childhood in residential schools, she still has a strong connection to a Cree identity, but at the same time recognizes the drawbacks and advantages of her experiences in both communities:

**Karen:** *"In a certain way I would probably describe myself in a bicultural way (...) I was born a Cree, always a Cree, and before I went to school I was raised in the bush by my parents. I was taught the traditional things that young Cree girls should learn when they are in the bush. A lot of the stuff that I learned were things to do with the expectations and the role that a woman in a Cree society would fulfill. Like, for example, going out to get firewood or going out to pick boughs. You don't do all the work yourself, but you are there to observe and you do a little bit and you're mentored into that role. For example, you watch it and then your mother, or maybe somebody in your extended family, would explain to you that when the man, your father or your brother comes home, comes home from the hunt, then as the female you're expected to take his hunting backpack and take the game out of the pack and then you clean and skin the hair or the beaver, or whatever the case may be. You prepare the animal for your family. That's one aspect of the culture you are taught. (...) the other half came from when I went to school, and this is what I would call my formal education, as in "white education" (KXI)*

12) **Greg** is a university graduate who prides himself as having successfully flourished in both the Cree and Southern worlds. He has a deep belief in traditional Cree spiritualism that he feels has allowed him to stay focused while pursuing higher and higher levels of education.

**Greg:** *"Well, for one thing I would say that I'm born and raised Cree and very proud of it. However, I would also mention the fact that I'm fairly well versed in both worlds; both the modern way and the traditional way. I can live by hunting and trapping and I've also lived the other way, down south."* (GXII)

13) Having spent the majority of his late childhood and teenage years studying outside of the Cree community, **Mike** had little problem adapting to the culture of higher education. Having received a bachelor degree, he returned to his community and now works at an administrative position. Experienced with the school setting, he answers most of interview questions as both an experienced parent and educator and declares the "very low" graduating numbers to be a serious problem. Having experienced both worlds, he still considers himself very much Cree.

**Mike:** *"I'm very fortunate, in a way, that I can function in both worlds. Now, if I have to go in the bush, like I do in the goose break, I don't think I would have any problems providing for my family. Probably, I wouldn't be able to do things like my dad used to do like making snowshoes (laughs). But, other than things like that, when I'm in the bush, you know, I don't think it would be too difficult setting up the tent and camp and stuff like that."* (MXIII)

14) **Craig** (CXIV) is a successful university graduate and is currently working within a Cree community in an administrative position.

**Craig:** *"Well, I've been educated: I've gone through high school, gone through university, through college and I've always tried to maintain my culture. For me to do that was more during vacation and on weekends and going in the bush. I just started doing the way it used to be done. You know, like culturally, in the bush? Like hunting and fishing and trapping and things like that, you know? I tell this to my students, even though I spent half my time, during my duties and my job, traveling and meeting different people, you know, in my work. So, culturally speaking, I can say I'm still attached to it somehow, you know? ... It's important. I think it's important. I'm not sure how it is in other cultures, but for me it's important."* (CXIV)

15) Having tasted both success and disappointment in a number of educational settings in the south, **Ronald** (RXV) completed a CEGEP certificate and is now in the midst of working on his

teaching degree within his community. When he described himself as Cree, I asked him to explain what that meant. He said:

**Ronald:** *"Hunting. Hunting. Going in the bush. That's it."* (RXV)

From the responses I received (some short, some with greater elaboration), it was evident that all of the participants had a strong connection to a unique Cree/Indian identity and this coincides with Salisbury (c1986), Preston (1975) and Sindell's (1974) accounts of initial connections within Cree communities and individuals as well. Furthermore, although their early life history took the same "twists and turns" as many people in all North American society, many experiences were uniquely Native. One of the experiences that I was particularly interested in was their individual experiences within the school setting. Hampton (1995) writes, "Native education cannot be understood without concepts of oppression and resistance" (P. 35) and it became evident through the interviews that the relationship between the perceived oppressor and oppressed exists. Most, if not all, of the participants responded to the general questions relating to the place of a Native person within the educational context as, the way one interviewee described it being made to feel by those who work and study within the educational institutions as though *"you're not smart or there is something wrong with you."* (KXI) This was an area that I wished to explore: I sought to understand their perceptions of themselves, not only as individuals of Cree ethnicity within schools, but also how they perceived the others' discernment of them as "Indians" within schools as well.

#### b) Image of Self in School

Central to the Interactionist perspective is "(T)he social construction of meaning in social interactions" (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995, P.19) and that development of identity and self arises through the perception of these interactions. Schools are a major location for these interactions and teachers become the significant others that influence the perception of self and a significant factor in identity formation (Mifflin & Mifflin, 1982). Most participants recognized that they were entering educational institutions, from primary to higher education



establishments that carried many preconceptions associated with their "Indianness" and had an impact on their image of self within the school.

**Greg:** *"All the comments that you hear (from education professionals down south) is that, 'Your kids are not smart enough. They don't have the intelligence.' or 'They are much slower than the non-Native students. I'm not saying they're stupid, but they are slower.' You know, that kind of thing. And everywhere you see that kind of racism. It's there and a lot of the students have talked about it. It hurts them."* (GXII)

**Karen:** *"I think they (the Cree students) get the message that ... that it is implicitly sent out to them ... It's not always something that you can say, 'yes, verbally I was told, you're not as smart, because you're an Indian.' But, certainly in the schools here the teachers' attitudes, you know they may not say it, but everything they do and every way they react to the kids says that you're not smart or there is something wrong with you. Like, my experience when I went to school, yes, I did academically well, but I still had this sense that, 'you're a Native person and you're never going to amount to anything'. So, as far as you're concerned, you can't go to university, so you go for a trade or whatever. (...) I think they have different expectations; they set different standards for you, in one sense. When I was in (a non-Native) high school, a lot of times my marks would be higher than the majority marks of non-Native students, which really annoyed them to no end. Because, academically I performed better than they did. But, I think the teachers found it hard to accept that."* (KXI)

**Jen:** *"They were just wondering where I came from, or wondering if I was any different from them. I had a professor that actually asked me, 'What kind of school did you go to?' They kind of have this perception that we're not (pause) they sort of wonder if we should be there! ... I guess it's their ignorance to start off."* (JVIII)

**Christine:** *"They sort of think you don't know or that you're less cultivated because you're from up north, you come from a smaller town than they do. Like in classes they would actually say that, 'Oh, we're from the city, so we know! We know more than people from up north!' (...) When we were in Montreal we used to make them believe that we were still living in teepees up here and that you have to come by plane, then you have to portage, then you have to go by canoe and just make sure you bring a sleeping bag and snowshoes because you're going to have to snowshoe up there. And they would believe that you know! They would believe it!"* (CVII)

**Sarah:** *"They see me as (long pause) as a less educated person, I guess. (...) They knew I was Native. At (a Montreal CEGEP), I remember there was a few professors who knew I was Native. There was one professor who was giving me an easy way. But I wanted him to treat me equally. (...) I felt worse, I thought, 'well who do you think I am that I can't do, well I can do it!' (Give me) the same task as your giving everybody else. (...) It didn't make me feel good, but it made feel bad and good in way because they wanted us Native students to succeed. But*

still, it's the way they showed it. (...) I don't know how the other (Native) students sees it, but I do". (S1)

**Melinda:** *"Still, I found that I found something kind of weird when I got into college. Within the first few days they pulled me into an office and they told me that my course load was too heavy. And, I said, "why is it too heavy?" And they said, "well, because you're Cree." "So?" 'Cause I had seven classes I think. And they said we can bring it back to five classes and I said, "no". (inaudible) I didn't like that, it, it, (...) I don't know, they probably thought that, like, I wasn't able to perform without that. And, they were probably thinking about the, uh, poor old school systems over there. But, I don't know, but, I didn't like it! (...) After I kept thinking about that. I was like, "Why did they ask me that for, I can do seven classes?" (MIII)*

A few students further raised the issue of teachers, instructors and professors who attempted to help Native students out by providing individualized or specialized treatment for them, based on their ethnicity and not their individual academic capacity, and how, despite their good intentions, such actions left the students with feelings of self doubt. In effect, it was a return to a form of the "nos enfants" thinking; the older brother that guides with the best of intentions (Tyler, 1973) but leaves the recipient with a sense of failure. This can be perceived as an air of superiority that Miller (1996) discussed as being prevalent in relationships between many of those who work with indigenous people.

**Karen:** *"But, you see, there's also the issue of the patronizing. No matter how well intentioned people are, you always end up having ... you can sense it when somebody looks at you like you don't have the capacity or ability to do whatever. Even if they don't say it, it's there." (KXI)*

One of the pitfalls that some participants discussed was the frustrating feeling that they were falling into the stereotypes that went along with being Native. Were they following along with Alexie's (1993) Native late night, corner-store customer, playing the role they thought was expected of them in this context?

**Donna:** *"I knew I was different, I knew where I came from was different and I knew there perception of me was different. (...) They knew I was different and sometimes they ask me things. Like, ask me if I was a Native and, you know, I guess it was like singling out ... and sometimes I would notice the so-called characteristics of Native people and myself, like I wouldn't look people in the eye too much, directly, if I just met them and it took me a while to get used to them. (...) I found myself doing that! In my environment, here at home, no, I would feel more comfortable here, talking to somebody. But when I was down there, I would have to*

*get used to that person before I would ... because I would be scared of who they were. Like, I wouldn't know who they were, they were like strangers to me and I'd have to get used to them. But I did find myself doing things like that, not looking people in the eye at first contact and ready for them to talk to me type of thing ..."* (DVI)

**Esther:** *"I didn't really like speaking in public. (...) I was like a wooden Indian in front of the public (laughs). (...) I just froze, couldn't say anything. I was worried I might make a mistake. (EV)*

Participants also discussed their desire to be accepted and perceived within schools for who they were, both ethnically and individually. Sarah stressed that she is not "pushing" her Cree-ness on anyone and although she is willing to share who she is with anyone, she prefers to be understood as an individual. But, as Joe suggested, this is an approach to self that comes with the wisdom and comfort of age.

**Sarah:** *"It's something that I don't try to revolve myself around. I mean, I like to explore other things. Meaning, that I don't always circulate around my traditions and my beliefs, and everything else. I like to (short pause) of course I'll share it with someone who wants to know about it, but uh, other than that, well. I won't say, "listen to me I'm a Cree"! Or, I'm this or that, no, no, no." (SI)*

**Joe:** *"As an adult, I can manage and be more, (short pause), comfortable. "To hell with it!", you know? I'm staying here (in college)! (laughs) (...) Well, for myself, (short pause), I just go with the flow. (...) I don't look at myself and say, "Hey, I'm a Native person" and try and figure out how everything is, I'm just a person. (laughs) (JII)*

One of the more curious comments that arose was whether the image of the Cree student within higher education is also affected by how people within their own community negatively perceive them; reminiscent of Franklin's (c1959) report of the Native Chiefs in Virginia in 1774 and their disdain for the native students that returned to their village.

**Sarah:** *"Some (Cree at home) actually think that just because I'm in (CEGEP), they think that I go back with a big self-esteem. They think that I look at myself as a better person than them: I'm in college now and, (short pause) I've been in college before, but I actually had someone tell me once, "Oh, you think you're better than us because you're in college now!", and I'm just, "What?" (SI)*

This, of course, creates an extra burden on the Cree student, who must not only deal with the preconceptions of what it means to be a higher education learner within the southern context but also cope with the perceptions of them as university/CEGEP students within their own community. It became clear from the interviews that the preconceived identity of the students that had been created by significant others affected their own perceptions of self, creating a possible barrier to academic success through a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. The image of self as the “wooden Indian”, as mentioned by Esther, illustrates her understanding of how teachers and peers base any personal shortcoming as being explained by representative of stereotypical “Indian” qualities; perhaps because of “... the historical view of American Indians as being stoic and savage ...” (Brave Heart & DeBruyn. 1998. P. 67). Realizing that few non-Natives have had the opportunity or inclination to learn about the cultural differences between Native groups (Mander, 1991), the image that exists within the non-Native significant other is that of the Indian in general. In response to this perception, the image of self can also be based on this generalized, pan-Indian identity as well, this is, after all the tenets of the “looking Glass Self”, where “(t)here is no sense of “I”... without its correlative sense of you, or he, or they” (Cooley, 1964, P. 182).

### c) Pan-Indian Identity

As a reminder, the term “Pan-Indian” refers to a sense of ethnic, political, cultural, or other identity among Native American groups that crosses tribal boundaries and refers to the collectiveness that encompasses all Natives, “... defined as the larger-than-tribal “Indian” level of American Indian ethnicity, similar to “Latino”, “Asian American” or “White”” (Cornell, 1988, P. 14). Early on in the development of my dissertation, I picked up on the interviewees’ recurring reference to themselves and others within the communities as being “Indian” or “Native”; indeed, these terms were interchanged freely with the word “Cree” as a self-descriptor. Most of the time, these terms were used in regards to the larger relationship that exists between North American Natives and non-Natives; they were used not necessarily to impart a negative connotation, but rather with an understanding of the larger framework of relationship between indigenous people of North America and Non-Natives, as seen in the minds of many of the latter. I broached the subject in later interviews, specifically asking interviewees why they

referred to themselves using a pan-Indian descriptor, such as Indian, First Nation, Indigenous or Aboriginal as opposed to Cree, or, why they would raise issues relating to other Native groups.

Although all questioned provided brief responses, some like Ronald retold a great comedic piece, a takeoff from comedian Don Burnstick's "You Might Be A Redskin", and joked about how he and his Ojibwa friend felt that Kentucky Fried Chicken was the common thread of Native culture; most however, framed their response within the colonial experience of indigenous people. Greg put it bluntly and said,

**Greg:** *"We're all different. But we're all Native!"* (GXII)

He expanded this idea of collective consciousness by retelling how it has in great part stemmed from the racism Natives have continued to endure.

**Greg:** *"The racism is still racism in Montreal. There was one time when I was coming out of the Sheraton hotel, I was just about to leave, and this guy says, 'Hi'. And then told me I was a 'fucking Mohawk'. And I said, 'I'm not Mohawk, but I am Native; I'm Cree.'"*

Despite Ronald's humour, he too described how the events during the 1990 Oka crisis affected his relationships with non-Natives during his second attempt at CEGEP studies.

**Ronald:** *"I had to go to (CEGEP down south), eh? There (laughs) I ran into a lot of ... Well, the first time I went there, they ... maybe '91. Right after I left (the other school he was studying at), it was right after the Oka crisis. (short pause) And probably you knew that one of the cops got killed and we, I guess we were told, just to watch out. Like people were told to watch out. Like, people in the (CEGEP) were told, (students) or whatever you want to call them, were told. When we got there, every one of us had a feeling that people were looking at us. Like, in a strange way, or people were looking at us like, as if we, you know, I don't know how to put it. (short pause) Like we had done something wrong. You know?"*

Much like Tall Oak (1994) of the Narragansett Nation expressed: "Every tribe has had their 'great swamp' ... every tribe has had their 'Sand Creek', every tribe has had their 'Wounded Knee'; the list is endless. **And we all have shared in that experience.**"<sup>37</sup>, the

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<sup>37</sup> Narragansett, Tall Oak. As cited in TIG Productions Presents (Producer). (1994). 500 Nations (Attack on Culture). [Videotape]. Burbank, CA: Time Warner Entertainment.

participants appeared to have already given thought to the idea of what binds Native people together and surmised that its roots lie in a common history and continued experience of oppression.

**Karen:** *"I think (other Native group's) experiences parallel mine and other Cree. I think you can't help it. I think if your experience is the same as a, let's say a Navaho going to residential school, or an Okanogan Native person going to residential school, then I think you can't help but have parallel experiences with those people. So, then you end up feeling the same feelings or questions about whether you're truly Native or not, or have you been enculturated into the non-Native system and I think you also go through the same experience of the loss of your culture, the loss of your language. (...) I think a lot of the themes that are portrayed or the message are trying to get across; the Indian people are not using the land the way they are supposed to, so kill them off. Or, that we stand in the way of progress, I guess. So, the James Bay Cree sure had that experience when in the early 70s when the first hydro project was started, that was the argument that was used, that the Cree don't use the territory and that they're not living in that territory so how can they be using it? With them (the Quebec government) not thinking that, "yes", people were there, they were trapping and just because we are not there digging up the land, that doesn't mean that we were not using the land. (...) I think our experiences as Native people, whether we are Okanogan, Cree, Navaho, Iroquois or Mohawk; our experience with colonialism parallel each other. They are the same, I guess is what I'm trying to say. (...) We're not all one group and we never were all one group. How could we be one group when we had our own different languages and cultures? Cree culture is not the same as Navaho culture, let's face it. (...) Yes, we were the same as far as colonialism is concerned, we went through the same process, in terms of the experiences we've had in education, with religion and all this kind of stuff."* (KXI)

The interviewees' specific responses to what defines them as "Cree" revealed a culture that not only characterizes who they are as individuals and a people, but also revealed what they perceive separates them from non-Native Canada. What follows chronicles their insight into their own culture as well as the southern culture they must live in to complete their higher education studies.

### Culture

Williams (1983) concedes that culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language. Given this, and when I compare it to the responses I have received from my non-Native students within my McGill University Interculturalism class, I really admired the

facility, clarity and ease in which the participants could describe culture in general and then their own culture in particular.

a) Perceptions of Cree Culture (defining)

**Sarah:** *"(Cree Culture) is very unique, (short pause) for sure. Like every other culture, it has it's own beliefs and it's own ... (short pause) Culture is something that you, (short pause) basically come from."* (SI)

**Melinda:** *"Culture is something that you, (short pause), live upon, I suppose. Culture is your background; culture is your mother and your father. It's who you are basically; it's who your people are."* (MIII)

**Donna:** *"Culture means to me is a lifestyle, a tradition, a language, activities that the people interact in and do on a daily basis. Also, there's also, how do you say it, their opinion on things? I would also consider that part of the culture, is the way the people interact together, that's also part of the culture."* (DVI)

**Jen:** *"For me, culture means not losing my Native language, which is Cree. I'm learning how to write it now. I can read a little bit, but not enough. It's important that my children learn Cree. It was very important for me that their mother tongue be Cree. But, it was very hard because my husband was (from another Native tribe). They lost their language a long time ago and I think it's only his mother who can kind of speak (their language). (...) How do I define Cree culture? It's hard for me to define it because I was brought up in a town in Chibougamau. We were taught the language, you know the language part was really important for my mother but ... being in the bush and being and doing Native things, we never really did them."* (JVIII)

**Esther:** *What culture means to me? (...) When people have their own traditions and values and way of life, the way they live. (...) I would describe my culture as people traditionally living in the bush, on the land, hunting and fishing. (...) Like, we have certain things we do and the Cree way of life, to support themselves, doing things like hunting. (...) The Cree when they live in the bush, their way of life, their hunting and fishing it's how I define our culture.* (EVI)

Ester's reference to one's "way of life" as being defining of one's culture was a recurring theme among the majority of participants. There were certainly expectations and set norms for what it meant to be Cree.

**Melinda:** *"Well, my grandmother comes from Waswanipi. She used to visit me a lot and she, of course, used to bring the bannock and the slippers and the mittens and, (short pause), and of course. So, of course I learned how to make a bit of bannock and how to make Cree*

jewellery, with beads, when I was younger. My mother used to tell us a lot of stories when she was young. When she used to live up in the woods and I liked it. I liked the atmosphere it would create. And, I used to go visit my grandmother in the reserve a lot. And, I got a lot of things, because I could see who my people are and where I'm from and where my roots are from, basically." (MIII)

**Sarah:** "My mom always taught, told us a lot about her (Cree) culture and her, (short pause) and what she experienced in her times, she used to live in the past, eh? I never used to want to believe her, I thought it was a fairy tale or something. Until I was nine years old and I went to Mistissini for the first time, went for a wedding. There, I actually saw people living in tents! (...) (short pause) I never used to believe it before and I never used to believe in my mom's culture before. And, that's what I used to call it, it was my mom's, what she experienced and what she went through. (...) Well, we have our values and our traditional way of believing stuff (short pause) and it's different. I mean you wouldn't believe in my culture and I wouldn't believe your culture." (SI)

**Shawn:** "Culture, to me, is what you do on a daily basis, on an annual basis. What are your main activities? What you do 365 days a year. But, working, people depend on that now. So, they can't always be living "the good way of life" 365 days a year, because they need the income to pay the bills and all that. So, that's there and I don't think that can be changed. But, we still have practices, like here, we give two weeks "traditional leave", to go out and do "Goose break" or "Moose break", or even to just spend time on the land. And, we've designed our holidays, instead of just having non-Native holidays, we've designed our holidays to be more Cree oriented according to our culture. On a day-to-day practice, actually going out, that's how I feel, and actually practicing the Cree culture. But also in the community, the feasts. Even talking to the elders. Usually every year I organize an elders feast for the elders and everybody brings traditional treat for the elders and the elders get together for the weekend. And the walking out ceremonies. Even myself, I've been practicing with my first son, who is four years old now and he is first born. I went to go see an elder and asked him, "what did they used to do when you have a first born?" A naming ceremony and I've started practicing that and saying I'm going to give my son a Cree name according to wherever the name is going to come from. But even before he was born I had dreams of certain things, and that's where his name came from. (...) I think more people in the community are starting to do that. For me, it's for my son to follow all the traditional initiations and ceremonies. (...) From there it goes to the "walking out ceremony" down by the river. The next step is to have the "snowshoe" walkout. And everything about the ceremonies means about the journey of life and that's what you prepare your son for. (...) I'm at the stage where I'm preparing him to be aware of society before he gets brainwashed and sees everything (laughs) on TV!" (SIX)

The participants' perspectives towards Cree culture were not, however, monolithic. Some expressed their confusion or concern with other community members' definitive beliefs on Cree-ness, suggesting confusion on *their* part by including too much of the "south" in their life. The debate and concern were that certain values and religious practices had become



adapted into or sometimes superseded traditional beliefs and customs, sometimes causing confusion as to what Cree culture truly means.

**Joe:** "Uhm, I think people have, (short pause), you know, weird, (short pause), beliefs (in Cree communities). (laughs) (...) Especially, you know (pause) like, it's all kind of a mixture of religious beliefs and you know, the traditional beliefs that are totally mixed up, you know. That's what I find." (JII)

**Toni:** "Traditional – modern" they just can't make up their mind. Because it's almost as if that you're not very sure, I'm not very sure and I don't think anyone is really sure about what we really are, because there are the Pentecostals that are really strong in the community and it's like, they're putting down the traditional drums, which I haven't heard in a long time. Then there are those who say we should go for the traditional and those who say, we should practice our way of life. (...) I've been lucky because my parents aren't (religious) so they haven't been pushing religion or their beliefs on us children. (...) I find that traditional is more like, not just speaking Cree all the time, but having to go out into the bush, and fishing and hunting and cleaning the geese and making bannock. (...) Modern is (laughing) bringing the generator so you can plug in your television and VCR! Modern, for me, is (also) living in the community, with electricity and having running water and traditional is going out to the camp down the road or up the lake. (...) (You're still being Cree) because that's how my parents lived and that's how I lived. You can't just stop everything (modern technology and conveniences) and go and isolate yourself and go live a traditional life without having food. Sure, all the hunters and the trappers in the community come home in the summers and live the "modern life". So they live in their houses and watch their TVs, with their cable and satellite. You can still be modern and traditional." (TIV)

**Donna:** "That's another very important question. (pause) Well, it's very important to me. When I look at it or when I get people to talk about it, especially people my age, they don't really know what "culture" is. Even I don't really know what culture is, but I understand it, that we haven't lost it, but we're at that stage where we are really losing it fast. (...) Well, there's so many things, like forestry that affect the culture; especially hunting, fishing and trapping. (...) Cree people have lived off the land for so many years, generations, it goes back a long time and it's something very sacred to people. It's been there such a long time and it would be a shame to lose it." (DX)

**Greg:** "(T)he suddenness of the change that occurred (with the arrival of no-Natives) was so rapid that a lot of the people don't know how to deal with it; with the change. A lot of the people that live in the communities haven't had the time or haven't made any effort to adapt to the change. Adapting to change for a lot of people is material. If their neighbour has a new boat well they want a new boat. If their neighbour has a new vehicle well they want a new vehicle too. The education route has been very slow. A lot of people just don't know how to deal with the whole conflict of knowing how to deal with change. (...) (M)ostly it is related to the fact that the change was so rapid and it infected the whole social environment of the Cree world. The

*change was so quickly that people didn't know how to cope with the new intruders of modern society."* (GXII)

Despite being slightly at odds on opinions of the "purity" of the Cree culture and way of life, the common belief was, as Richardson (1975) concluded, that Cree culture did indeed differ with that of non-Native North America. Here within the responses of the participants was validation of Tomatuk's (1997) statement of the differences Cree students must encounter when they wish to pursue higher education, but did this necessarily mean that they perceived it as a "cultural barrier"?

#### b) Perceptions towards Culture in Higher Education Settings

In response to the progressing dialogue regarding culture, the Cree communities, non-Native communities and the institutions of higher education in which they are situated, the interviewees offered narratives in regard to the culture of these locations. Overwhelmingly, the interview participants raised their interpretation of the culture within these southern settings as well as what separated it from their own. Although I often tried to draw out their discernment of what southern non-Native culture was, the responses were mostly in the form of a descriptor of the culture shock the participants had felt or of the differences between the cultures.

**Esther:** *"No, It was different! There were a lot of people, scary people. (laughs) And the traffic! (...) Well, in school, people that you have never seen before, there's a lot of them and I don't really know them and that's kind of hard in the beginning. (...) The culture at CEGEP was very different. (long pause) Everything was just very new to me, before everything was our culture. (...) I started to get used to the culture; I'm more comfortable. (...) It took me probably a year until I got comfortable."* (EVI)

**Karen:** *"I think (culture shock) does have a role. Don't forget that in (Cree villages), there's not really a very definitive type of structure that kids follow here. (...) My kids had structure: you're home at noon for lunch, or you get up and go to school or you're in bed at a certain hour. A lot of these kids don't have that structure. You can see a lot of kids who are out. Like when (my child) when (s/he) was going to school here, I think (s/he) was about seven or eight. I used to have kids from (his/her) school, from her class who would knock on the door at 11:00 at night and ask if she could come out to play! And, I used to say, "No, (s/he)'s in bed and (s/he)'s not coming out to play", and then I would say, "there's school tomorrow and you should be home sleeping!" at least at this hour, at 11:00 (...) If you grew up in an environment where there is no structure and where there were no rules, then you are going into an environment where there*

is very definitely a structure that is in place, like there's certain expectations when you are going to college, like there's timelines you have to meet. So, if you come from an environment where you didn't have timelines, (...) then coming into a non-Native culture where there is structure and there are expectations that you have to meet, then it is very difficult for a youth to be able to adjust to that." (KXI)

**Toni:** "Oh, it's very different. I find that people around here (in Cree communities) tend to just grow up a lot faster than the friends I met in CEGEP in Montreal. (In Cree villages) they want to be parents at the age of seventeen or eighteen! (...) Coming back here, they were having number two (baby). I would ask them, "why don't you want to go back to school" and they'd say, "We don't want to go back, it doesn't interest us!" (...) Probably because of lack of support from home or from school. (...) Cause their parents might be in the bush and not there for them all the time. (...) They might think these children are old enough now and that's it! That's it? You don't get to travel, that's it; "it's time to get married!" (TIV)

**Sarah:** "No. I know I'm different from them so, (short pause) cause I'm a Native. I have different values, different beliefs and differences. (...) The lifestyles, they are different, (short pause) People are less (short pause) How do you call that, not values but. Well, their values are very different of course. And, the people seem to be very, (short pause) Not in a way lost, but they're not, like, (long pause)" (SI)

**Ronald:** "The differences between them and us is the culture here is more slow-paced and we take things not so seriously. Yeah, like the little things in life. Little things in life like (short pause) like time! (laughs) You've probably heard about Indian time. Stuff like that." (RXV)

After establishing the major common theme of culture shock, which follows in the forthcoming "Attending Schools of Higher Education" section, and straightforward perspectives of differences, we began to discuss what sense the participants had of the specific culture that prevailed within the schools and the kind of lifestyles, upbringing and culture of their non-Native student peers.

**Karen:** "Yes, definitely there is a (cultural) difference. I think how people lived back in my parents' time and people shared everything (...) Even their children they shared! There was a difference in the way they looked at the world around you. I think even with the aspect of having been to residential school, there's remainder of that culture still left over. I think you will find that Native people are generous; they'll give you the shirt off their back or they'll give you money even if they don't have money (...) I think that's something that's left over from generations back, where people had a different attitude of material things: what you have is what you share. You know, people will come you and ask, "can I borrow your car?" and expect the answer will be, "yes", without any hesitation. Because in the old times, that's what people

would do; they would come in and say, "can I borrow your canoe, I want to pick blueberries" and somebody would say, "yes, ok", and then the person would come back and they would give you a bucket of blueberries because they borrowed your canoe. What is it like down south? "This is my property! Do not touch!" (KXI)

**Toni:** "(The schools in the south reflected) the Quebecois culture. A lot of students came from French high schools. There wasn't really a variety of culture; it was mostly white." (TIV)

**Sarah:** "Because it's (the CEGEP system) all run by non-Natives!" (SI22)

**Shawn:** "Looking at the city as a whole, everything you have to do, you have to spend money. Going on the city bus (short pause) I got sick of the city bus, that's one of the main reasons I came home (laughs). But, it's like living in the "fast-lane", always on the move. Also, people aren't as open, you say "hi" to somebody on the city bus and the person just looks at you and thinks, "who is this stranger?" We would be open like that to say hi to anybody or talk to anybody."

**Donna:** "I would say they (the non-Native students) come from middle-class or upper-class type families, with ... a lot of them didn't come from, I don't think a rural setting, I think there's a lot of urban people there. Coming from an urban center or ... definitely they have more access to, they know how to get these certain things. They weren't coming into a university totally blind as to how they go about getting along there." (DVI)

Having established that there were clear-cut divisions in the kind of culture reflected within the schools of higher education, I asked the participants if they thought that they were allowed to bring their own beliefs and perceptions that they considered to be associated with their own culture into the classroom. Some discussed the misconceptions they had to live with, while others spoke of the reluctance on the part of the school community to acknowledge differing perspectives.

**Joe:** "I couldn't bring very much (Cree-ness) into my daily life. Sometimes things would blow-up because they (non-Native) would say that Native people couldn't do anything for themselves and everything had to be done for them. It made me feel really mad, because I was Native and I tried the best that I could in order to achieve something. And then, them saying that, it felt like it was pointed at me. But I knew that they weren't saying it to me. That's what they would say, "Yeah, but we're not saying it to you." Yeah, but I am Native ... One time I told some friends in class, just because I talk like you and just because I understand your culture, it doesn't mean I'm not Native. It doesn't mean, you know? But they'd say, "Yeah, but you're different from the rest of them!" (JVIII)

**Shawn:** "In school I found that people had no idea who we were. At the beginning they would ask us, "do you still live in teepees?" and we'd say, "yeah, we still live in teepees!" and we kind of took them for a ride." (SIX)

**Doug:** "That was the one thing I find I didn't talk about was Cree culture to them. What we'd talk about was school and what you were planning to be, and stuff like that. I remember a friend I had, in my class, and he was a Mohawk from Akwesasne, and he knew I was Native and so we always talked. And I remember he told me one time, "so, you guys still go hunting" and it really came back to me when he said, "oh, I wish I could go hunting" and the first thing I did when I got back was I headed off to the camp (to go hunting). (...) (The Mohawks) are so surrounded by white society they really lost something quite important. (...) (Culture in CEGEP) was so mixed. It was more like just going into the White society. At first it wasn't very comfortable for me to talk about the Cree. (...) I never really talked about my culture to (the professors) because I knew they weren't very interested in it. (...) Yeah, yeah, I felt that way. Like, if I talked about my culture I thought they would think, "well, I don't want to know about that, that's not very important." I felt like that." (DX)

When describing their non-Native peers, some noted the differences they noticed with respect to the expectations placed upon them by both family and community members.

**Jen:** "I had friends who were Cree and their parents never pushed them to finish school, or their parents never insisted on them; to help them. (...) Their parents never really insisted that they pass. I would even say that some of their parents don't even really care, if they passed or not. Whereas if I came home with a 69% my (non-Native step dad) would say, "but why?" and there would be this big lecture for two hours!" (JVIII)

**Shawn:** "I guess they (the non-Native students) were more motivated in terms of education, getting their grades up and doing their homework. I think it came from their home. Because, if they didn't succeed in school and they'd get the boot or wouldn't get support from their parents. It was just driven from the home, I believe. But, in our case, where we were living, they (the foster parents) didn't really care if we were succeeding in school or not, all they really cared about was getting their pay checks. At the same time, we didn't really care about doing our homework. If we had homework, leave it there and let's go out!" (SIX)

**Joe:** "Hmmm. (pause) A lot of them (Cree CEGEP students), used to tell me that, (short pause), they didn't have any, (short pause), confidence in themselves, or you know, no one pushed them, or you know?" (JII)

This notion of "being driven" to succeed in schooling surfaced further as participants discussed the opposing expectations that their own family and community had for their own education. Within the setting of primary and secondary education, they discussed the roots of

the perceptions they developed towards education and how this impacted their relationship with schooling in general.

### Perception of School

When discussing the subject of my dissertation, most non-Native people in education would tell me that the greatest barrier for Native success in higher education was the schooling they received prior to CEGEP or university. Having worked with Cree students at both the CEGEP and the university level, I can acknowledge that there are some academic barriers one has to address. But, that was my point of view; I was interested in the interviewees' perceptions of the preparedness of their Cree peers and themselves for higher education.

#### a) Quality of Education in Cree Territory & Preparedness for Higher Education

**Toni:** *"Well, some of the terms and that, some of the students were at a level, maybe because I was put into a group that was a little bit advanced or they had been in that program for a year. (...) I just found it was a little complicated and I felt a little bit intimidated by it. Just by the terms they used, I don't even know anything about what they are trying to say. (laughs) (...) I didn't know what they were talking about. It was their field, eh? But for me, I just wanted to know the basics and why we had this. I continued on, I barely passed. I just wasn't interested at all after."* (TIV)

**Joe:** *"(School in the south is) totally different from up there (Cree territory). And, that you always have to be prepared, you know. Work hard, if you want to go places. And, there's all these rules that you have to follow."* (laughs) (JII)

**Esther:** *"I was living in (Montreal). There were ten of us that went to ... ten little Indians (laughs) ... ten women who went down to study nursing; there was ten of us. (...) Five (graduated). (...) They dropped out; they didn't want to do it. (...) The books were too difficult, in the clinical areas. (...) What was my first reaction? I said, 'oh no. I'm in trouble!' I said to myself, 'Why did I have to come here?'" I guess I had doubts for myself, that I couldn't make it, that I couldn't achieve what I came here for, after they gave us our outline for the nursing program!"* (EV)

**Karen:** *"The vast majority of those who have graduated (from high school in Cree territory) haven't gone (to pursue higher education). Look at my (relative) for example. (S/he) went to Algonquin and failed most of her courses. I don't know, (s/he) didn't have the basic*

background. I'm not saying (s/he) is stupid, ok, I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is that (s/he) did not get the courses (s/he) needed, (s/he) didn't have research skills, (s/he) didn't have writing skills, being able to write reports, papers, whatever. I don't think (s/he) knew how to do that when (s/he) left here. (...)Ok, so how much of this is a part of this pattern we see from elementary to high school, there's problems that are going on. Then you say there's a problem when they go on to get higher education. Then they have to deal with two things, they have to deal with their education and then they have to deal with the cultural barriers too? (KXI)

**Doug:** But, you know, another thing that I noticed is that, the standard of education now is pretty low in Cree territory. You know, when I first attended CEGEP (short pause) But, often, when I was a kid they'd tell me that I'd won awards for English, Math and, you know for (short pause) you know, I won a lot of awards here. And so, I felt really good about that, and it really, really boosted up my self-esteem and my self-confidence. And I thought I'd have no problems in college. So, when I went there and I did a test for the entrance exam, I guess I found out my English was really low. And so, I kind of blamed them, the education standards here."(DX)

**Mike:** "Well, I think there's a lot of problems (in our schools), I would say, in terms of looking at our youth. Either they have to be pushed so that education becomes a priority in their lives. At the moment, graduation ceremonies and graduates are pretty, pretty low. Either the structure of the school has to change or (inaudible) someone has to tell the students, you know, that education is a very important part trying to get somewhere in life." (MXIII)

Participants also raised the subject of a problem that went beyond the quality of academic training received by Cree students within their respective villages. They referred to a deeply rooted problem concerning the cultural link these schools had, in terms of their curriculum, rules, procedures and even teachers, within the actual Cree community.

#### b) Relationship between Reserve Schools and Native Community

The topic of teachers and their relationships with both students and the community were discussed by the participants. They often expressed that there was a feeling that the local schools represented a "foreign" element in the Cree community, much like Morantz' (2001) observation that "(s)chool was another institution from the south imposed on the Crees, as on other Indians across the land" (P. 212).

**Joe:** "I mean, from the day you go to elementary school (in Cree territory) you're exposed to a different culture already." (JII)

**Greg:** "One of the things I noticed when I (worked at a Cree high school) that there were certain students that used to tell me (about racism in the school), but you could never prove it. They would say, "such-and-such a teacher would call us little savage, or say you're too stupid to continue." I've always had that experience with the (non-Native) teachers (in the Cree high schools). I had my own experience with my son because teachers told him, "you're never going to get anywhere!" No matter how much pressure I put on him, he wouldn't go back to school. Finally I told my wife, we can't force him, he doesn't want to go, we can't force him. He's still at a legal age to have to go to school, but, he won't. And, it's just that climate in the schools. He still talks about it today." (GXII)

**Karen:** "Our politics have been coloured by colonialism and our systems are very much structured according to the patriarchal system right now. But I think people are starting to examine that; to look at it and say, the education system is not working and we're using the non-Native system and why isn't it working? Our system isn't working so it must be something to do with the way we structured our education. (...) (The school) belongs to the principal, it belongs to the teachers. (...) The teachers here are segregated. They segregate themselves from the rest of the community. There are very few teachers, and it's usually first year teachers, who participate in community activities. After the first year, then it completely changes. Gradually, they just withdraw and the teachers just live in their own little world and they don't associate with the community members and vice-versa. Some parents say, yes we have a lot of respect for my child's teachers and there are a few parents who say, yes, I speak to the teachers all the time. But, on the whole, on the average, the two groups are very isolated. (...) You end up having teachers that come up here that have been somehow, somehow it gets to them and they have this message that the kids here can't ... can't ... And, on one level it's true, these kids are illiterate when they get to secondary one because they can't function at a high school level. Because, for some reason, I don't know what's happening at the elementary level, but they're not getting the basics to help them get through high school." (KXI)

**Craig:** "It's hard to change that (perception of schools being "white"), you know? I'm still, after all these years, (short pause) its' like a different kind of residential schools. I feel sometimes it's like a Cree school, but even today, it's not the same. I always feel when they opened the school, I was (an administrator) at that time. The first year it was okay. We had rules, we had to do good things in the community. And I tried and I spent many hours to do that, to get people to come here: conferences, meetings with parents, you know. I remember the first time there was a big crowd when we opened the school. Parents came and we sat down, all of us as a community, and we went through the student's handbook. The student's handbook was about 25 pages. We went through it, all of us. (...) We were sitting down and we went through it sentence by sentence, the school regulations. "Do you agree with that?", you know? "Any changes?" "Is there something you don't understand?" "What don't you understand?" "If there's something you don't understand, put your hands up." And then, we wouldn't go on to the next sentence unless everyone understands, until all the hands are up. So, once they're all up, we go over to the next one." (CXIV)

**Greg:** "One thing for sure (short pause) it's not the community. It's not a community school. It's not, no. It's still like a foreign system. You know, I've had people ask me, "Why are you doing



*things in the way that only non-Native people think?" It's alien in that sense that people really don't really understand what the concept of the educational system is all about. How you develop a child from, let's say, primary level to secondary level. That concept is not there, and part of the reason behind that is the fact that, you know the whole parental guidance system, the traditional system was taken away from their hands. And now, there's a gap there. There's nothing in between. (...) A lot of the change today, they don't know how to deal with it, they don't know how to raise their children, they don't know how to help them after school. But, if you look at the majority of the population right now, the fact is, a lot of them are dropouts. How are they going to help them stay in school? Yet, they're supposed to tell their children school is important, but they didn't go themselves." (GXII)*

Delving further into the subject of the school within the community, some interviewees discussed their belief that the chasm is a continuation of the divide created by the parents' experience in residential schools.

**Craig:** "Let me put it this way. I'm not sure if this is appropriate. The way I look at things, is that from, and I'm different, you know? (...) What I'm trying to say is that, people my age, because of residential school, they missed out on a lot of things, okay? So, when their children were growing up, they didn't want their children not to have to go through the same things they went through. Okay? So, every child who is nine years old, ten years old, are asking for his parents for a skidoo, you know? One of these things, you know? Every child is asking for a \$200 pair of skates, you know. The child is going to get it! You know? (...) Because (the parents) are saying, and I heard people, they say, "Well, I didn't have that when I was a child, so let's get it for them." So, for me, when I see that, it's wrong. (...) What I have seen happen is that, children are spoiled. Very spoiled. Parents are asked to pick up their children. When I was (an administrator), I don't know how many parents came, right into the office and I was always abused in my office. I don't know how many parents came right through that door asking me for something and asked me to be "reasonable", you know? And I would tell them, rules are rules! "(CXIV)

**Karen:** "I think it has to do with attitude, and a lot of times kids here think and hear at home about "teachers this and teachers that" and all that kind of stuff and maybe a lot of it stems from the parents themselves not having respect for the teacher or having a problem relating to the school environment itself. And, I have heard people say, it's a copout, but I've heard people say, well, I don't want to go near the school because I have bad memories of residential school. (...) To me, it's like, yes, so you had bad experiences, but there comes a time when you say you deal with the pain, you deal with the issues and you get on with your life. To me, it's like everyone says parents aren't taking responsibility for their kids because of what they went through when they were kids: they didn't have any parental guidance, they didn't have, well, I can say for most of my life I didn't have any parental guidance, because I was in the same environment as they were. The good thing in my life is that I boarded with a good family. Now, other people who were my age also boarded with families and they seem to do well. But, there's this majority of people who seem to feel that the residential school was a "bad trip", that it took away everything. Yes, I'm not trying to belittle it; it took away a lot of things. I mean, I

don't know how to go trapping, I don't know how to set a rabbit's snare. But, am I going to lose sleep over that? No, because I learned other skills, other life skills that I can learn to survive. (...) (People in the community tell me)(t)hat the residential school was bad, that it took away their culture, it took away their language, that it didn't provide them with parental skills or the life skills they needed to either get a job or go trapping. You know, they were kind of caught in a, how should I say, a no man's land, in a twilight zone, where they didn't know where to turn. At one level, for some of them, they were able to salvage something out of it and a lot people, once they came out of residential school, they went to the bush, so they were able to live off the bush, so they were able to live off the land afterwards. (...)I don't know what they are saying to their kids, they send their kids (to school) but their kids are not getting anything out of the system either. When your school has an enrolment of 600 students and you can only have 2-3 graduates per sector graduating from school, what does that say about your system? What's wrong with your system if you are not able to at least graduate at least 60% of your students? Whereas now you're only graduating, what, less than 1%, if that! To me, there's something drastically wrong with the system if that's the case." (KXI)

**Mike:** "It's very low (the CEGEP graduation rate) (...) Very slim; there's a lot of dropouts. Well, I think the work habit, for me, I think. I can only give examples of what we trained our kids to do when they were going to school. At a very early age, you sit down with your kids, when they come home from school, and you do things like, sentence structure or being able to read. And you do that two or four times a week, you sit down and sit with the kids and you start reading and then they enjoy reading. So, if you don't do that, then you're not showing interest. You know? They're not going to push themselves. It's more problems for them and you have to go on until they hit grade five and then after that, after grade six then they're able to go on their own without (us). Every once in a while they would ask us, "how do you do this?" or "how do you do that?", but we had no problems. (short pause) But, if you didn't do that at an early age by the time you get to grade seven, if they don't have that work habit early on, it's tough, it's a hard life for you." (MXIII)

**Greg:** "(The parents' perception towards school) is still negative. But there are parents who have gone through the system and said, "Well, nothing has happened to me". But psychologically, they are already been affected. This is what they don't realize, the impact is already showing through what they do to their kids and how they react to the educational system. (...) The message that they give to their kids is what they (residential schools) did to them in terms of if they chose to rebel. They grew up with residential schools ... the pride that really affected them comes out when they go to deal with their child's problems at school." (GXII)

The residential school experience still has an impact on the perceptions of schools within the community and is regarded as "...one of the most destructive southern institutions imposed on the Crees" (Morantz, 2001, P. 216). Stemming from abuse that Native people endured in these schools (Cheechoo, 1993; Battiste & Jean Barman, 1995; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Grant, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1988; Jaine, 1995; Adams, 1995; Miller, 1996; Huff, 1997;

Dyck, 1997, Whiteman, 1986) the message is delivered from parent to child that the schools are not truly a part of the community. It is easy to appreciate and understand much of the perception developed towards the education system when listening to those participants who lived through the residential schooling and who allowed me to have a brief insight into the overwhelmingly negative experience they endured.

### c) Residential School Experience

Karen's first-hand impression of the aim behind residential schooling leaves little room for interpretation: it was an attempt at assimilation.

**Karen:** *"I think in the process of what happened with the residential school, that era never really changed its perspective, in terms of what its mandate was; which was to assimilate. It didn't matter whether they called it integration or whatever. It all boiled down to one thing, and that was to assimilate the Native people into the non-Native culture. Either you're going to train them to be little farmers and you're going to train the girls to be maids in homes, or whatever. One way or the other; that was the mandate. When they finally realized the whole underhanded way the government wanted to educate the kids by wiping out and getting rid of their language and culture, I think Native people realized they had made a mistake. (...) The government came in and said the white way is the good way and so we will take your kids away and we'll teach them to survive in the white world, because your world is going to collapse and your traditions are no longer going to happen."* (KXI)

The personal impact of the residential schooling left profound childhood memories on all participants. Following closely to the Assembly of First Nations' (1994) account of the residential school experience, participants discussed issues of culture shock, loss of freedom and loss of family that played an integral part of their early childhood memories.

**Joe:** *"Oh, my family wasn't always, (short pause), there, you know, growing up. I grew up in a residential school. (laughs) (...) Yeah, (short pause), it's hard to describe, (short pause), going to school in residential school and then going back home, it was totally different. In residential school there was no freedom, absolutely no freedom at all. (...) Well, I guess we tried to spend as much time with our parents, every moment, as much as possible. That's the way I, the way I was. I wanted to spend as much time with them. You know, ten months is a long time!"* (JII)

**Esther:** *"It's real different. Because in residential school, they had the rules and then when you back home for the summer, I felt like I was free to run around! (...) That was my routine until '72-73."* (EV)

**Mike:** *"Yes, I can still remember (first being sent away to school in the south). As a matter of fact, I just came out of the bush ... I was in the bush for a whole year ... It was a very big change. After spending maybe a couple of months with my parents and now I found out that I'm going to a totally different world."* (MXIII)

**Craig:** *"When I was seven years old, and I remember this: a plane flew up to (the village's nearby lake) and they'd come to pick up all the children that were school-aged, and take them to Moose Factory in September. And people were ready to go in the bush and ready for when the plane comes, (inaudible) people come around to pick up all the children who had to go to school. And at that time I was seven years old and I didn't want to go. I was hiding in the bush and my mother said, 'I'm very sorry, but you have to go! You have to go!', you know? I had to be dragged to the plane."* (CXIV)

If being forcibly separated from family at such an early age was not enough, many had to live through the further maltreatment of psychological and physical abuse.

**Greg:** *"We have a teacher that actually made a comment in our school one time; I mean in the (residential school). You know what he told us? 'The only good Indian is a dead Indian!' Now, you'd hear that a lot from other (non-Native) people, but you wouldn't think ... but that was one of the teachers. So, we were taught to believe that they were right. That's the part that's psychological control and abuse they used on us."* (GXII)

**Esther:** *"I just wanted to achieve something. I know when I was in residential school they used to put us down; they used to tell us, 'You're no good'. (...) Councillors would say that. I guess that's why I wanted to achieve something. (...) They (the teachers at residential school) used to tell us, 'You're stupid'."* (EV)

**Karen:** *"I went to residential school and I think that a lot of the stuff I learned as a child, the values that my parents had, the beliefs that my parents had, their spiritual beliefs that they practiced when they were in the bush were erased when I was told that was not the right way to believe."* (KXI)

**Craig:** *"One of the ways (they assimilated you) was religion. You have to go at six in the morning, you have to go to service, go to the chapel, at six o'clock in the morning. Then you have to go back to your room at school, the boarding school, where you stayed. Before lunch, you had another service. Before you go to school you had to go to church again, the chapel. Again, then you had to go back after school and you had to go after suppertime. After supper you had to go back again! (...) (T)hey (residential school) were saying we encourage you to go to speak (in English), but you couldn't (speak Cree), I mean, you couldn't. So, in other words they tried to. In a way it's good for you, in some ways it's not good, you know, they tried to force us to speak their language and we didn't. You know? (...) There was lots of them who*

were rebellious and who demonstrated their opposition. (...) They got severe punishment, yeah. And it was, to me, it was awfully cruel. People were treated cruelly, you know? It was (pause) some of the things I saw kids go through, it was very, very tough." (CXIV)

**Greg:** "The other thing that was harsh, I found, and I don't know if it was a form of punishment, you get up every morning and you go to services. And then after breakfast. Then you go to school and then you go back (to services) at lunch hour. (...) We got up at a certain time, we eat at a certain time, we go to church at a certain time. Very, very regimental. We knew they were trying to change us, but we didn't know at the time. We knew because of the way they talked about our culture and our language. How horrible it was. How bad it was. That we were atheists. We didn't know who God was, and stuff like that. We knew because that was how they talked about our friends and other people. "You're Nomads." That's the only part that we understood that they wanted to change. But the real motive behind that was too difficult to understand because we were too young to understand; now I understand, the whole system was about! (pause) Fortunately there's many of us who resisted that. You know, I almost lost my language. I had a hard time regaining my language. I had to go to the bush to regain all the things I had lost from my language. I knew that when I left school I was very ... I was violent! I fought a lot. I drank a lot. I even criticized my own people because of how I was feeling. It came to that point. Only after, I went to the bush and started listening to the elders. There was some good in my life now. And after that I started going down (inaudible) and continued drinking again, because there was still a lot of things that were affecting me." (GXII)

Those who shared stories of corporal violence corroborated remarkably similar accounts of how the residential school staff used a frayed "fan belt" to punish them.

**Craig:** "Let me put it this way. How can I say it? When I was younger, I was very mischievous. I think what I did was get caught. I broke those rules, you know? But, at the same time I don't think I deserved that, you know? I didn't deserve what I went through. We got whipped-down with a strap. They used to hit us with a strap. What do you call those things ... you put into ... you have this ... (makes motion with his fingers of objects coming out on a strap) ... you have them in cars? (...) A belt! They cut them in strips. You could see the wires inside. They hit you on the wrist. I got it three or four times. And, I had a beating from (an employee of the residential school) with a boot. You know, those rubber boots? (...) Then one time I was sick, I threw up all over the floor, (an employee of the residential school) said, "you clean this floor", you know? And I was sick, you know? I found that was cruel." (CXIV)

**Greg:** "To give you a mild story, when we started off in (residential school) the first thing we were told was, "under no circumstances are you to speak your language!" If you did, even utter one word, you were physical punished for it. Even to the point where you were deprived of meals. (pause) These things happened. A lot of the people I went to school with, we hid to talk our language. You know? We'd go somewhere where we could have conversations on our own. We took advantage of that, because, what we'd say is, "we want to go home!" (...) we fought in many ways and a lot of times the counsellors weren't aware that we were doing that. But, the worst part is when you did get caught, they were very severe with punishment. I got the strap

*on a number of occasions, eh? (inaudible low voice) ... but I wouldn't cry. (short pause) I wouldn't cry. (...) Well, a lot of it (the beatings) was from, what do you call the, uh, you know the conveyer belt? And it looked like, it had these metal clips on them, eh? It was really painful. But, if you refused to cry, that's when you are deprived of your meals and things like that. I went without meals for a couple of days."* (GXII)

Morantz (2002) wrote that "The Crees may not venerate their past but they do recount it" (P. 10) and to a great extent I concur. However, I was quite taken aback by the depth of stories these participants were willing to share. As I had already completed a significant amount of my literature review for my dissertation, before completing the interview process, I was curious as to why nothing has been written on the Cree residential school experience and posed this question to some of the participants.

**Craig:** *"The only thing I can see is that the history was never written down. I don't know. I don't know, it's just that, I can't answer that. It's just, uhhh. (...) I don't think that I have anything to conceal or hide. As a matter of fact, I think what I went through helps me with my children, because they tell me, "I don't want to have to go through what you went through". (...) So, it helps them to make a better judgment, a better decision because of what we went through. Because what we went through with those rules, in (residential) school, we were not given a chance. (...) There's been a lot of research on the Crees! But, from my experience, I haven't seen anybody who has done any work on this issue (of residential schooling). (...) Maybe it partly relates to the fact that people are reluctant to speak about it. You know? Maybe there are attempts that I'm not aware of, but, maybe there have been tries. But, my experience? I haven't had anybody come forward and ask me what I thought of the ... other than relating that we had similar experiences with other Native cultures, with residential schools."* (CXIV)

**Greg:** *"I guess nobody has really thought about actually doing a book on it, or writing about their experience in residential schools. I don't know what the reasons are behind it. The thought never really occurred to me to talk about residential schools. It just didn't seem like a topic that was worth writing about. I don't know, I think maybe part of the reason is that there was so much negative experiences connected with residential schools, so it might be that people just don't want to be reminded of their experiences. So, I think that's part of the reason why. (...) I guess it was so bad that people don't want to be reminded about it. Although I think it would be a good exercise for somebody, if they were so inclined to do it. For me anyway, I don't know, it didn't really occur to me when you talk about education to look back at the residential schools and look at it in terms of (...) I really don't know how to put this. I guess part of it has to do with not really making that connection and saying, well this is part of the reason why. When I think about it, yeah, there is a connection but people tend to look at education now and tend to want to skip over that era of residential school and kind of skim over it or whatever. Again, I think it's because of the negative experience they have had in residential school. People will say, "Oh, I've had such bad memories about residential schools" and everybody just doesn't want to talk about it."* (GXII)

Greg continued his train of thought on why nothing has been written on the Cree residential experience by adding that the silence on the issue has created further problems for the community.

**Greg:** *"I think in lots of ways that they experience the effects (of the residential school experience), like, I think a lot of parents are lot more lenient on kids, especially the ones that went through residential schools. So, they don't really provide much structure for their kids. I think that's part of the problem with a lot of the kids; this generation anyway. The kids haven't had much structure, really, and the parents tended to be much more lenient and allow their kids to get way with a lot. And, I think there's also quite a bit of, and although the people in the James Bay region don't like to talk about it, but I think there's a lot of child abuse, in terms of sexual abuse that has gone on, and a lot of it stems from what people experienced in the school. So, it is kind of like the abuse is intergenerational. So, you have kids who may have experienced growing up with sexual abuse and then they in turn abuse other kids. So, that's one of the negative things, then there's also the alcoholism and a lot of addictive behaviours that go on and a lot of it has to do with masking the pain that's been going on and that people didn't want to have to deal with. So, they have turned to alcohol or drugs instead."* (GXII)

Much like Brave Heart and Lemyra (1998) concluded that there is a "long legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations" due to the American Indian holocaust (Thornton, 1990; Churchill, 1995, 1998), residential schooling has also left unresolved scars. Through the interviews, it became clear to me that due to the after-effects of residential schooling, the distance that has been created between local schools within the community has only added to the problematic perceptions that Cree students hold towards these institutions, both at the local level and the higher education level that resides in the south.

#### Attending Schools of Higher Education in the South

Because I acknowledged that culture shock was a great part of my initial experience teaching at the CEGEP level in Cree territory, and because it was the focus of my dissertation, I asked my participants whether or not this was part of their experience as well. The retelling of their early experiences of attending school in the south was overwhelmingly filled with stories of culture shock and feelings of anxiety related to being in an unfamiliar context. Even those students who attended residential schools felt they were still not ready for the differences that awaited them.

#### a) Culture Shock

Pedersen (1995) characterizes culture shock as the personal experience when familiar cues and norms that one usually relies on within one's own culture are substituted by cues that are then perceived as unfamiliar. The responses of the participants to life studying outside of their community certainly fit Pedersen's description.

**Sarah:** "Oh, it's a big, it's a big (culture shock)! (laughs) It's like you hit a wall, or something." (SI)

**Christine:** "Like, when I first left, I was like seventeen and it was totally different. (...) The city life it wasn't what I ... Like, I couldn't see any (Cree people). Like, I panicked, I thought I was alone. I wanted to meet people, like Natives, mostly Natives. I wasn't surrounded by Natives, I was surrounded with (long pause) yeah. (...) I was kind of scared ... like, it might be someone who ... Like, I didn't really. Even in high school, I always hung around with Natives." (CVII)

**Doug:** "The longer I stayed there, I felt like, I didn't really think about the bush. But now that I am here I always think like, I want to go hunting, when I was over there it was like, I was kind of losing something very important. (...) I was confused when I was (in the south), you know? It's so ... it's such a sudden change, you know? A sudden change, now that I think about it, it changed so fast." (DX)

**Joe:** "Uh, I was exposed to a lot of things, all types of things, (short pause), my wife's there (down south), working. And, I saw all the problems that the kids were facing. Especially, going from elementary to high school. It was kind of a shock to them, you know? (...) (pause) I guess from what I've talked to the (other CEGEP) students about, (short pause), it as, as if they didn't fit like, (short pause), Uh, it's hard to describe it. Like, they weren't ready, or, you know? It was kind of like a shock to them." (JII)

**Ronald:** "... (Y)ou feel isolated more. Like, I didn't feel at home. (short pause) Like here, you know everybody, down there, you don't know anybody. (short pause) And the people I went down with, we were scattered. It was a pretty hard time, eh? (...) Just to feel at home, you know what I mean? And, just the coffee shop (in my community) and everything. I (short pause) I wanted to come home. I didn't feel like I was one of them and people were looking at me in a strange way." (RXV)

**Joe:** "I find with a lot of people when they start CEGEP they can't handle it, for the first year, (short pause), they drop out. (...) Well, I guess a lot of the students have never been out of their village. I have a nephew and a niece that came down and they didn't last very long. (...)



*They weren't used to living in the city. (...) One of my, (short pause), my niece has never been out of the uh, her reserve. And, her high school graduated and she decided to go to college and she just couldn't adapt. She had never been in the city before. Something happened to her, it's just what I thought. She couldn't get used to it. (...) Well, she's kind of , (short pause), uh , (short pause), she didn't socialise at all."* (JII)

**Melinda:** *"I think it's because all the other ones come from a reserve and from up north and this is a very drastic change for them. (...) There's a lot of people and they're not Natives, so, I guess they're used to identifying themselves with other Cree people and, uh. You see these, uh, like, there are a whole bunch of people and they're all French Canadians and I suppose that they're, (short pause). I don't know, they were oppressed up there, there's nobody else who's white up there. The only white people are probably the, uh, the imported, but even then."* (MIII)

**Karen:** *"Yes, I think so (it is difficult for the youth of Cree territory to function when they come down south) because they grew up in an environment where they grew up differently. Say for example, a little kid comes along, climbs your tree and breaks your branch, right? Down south, the person who owns your property would have a big fight with his neighbour about this kid climbing his tree and breaking his tree. Up here, they don't think anything of it; the kid would climb the tree and nobody would say anything. Even kids will come into your yard and turn on your water faucet, outside, and let your water run, without even thinking, "hey, I could be flooding this person's basement!" and walk away, leaving the tap running and nobody would say anything. But, down south, people have very different ways of conducting themselves, than it is up here."* (KXI)

**Craig:** *Well, it's just, it was different. It was different; it was a cultural shock for me. It was a different way of life, different things. (...) And I had a hard time. It wasn't just adapting, I had to adjust to new ways of doing things."* (CXIV)

As Jen illustrates, the sense of being overwhelmed by the sheer number of people you encounter, on a daily basis, was also part of the culture shock experience.

**Jen:** *"Oh, just the city (Montreal), it was really big. Like, Chibougamau is small; you have everything there. Whereas in Montreal you have to sort of run around and figure things out and everything just seems so much more complicated in the big city. The first time I went, that's what I found. And I used to think, "how can people live like this?" You know, "how can people live?" (...) You know what I used to do in Montreal? I used to actually look for trees. Anywhere I could find trees. I used to go on Mont Royal and just pretend ... just sit there and imagine that I'm back home."* (JVIII)

**Karen:** *"There's definitely an adjustment that a student has to go through when they come from Mississauga or Wilmot and go to John Abbott (College). I mean, John Abbott probably has*

*a student population that is equivalent to Mississauga's total population. (...) So you're looking at being in an environment that is ten times bigger than your community." (KXI)*

**Melinda:** *"The (laughs) school that I graduated from in high school, my grad class was, like, ten students. So, when I got over here to John Abbott there was, like, 5000 students, well (laughs)! I nearly fell off my chair." (MIII)*

**Esther:** *"It's very different than from where I come from and my community is a big community. It's hard. You know, you have to; when you work at school you are very busy. You don't have much time for any social life. (...) What hit me was ... I don't know how to describe it; you know, the amount of people (laughs)! There's a lot of people in the streets and I was kind of afraid a little bit (laughs)! Yeah! I don't know it was different, you're not used to it." (EVI)*

From a slightly different perspective, due to their extended time in non-Native communities while attending parts of primary and secondary schooling, both Donna and Shawn expressed their difficult experiences of having to go back and forth between Native and non-Native cultures.

**Donna:** *"I grew up in a nuclear family type thing: mother, father, brother, sister. We moved, I lived in (a non-Native village) where my brother and sister were both born ..., so I've had that experience of being down south, so I wasn't really shocked when I had the experience with (the specific university). When I went up north, when I went back home, (...), that's when I encountered a lot of things that were foreign to me! (laughs) And, after a while it was a part of our life. Some of the experiences were negative, in terms of the alcoholism that goes on in some Native communities and the economic situation; a lot of the people did not have jobs. The problems that accompany alcoholism in the homes, you know, that destroy families and marriages; when the police come to your door, that type of thing. But, after a while I ... because I didn't participate in a lot of things, I was kind of sheltered, because I wasn't in that scene, I wasn't participating, (...) because I chose myself, because I had seen what happened to people in my family, in some of the violent ways my family members died due to various alcoholism problems, so I chose to, myself, not be like that." (DVI)*

**Shawn:** *"But, when I went to (primary school down south), it was a whole new experience to me when I went to the big city. It's in Hull, that's where most of the Crees went. When we went there. The first day in school (pause) from our non-Native boarding homes in Gatineau. On our way, we had to take a city bus to school and it took us about an hour and a half to get to school, every morning. We had to get up early and sleep half way and wake up when we got to school. But the first day of school, I still remember that day because we never went to school. Where we went, is we went to the Parliament Hill; between the Rideau Canal and the Parliament Hill there's a little forest there, that's where we went. We went to go sit in the forest and (pause) go play with the squirrels. (laughs) We felt comfortable being around nature. We didn't feel comfortable being in the big shopping mall at the Rideau center and it was just too*

*many people and too much traffic. It was something new to us and we didn't feel very comfortable. But, slowly, even going to school, the next day, after we played hooky the first day, the next day going to school was another totally new experience; just to see the traffic and the people and you don't even know anybody in the school and everybody else knows you're new. When you go to the homeroom class ... the homeroom class was all Native, so that was ok, we started from there and then we'd go off to our classes. But, just going to the classes, to me, I wasn't there to learn an education; I was there to learn a new way of life! A new way of life, but also this new way of trying to even pick up what they are teaching." (SIX)*

The participants' descriptions of initial experiences studying outside of their communities affirmed Peregoy's (1990) findings that although Native and non-Native students share the same stresses associated with education, Natives must endure added stress by entering an educational context that is "alien to them" (P. 8). In effect, not only do they have to worry about their studies, they must also deal with culture shock. With the affirmation that the participants shared the same experience of culture shock as I did, it was no surprise to me that one of the thoughts that fuelled this perception was "home sickness"; this follows Pederson's (1994) "disintegration stage" in which the culture shock is compounded by the profound loss you feel for the comforts, support and predictability of your own cultural environment.

#### b) Home Sickness

Home sickness within a milieu in which you feel culturally secure can be difficult. Home sickness in an environment in which you are dealing with culture shock is entirely different. Some of my friends and relatives did not understand why I felt such a loss over my separation from my family during the initial few months in Mistissini and would sometimes recount how they had spent weeks away from family on business trips. After much consideration, I now realize that home sickness is much less acute when you are surrounded with comforts of cultural familiarity. The kind of home sickness you experience when you are without this cultural acquiescence leaves you craving for your norms.

**Sarah:** *"The first thing you become aware of is the cultural differences as you are trying to learn what the culture is or even how to behave or how people react or even what is expected. That's the first thing and usually that takes time and you have to be there for so long to get used to that. Because, the behaviours and norms and how people do things and how they behave is different from over there to here. Because, over there, they have different*

aspirations, over here they have different things; it's a little more slower, you can go out in the bush and do the things you want to do with what is available. Over there, you're living in the fast lane, you have to be in class at this time, you have to do this and do your homework, then go buy your groceries. It becomes (short pause) it does help you to become independent. For us that's what made us (my brother and I) independent. If you're alone up there, it's a lot more difficult than if you have a friend or two, doing it together. Because, it's easier to break when you're alone than when you have three guys together. (...) (But), three, living in the city with no association with any Cree? (short pause) No, you need other friends to visit and socialize with, to do things together. At the time, we had that. We had two of our sisters that were going there, we had a lot of friends that were down there and were able to associate with. And, we visited and had get-togethers and suppers together and did different things together. That was there for us. If that wasn't there, it would have been a different story. (...) If you have family and friends then you can fit in with them and slowly start to fit in with surroundings." (SIX)

**Greg:** "The first time I went to (an institution of higher education) was in 1979-80 and I remember when I got there, there was no (Cree) post-secondary program. What I had done is I had saved up enough money to go to school. But, I didn't know who to turn to! You know? There was information here, information everywhere and we couldn't figure out who we should be talking to. Nobody (at this institution of higher education) could tell me, "go here and go see this person". I had to literally follow another student and say, "look, I'm in this program, where do I go?" (...) Eventually, you get so frustrated that you, you know? "Wow!" (...) When you get home, you have problems after that, that's when it always hits you. That's when you miss the involvement of the family and having a family; the family relationship, you know? And, I remember when I started (residential school) the first time that I got to that school, I was horrified ... just the building ... I was scared. You know? Of the people who were working there. Right from then you knew that you were not in an environment that you should be in, or what you were used to. And ... that's the first time you really understand what the concept of fear is, in (residential school). I never had any fear, being in the bush. Away from the family; you know, out bird hunting or hunting partridges or something like that, away from the camp. I never had any fear of the animals or anything like that. But, when I got to that school and I saw that big building, that's when I was afraid. (...) Even though a lot of the youth have an opportunity to take a trip down south, because the parents have vehicles now, the concept is still (short pause) it is still not any easier because you have been exposed, just because you've been in the southern world and you've had the opportunity to go. It doesn't make it any easier. The minute you arrive and you're on your own! That's when it hits you!" (GXII)

Greg's sentiment of, "That's when it hits you" parallels my own initial experience of teaching up north. The loneliness of my time in the community without my wife and daughter compounded the culture shock to a higher level. As an adult, 29 years old, the experience was difficult; had I been of standard CEGEP or undergraduate age, it would have been unbearable and many of the participants in retrospect agreed that their experience was, indeed, challenging and intolerable.

**Christine:** "When I left my parents I was like seventeen and I went to three colleges in Ontario; Toronto School of Business, Ontario Business College and then I went to Algonquin and I was alone, like I didn't live with anybody, so I went home. I only went there, like I lasted only three months, two months. I quit, I withdrew, because I was lonely and I wanted to come back." (CVII)

**Doug:** "Well, it was a change, because my mother wasn't there, my brothers and my sisters weren't there, so I had to adapt to a new environment. (...) At first, it was really hard to adapt to the fact that I wasn't with my family anymore. I had a friend and that made it a little easier for me. The first three months, it was, I was just partying, and I kind of knew I wasn't there for that, I was just enjoying the nightlife, I guess. The nightlife, I kind of regret doing that, you know, going out almost every weekend. After that, I kind of slacked off." (DX)

**Christine:** "Like, when I wanted to go into the bush, like. Especially when it came to April or May, when I was still in Hull, I knew everyone was out in the camp and I would want to go back, or I would want to go and eat traditional food. I was (long pause) (...) When I first left (the community) I lived with my cousin, and then I had roommates, so I had roommates during the time of the other colleges, but then I went to Algonquin and, like, I was alone, everybody went home. So, I couldn't ... (...) Because I didn't have nobody to talk to, or even have ... you see, Algonquin was a big school, and it wasn't really, like, I couldn't ... I was looking for Natives and I never really had a really close friend. Whereas at Heritage, it's a small college, so I found a few Natives there and I hung around with them during breaks. And then I met this girl, she was a Philippino and I became close to her. So I started hanging around." (CVII)

**Sarah:** "I needed a lot of support, from back home, when I first came. When I first came here last May, uh, I mean January 1997, I was like, alone. I didn't have my family with me. I had an apartment by myself, and everything. I had a big condo by myself and I was completely alone. I felt lost at first! (...) I felt completely alone, at first. I didn't know much of anybody. (...) My grandfather passed away the first semester I was here. So, I had a hard time coming back to the apartment all alone and, after the funeral and all that. It happened during my spring break, in '97. So, uhh, I felt all alone. Having to work after the funeral and after having all my relatives up there, and all that." (SI)

**Melinda:** "I was homesick too, for like three months. (laughs) I really had heartbreak. I got over it, I made new friends I, I found new things to do, and, uhh, go do it. After a while, of course you still miss them, but, it's not as bad." (MIII)

**Doug:** "Well, I kind of missed home, you know, it was like, "I want to go home now!" I felt like I was so far." (DX)

**Esther:** "Some of (the Cree CEGEP students) have problems. I guess they're homesick. First semester, I was homesick too; I didn't want to leave my family, but I got used to it in the

second semester. (...) Yeah I was (used to being separated from my family) but, I didn't really... when I dropped out of school that's when I wanted to stay with my family." (EV)

Comparing her own experience with non-Native students who have the luxury of choosing a CEGEP within proximity to their home, Esther continued her description of her time at school by commenting on the fortunate circumstance of the non-Native students.

**Esther:** "Well, of course, (non-Native students' experience is) different from ours. They grew up in the city; they have their families with them. (...) They (non-Cree students in CEGEP) were lucky, they got to live with their parents, with their family, they were near. (...) Well, it's a big change in Montreal. It's a big city. (...) People are ... everyone's just going their own way, you know? It's a big city. Like, there's a lot of people (laughs) it's rowdy! Here, I find it quiet and also the rent is too high in Montreal. There's no air pollution here. (laughs) It's polluted! (...) I got used to it. Except for homesickness (...) my family, my friends, my grandparents and I wanted to be in the bush, go up the lake. (...) The fact that you don't see your family that your parents weren't there to support me, do you know what I mean? They were in their community and in the bush. (...) It's different for the (non-Native) students." (EVI)

Even those who said they had some support from family, friends or student services expressed their anguish at being homesick and discussed how it either tempted them, or was a final determining factor, in deciding to drop out of their higher education program.

**Toni:** "(My GPA was) not very good. I just wasn't into it. I just couldn't concentrate and I was homesick a lot. I had a boyfriend back home, here in (the village) (laughs). So, I was visiting a lot! (...) I could see that I had all the support that first year from my family. But, I just didn't want to be there. (...) The last year my mother left. She came back home (to Mistissini). My mother came back home, because my father was living in Mistissini the entire time, so they were commuting back and forth (...) I had left my son with my mother, here in the community, so I could concentrate on taking extra courses. But it didn't work because I wasn't happy, I didn't have anyone with me. So, it was kind of like an up and down, trying to concentrate and thinking of the community. There's nobody here, so there's no point in being here. It was hard. So, I had to move back. (...) I went back after Christmas and this time I told my mom, ok, you take him and I'm not going to call you and say bring (my child) back. It didn't work! I withdrew my application and said, "I'm going home now!" and that was it. (...) I didn't even talk to a counsellor, because they're never going to convince me and I'm not going to stay. I felt kind of lost because I always had my mother with me. I just felt there was no support." (TIV)

**Craig:** "Yeah. But the one thing I have to say is, people encouraged me; being one of the first Cree to go to university. A lot people encouraged me and a lot of people came to see me when I was in Montreal. So, that sense of support was (pause) people were there for me. But, it was tough; it was very, very tough." (CXIV)

According to both my own experience and that of my participants, homesickness and perceived isolation certainly compounded the sense of culture shock you were undergoing. Homesickness is a difficult enough state of mind to endure but adding to the stresses are feeling of significant differences in norms, values and customs to which you have to adjust yourself. The first such tangible experience I can point to was that of the cultural difference between "time and pace" that we place so much emphasis on in the southern culture.

a) Time & Pace

From the outset of my CEGEP teaching, I was warned by other teachers about "Indian time". Kincheloe (1983) urges that non-Native teachers working in these communities must give consideration to the differing perception of time. It didn't take long before I learned to appreciate the idea of not worrying over time while, at the same time, completing the work that needed to be done and putting it all into perspective. This was a point of view, unfortunately, that changed immediately upon return to the Montreal workplace. The interview participants noted the same thing.

**Sarah:** *"They're constantly going after something around here: either you're running for the metro, or running for the bus, or, (short pause) like a mouse in a maze! Running, running, running, running! (...) But, (short pause) everything was such a fast pace, movement and everything. (...) It's a completely different pace and lifestyle."* (SI)

**Melinda:** *"First time I got here you had to go from point A to point B without being late. (laughs) Why are people running?"* (MIII)

**Ronald:** *"Definitely I found the "time wise", everything is rushed and you have to get here and there and you have a certain time to get there. And here (in her village) you come from such a small community and you can come and go and get there in five minutes (laughs). But where, I'd have to plan my time, I'd have to say, now I have listed minutes, I have to get out of here and do this and that."* (RXV)

**Esther:** *"They have a fast pace; you have to be on time. The time! They don't go for the Indian time! (...) Everybody is rushing, rushing, rushing! That's how I saw it when I first went down. It seemed like everybody has to go, I don't know, like they have to be on time for something. I*

*wasn't. (laughs) I always took my time. (...) Yes. I was always late. When I went to the classes, they closed the door on me!" (EV)*

**Joe:** *"Of course, there's, you know, certain things that are stressful. And, you know, coming to school down here, you know, everything is scheduled, you know. It's, you know, very, very, very..." (fast staccato hand motions). (...) I took a course, a stress course. And, I discovered all the stuff I was going through. You know, in school. And I was thinking about back home (inaudible) a lot of things. I found that it was different, like uh. Back home, there's less stress, you know like, (short pause), (laughs), (short pause), When you're doing traditional activities, like, you can do them whenever you want to. You're not stressed too much. You're not, "there's no time". Like, there's Indian time!" (laughs) (JII)*

**Mike:** *"You have to understand that there's going to be a lot of changes (when you go to CEGEP). You have to follow a schedule, because sometimes even here (in the community), you know, you tell them, "well, you have to be here at 8:30" and you have people walking in at 9:00, 9:30. Like, you have to learn to follow the schedule down south, you see? Otherwise there just no way you're going to survive. If you start skipping classes and you decide, well, you just don't feel like coming to school one day and you just don't feel like it, then you're going to fail. Well, if you get a job, I mean, you're going to have to show up!" (MXIII)*

Adjusting your sensibilities to Cree or southern concepts is a problematic but not insurmountable task. And homesickness does create a sense of loneliness and a longing for the familiar, for family and friends, which can also be difficult to endure. But nothing creates the deep chasm separating the individual from the achievement of higher education like encountering prejudice in the location in which you are seeking enlightenment, both in the school and its surrounding community. This is a jarring event that very few have enough fortitude to overcome.

b) Encountering Prejudice (school & community)

Within the school setting, current and former students discussed critical incidents of racism between themselves and various members that made up the higher education community. All of the participants recounted encounters which made them increasingly conscious of the prejudicial manner in which they were being perceived. The discrimination they talked about came from three sources: non-Native peers, the non-Native community and the higher education staff. From the outset, participants found living within their new neighbourhood problematic.



**Ronald:** "Some of the people were kind of (short pause) I was just (short pause) I encountered a lot of racism when I was there. People calling me savage or people trying to bother me when I was walking down the street doing "Whoooo, Whoooo!" (imitates stereotypical "Indian war cry"), you know? (...) One time, I got into a big argument with a lady on the bus! (laughs) Like, I had to go outside and she said something to me in French. I understood. She called me a savage. A "sauvage". And, I turned around and I let her have it (laughs). (pause) But everybody on the bus looked at me and (short pause) felt that I was the bad guy, because I stood up (short pause) because I stood up for myself. Know what I mean?" (RXV)

**Toni:** "I grew up in (non-Native town) and there's a lot of racism (there). When you're young you're witnessing them calling you a savage. So, that's what I thought everybody thinks. They all think you're a savage." (TIV)

**Shawn:** "I think (the failure) has a lot to do with the cultural orientation, in terms of behavior and the norms of the individuals. If you persevere from here, let's say a high school graduate who comes from here, they wouldn't have the outgoing mentality (pause) of going out and meeting people. More or less, they'll keep it in and the shyness will take them over. Living in a small town, and I can't really say what it is, but, the cultural aspect of it, when you go to the city it's a totally different culture. (...) I think in our case, we lived in non-Native society, where French people called us "Kawish", so (we were used to it)." (SIX)

**Melinda:** "Over there (in the non-Native community), we're like a minority. So, it's like, it's very, very, uh, we face a lot of racial discrimination. (...) Because, we were a minority over there. And, I don't know, but they don't seem to enjoy having, (short pause). If they see something new, like a new person or a new race or colour or anything; and they tend to pull this, "why do you want to be with your North people?" and they have hard time accepting. Like, coming from a different racial group or something, I don't know what it is?" (MIII)

**Jen:** "I found that, after getting to know them that a lot of them were brought they way I was brought up. I guess because of my (non-Native) stepfather. You know, a lot them were pushed ... (...) But I found that the (non-Native) students that I went to (CEGEP) with had the same background that I did. (...) Except the fact that they thought we (Natives) were less than them, that we were so isolated." (JVIII)

**Greg:** "I've explained to some youths and explained to them about when I was younger, the way we were treated. The mere fact that you're always reminded that your friends are not worth it, they don't have an education, they're not worth it, they're stupid, you know, and that type of thing. That's one kind of racism we had, but it still lingers on, the impact still lingers. Especially the type of racism you get when you come back to your own community, your perceived as a "little brown white man". People will say that in back of you, you know? It's a subtle form of racism but it's from your own people. It still happens today. The other form of racism is more blatant, when you go into in a restaurant and you're eating there with your

family and there's another French family sitting beside you, and they say, "Look, those savages are eating the same food we are!" That has an impact on you. It still occurs. Recently my wife and I had that experience. We were eating and a little kid across from us and the kid said, "Look the savages are eating the same food we are!" And the father laughed. I told my wife just ignore them." (GXII)

Jen discussed how her own primarily non-Native upbringing allowed her to avoid many of the harsher prejudices in the original community she partially grew up in, but problems started to creep in when she had to move to a new district when she went to CEGEP.

**Jen:** *"The first year I went I was seventeen and there were no Native students there. The non-Native thing really didn't bother me in the beginning, mainly because I was the only Native graduate out of 120. So, that part didn't bother me. But, mainly because I knew them since I was young and everybody accepted me the way I was. But, when I went to (a French CEGEP) there was ... nobody knew me. So, I had to start all over again and start with people being prejudiced. (...) In some courses, let's say, they were talking about issues between the French and English and then somebody always brought up the "thing about Natives", "the Native issues", "Natives never pay taxes", "Natives have so much money". (JVIII)*

In her new environment, she felt she understood how to "fit in" to the non-Native culture, but also admitted how frequently she saw other Natives being mistreated by non-Native peers.

**Jen:** *"There were some Native students there that spoke French, but not like Quebecois. (...) People would actually laugh at them! You know, they would laugh at them; they would talk behind their back and even when they were there! They would sort of talk like them and use local expressions so they wouldn't be able to understand them. You know, like calling them names. (...) The one that always come up is they would call them "Kawish". Kawish, I don't even know what it means. (...) It's almost like calling a Black person "Nigger" or something like that. (...) It made me feel bad, it made me feel bad. (...) And I would say, "maybe you should do this and maybe you should be more implicated", instead of staying in your own (pause) Mostly, they tried, but mostly they found it really hard. I guess, there was too much of a cultural difference for them. They didn't feel as if they fit in with other students. They felt out of place. (...) They didn't graduate, because they felt out of place. They felt out of place and there was no support for them. (...) (The other Native students) all they did was stay in their own corner.*

From dealing with the locals of the new "neighbourhood" in which they found themselves, to interacting with the teachers and professors of the CEGEP and university community, participants had to deal with misconceptions and stereotypes associated with their Native heritage.

**Sarah:** "They (teachers and professors) see me as a less educated person, I guess. Knowing that I'm a Native and uhhhh. I guess it's a rumour, I don't know. But, once they know that you're a Native they kind of look at you a different way and then they'll act different towards you. (...) When (a CEGEP teacher) found out I was Native, she was like, "Oh!", all of the sudden she had a different expression on her face. Whenever I would ask for her help, or I'd go see her in her office, like, she was constantly, uhh, telling me to hurry up, or I don't know. It was like she was always in a hurry to get away. Or, I don't know, maybe she was just like that. I don't know, but. I had the impression that she wasn't very comfortable with me. 'Cause I can feel it when somebody isn't comfortable with me, or when they are." (Sl)

**Ronald:** "I had an encounter with the administration there, because I had long hair and they wanted to cut it and I told them, "no way!" And they felt that the instructors wouldn't really understand my hair ... There was two (Native students with long hair). Me and this other (Native person with long hair) guy, we had to meet with the assistant director. We then had to explain or check as to why we had long hair. (...) I was, like, upset. And I told them. I told the instructor that my ... when I was in college, like, I was getting a lot of people who were making fun of me because of who I am. And we had been told about coming here that you have to treat me like, "I'm a cop or I want to be a cop and everybody here is a cop and wants to be a cop". So, I'm here and I figured it doesn't really matter if you have people there, oriental people or whatever, and as soon as I got there they are telling me about my hair and they want to cut it. And, they were telling me if you don't cut your hair like the other hair it's not showing respect. And, I told them, "I'm a Native person and it's part of our culture to have long hair". (pause) Me and my buddy, we had to go see the assistant director and we had to justify why we had long hair. And he said, "Well, some of the Cree before you didn't have long hair". And I said, (sighs), "Well, I don't know?". And they wouldn't let me wear my uniform; I had to go buy a suit. They wouldn't let me wear my uniform with my long hair. So, I had to buy a suit to continue with the training. (...) And I told them this, they're telling me that I can't fit in. Because everybody here wants to be a cop and just because of my long hair, and I feel it's because of who I am, you are ... I was being discriminated against." (RXVII)

**Toni:** "Even the counsellors at (the CEGEP), I found, would treat you different. It's almost as if they treat you like you're "special people", like they have to take care of you and you need this attention. (...) Special meaning like, you need a lot of help. (...) Especially when it comes to a teacher. When you hand in a paper, then you hand in a bad job, because that's what she expects from me, because that's what she wants." (TIV)

**Donna:** "I hate to mention this, because there was this one professor that was really racist. I was in a situation where I had to explain what I was supposed to do. I was afraid, and that was my first presentation, I hadn't made any other presentations or speeches, in front of an audience where I don't know anybody. And, I was a nervous wreck and I didn't do a very good job. And, he talked to me after, and he said, "I know this about you Native people" and this and that. (short pause) So, I kind of felt really down about his class. He was, he was ... I didn't really like him, so I never showed up for his class again. Because I felt he wasn't going to accept me for who I was. So, I never said anything about that, until now. (...) Maybe, he could

have said, try harder next time, or something more positive instead of saying, "Oh you Native people, I know this about you, you can't do this and can't do that." During that time I really felt down." (DX)

**Craig:** "I think one of the biggest obstacles people go through is, how can I say? (short pause) One of the things I went through is a lot of racism. People, you will find, especially in groups in the school, in the classes, I found people were very prone to racism, you know? Because I found, there was only so much I could take. And this is what I would warn people about. Be ready for this, because that's going to be something. You won't like it, but sometimes you have no choice. (...) When I went to (a school of higher education down south) I had some "run-ins" with some professors and some of the papers were, uh, at least that's the way I thought, you know? I think I had a few professors that disagreed with my papers. So, I felt that they would be more open, that they respected (short pause) (...) Culturally. Yeah. Culturally. Because I wrote an essay on a cultural issue and she didn't recognize my paper. (...) I'm not sure, but maybe they didn't know anything about my culture. So, maybe they wanted me to say something that they wanted to hear. OK? So, we had disagreements with that." (CXIV)

**Karen:** "I think there is that stigma; that underlying institutional racism and discrimination that's there. That because you're Native that you won't be able to do it, so you need special programs set up just to help you through. (...) But, certainly for me, when I was at (university) I felt that, that there was this, sort of like, it was never said out loud, but I was to be, you know ... I wasn't expected to do well. (...) I think at the beginning each time I had a new professor they had the "ugh", kind of like attitude, "ugh, another Native student! (...) Other Native students may not have another Native student in the classroom and for me that was another challenge I experienced. There were never any Native students I could hang out with or relate to, they were all non-Native students, so I never had the opportunity to say, "Hey, I can relate to that!" So, sometimes you do feel that way and I don't know about Japanese or Chinese students or other minority students if they feel that way, but certainly, as a Native person, you look around and all you see is this sea of blonde hair and blue eyes surrounding you. I think that mainstream society looks at (other visible minorities, such as) Japanese or Chinese students as being very studious and industrious. Whereas, Native students, and part of reason is also that a lot of Native students who attempted university dropped out. So there is that experience, from the university's side, that, "Yeah, we've had Native students and (...) I don't recommend you sign up for five courses because you're not going to be able to do it. Other Native students attempted it and they couldn't do it. Therefore, you won't be able to do it either". You're painted over with the same red shade." (KXI)

The essence of Karen's statement that "you're painted with the same red shade" was a commonly held sense among the participants. The discrimination they faced stemmed from the long held prejudices towards the generalized "Indians" of North America and, as discussed in chapter four regarding collective consciousness and Pan-Indianism, added to their negative perceptions of institutions of higher education. Culture shock and the prejudice that has also been associated with it have created a divide between the educational institutions and many of

the Cree students. This divide begins in primary school with wary parents who have experienced residential schooling or the after-effects of residential schooling, intensifies with the attitudes of the primarily non-Native teachers in Cree territory who are themselves defensive because of their own culture shock, and then reaches a pinnacle at CEGEP or university with the added stress of experiencing further culture shock as well as all the normal stress associated with higher education, such as "making the grade". Karen, a successful student of higher education herself, expresses her frustration as a Native person being caught between having to adapt to non-Native culture in order to succeed and then ultimately not being accepted into the culture to which you have either fully or partially conformed. She explains her perspective through her residential school experience:

**Karen:** "No matter what the intentions of the government were, as far as the residential school program was concerned; which was they wanted to make the Native child into a white child. What they didn't realize is that once you left school you were still an Indian and people, non-Native society, treated you like a Native person. They didn't accept you." (KXI)

Here is the dilemma of the Native student studying in higher education: to succeed in the non-Native school you must conform, only to then have to deal to the possibility of not being fully accepted into white society. Many of the participants focussed on the notion of having to balance their cultural identity between non-Native and Native in order to succeed in higher education.

#### c) Walking in Two Worlds

The concept of "walking in two worlds" has been a euphemism often used by Native people to describe the harsh reality of having to live within a situation that has been anywhere from unreceptive to hostile to them. The participants discussed how the ability to function and adapt to a foreign culture was paramount to any success they achieved within southern schools of higher education. Peregoy's (1990) research also concluded that his Native college participants "... saw the need to value both Indian and non-Indian ways in order to eable to adapt and function ..." (P. 118). Karen described the essence of what it meant to have to adjust and adapt to the southern culture as she referred to the mindset one must develop when referring to the cliché of "when in Rome, do as the Romans".

**Karen:** *(In Cree villages we have) rules in terms of how you behave. Right? But they're not rules that are necessarily congruent to how you should behave in the south. (...) Those (Cree) rules apply here and they're taken for granted, but those rules are very different from the expectations of how you're expected to live when you're in the south. (...) One of them is the time management issue. This whole notion of operating on Indian time, which to me is another example of not wanting to operate "like the Romans do"! I think when you're in different environments, in different situations, I think at a certain level you have to say to yourself, "Ok, I'm not at home anymore, I'm not in (my village) any more, so I have to conduct myself in a certain manner. So I can survive. So they don't think I'm a loony! So I don't end up in a hospital or something!" Or even, if I do something here (in the village) and people would turn a blind eye and down south you could be charged. (...) When you're in Rome you do as the Romans do. At the same time, in the back of your head you are still very much aware that you are a Cree person, and at the same time, other people are making you aware that you are different, that you are a Native person. They don't know what tribe you're from, but as far as they are concerned, to them you are an Indian. So, you don't quite measure up to their standards as a citizen or to be hired for a job. They may not be blatant, but (the racism) is there, it's staring at you in the face. I'm not trying to cry the blues, but ..."* (KXI)

Emily concurred with this philosophy and although she herself did not fully complete her studies, she stated that "going with the flow" allowed her to eventually achieve a certain significant measure of success.

**Emily:** *"I was just going with the flow. (laughs) I just followed along. I was the follower. (laughs) Yeah, just following along."* (EV)

Again, despite the varied levels of academic achievement, participants acknowledged their own way of life as having to yield to the culture of the school as having been the only way they could function. Even students like Donna, who had spent a significant amount of her life in a Northern non-Native community, needed an adjustment period. Craig admits to initial failure before he came to terms with the cultural differences he encountered and then adapted to them. For other graduates, their responses reflected the same premise that conformity or eventual familiarity played an important role in suppressing the culture shock from which they suffered.

**Donna:** *"For me, after the initial few months, I didn't have that much problem adjusting ... because I had experienced it before, living and studying. I just get readjusted to it. I think if I had not had that experience it would have been a lot harder for me, and I would have taken longer and would have had more things to get used to, more information to know ... For me, I*

found it, like, I could get information that I needed, but for somebody who wasn't comfortable to approach others to get information, well ... cause you have to, you have to interact with other people you have no choice. (...) I just got over the initial fear of being away from home, like, being in a new environment. I would also meet certain people in the course and hang out with them and talk with them and get used to what they're thinking and discuss certain things. Of course, the Native thing would always come up, so I'd always have my time for them to get to know me." (DVI)

**Craig:** "When I first went to school, when I first went to McGill, I was afraid to go to university because I thought I was going to lose contact with my people, the Cree. But I had to. But before going there I was in the bush; I was hunting, I was trapping, I was doing my culture. And then I decided that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life being a trapper or being in the bush, you know? I didn't think that was a good choice for me, you know? So, when I went to university, I had to keep two things in mind. One of them was to maintain my culture and the other is to mix in with the south. So I always kept those two things in my mind. I was able to adapt when I went to university. As a matter of fact, when I first went, the first two months things didn't work out for me, so I had to come back." (CXIV)

**Doug:** "Like I said, the big I had problem was adapting to a new environment and knowing a new culture and another people that I have to adapt (to). It was kind of hard for me to adapt to that situation. But, the more I talked to people, I find, the more it helped me accept who and what they are. Sometimes I misjudged people. (...) I learned a lot from other people and different cultures. And maybe I found out that maybe if I expressed more about my culture, you know, they would have had a better understanding of who I was, because they were the ones talking about their culture and I was afraid to talk about my culture." (DX)

**Melinda:** "But, (short pause), that's ok, I adapted to it (large crowds) very nicely and I think I like it. I like to have a lot of people, I like to see people, I like to see a lot of cultures and ethnical, ethnic groups that go to John Abbott, it's very mixed and I like to see that." (MIII)

**Karen:** "To me, if I think back to when I first moved to Montreal, well, that to me was frightening (...) You have to adjust to the transit system, you have to look for housing and you're expected to pay for your house, whereas up here, your family is paying for the house and you may have lived in that house with two other families. (laughs) All this is something very new, and a lot of time these youths are not told that these are the things they have to learn, these are the things they have to accept when you are down there. I don't look at it in terms of being conquered. I think of it in terms of being able to adapt more than anything. More than just accepting the fact that I've been defeated and now I have to assimilate into this culture. If I live in Mississauga I conduct myself in a certain way; there are certain expectations, I believe, that are expected of you, that are very different from when I lived in Montreal. For me, being able to adjust is not admitting defeat. It's a survival technique, I think, or it's a way of surviving in both worlds. If you're in two different environments then you have to put on your "white coat" (laughs) I have to put on my "white skin!" (KXI)

When I questioned Karen on whether or not the responsibility of adjustment, accommodation or conformity falls upon Native people in general or upon an education system that is meant to serve all Canadians, her perspective surprised me.

**Karen:** *"Yes, I think (the responsibility of conforming falls upon me). (...) (If not), then I'll stick out and look like a dumb Indian (laughs). (...) (Canada) isn't (our land) any more! (laughs) You can bang your head up against the wall and say this is my land, but are people going to turn around and say, "Yes, definitely it's your land." And, "Here you go; here are the keys to city hall." It's not going to happen. (...) Defeatism? No, I don't know what to call it. You look at the facts and say, "we're no longer the majority here". I think it's important that you retain your identity as a Native person that you don't lose that. At the same time, if I'm living in Montreal then I have to follow the rules of that society. But, I can still retain my identity as a Cree person. (...) I'm assimilated right? (laughs) Maybe somebody would call me "assimilated" or a "red apple". To me, it's realizing if you live in a certain environment then you have to adopt those rules, to a certain extent and not losing who you really are."* (KXI)

Despite my surprise at her personal disclosure, I am left wondering if Karen's response reflects a broader resignation on the part of indigenous people, of a lowered expectation of having a higher education school system that would serve their specific needs.

**Karen:** *"What's happening in the Cree world is that, I think people are hanging on the last vestiges of Cree tradition and Cree culture, because they don't want to lose it. But, at the same time, they don't have anything in place, which will give them the skills to survive in a bi-cultural world. Which is bound to happen anyway. I'm convinced that the only way we are going to survive is if we teach both cultures. To teach both values and both cultures and provide our students with the life skills to help them survive if they have to go south and go to school and university, if that's what they want to do. To me, I think it's up to the individual to make a choice whether they want to go to "the bush" after they finish high school or they want to continue with school. Either choice, whichever path the person takes, that person should have the skills to be able to survive in either of those two worlds. But, right now, what's happening is, we're doing neither. We're not giving the skills to be able to be able to survive at the university or college and we're not giving the skills for students to survive in the bush. It's only when they reach that stage when they're lost in a twilight zone; there's a period, for a while up here, where kids don't know what they're doing, and they only know how to party, get into mischief and drink and end with having kids at a very young age. To me, that's something that stares me in the face and says, your system of education is not working and it's blinking in my eyes and telling me it's not working (...) we're definitely failing our kids, in both worlds."* (KXI)

Karen was not alone in her statement that she felt her community had somehow failed its youth by not preparing them to function in either the southern or Cree communities. There was a common sense amongst all the participants that they were all aware that the current



level of educational achievement by the Cree youth was indeed problematic. The admission that the Cree primary and secondary schools had not fully prepared them for the academic challenges of higher education seemed to have an influence on their perspectives of continuing Cree control over education to the creation of a Cree institution of higher learning.

#### Cree Self Control over Higher Education

Initial talks of creating a CEGEP system by a committee of Cree College Study Group, appointed by the Council of Commissioners of the Cree School Board, took place in the mid 1990s. What developed from this committee were numerous questions regarding feasibility issues of the proposed CEGEP: among them, assessments of the clientele, legal obligations of the Quebec government in regard to the James Bay Agreement, cultural needs, etc... One document, "The Potential Clientele for the Proposed Cree College or CEGEP", written by I. La Rusic (August, 1996), explored the demographic viability of a Cree CEGEP, but there has been little development since then, or at least no published or widely dispersed or accessible document on the subject. Despite the momentary respite in the progress of creating a Cree CEGEP, the interviewees had a great deal to say on the subject. Although there were pro and con opinions on the immediate formation of a Cree CEGEP, there was an overwhelming agreement that an eventual school of higher education would mean a great deal to the Cree people, both academically and spiritually. Arguments interviewees had with a Cree CEGEP had to do with issues regarding academic standards and not with its existence, as no one doubted the positive impact it would have on the Cree people if it was done correctly.

Assertions in favour of a Cree GEGEP typically focussed on how a Cree CEGEP would have helped them in pursuit of their studies.

**Doug:** *"Oh yeah. I heard about this before, having a Cree CEGEP. But, the reason why I feel it would really help my people is because they know they know each other, you know? And they would try and help each other. But, to have a Cree CEGEP in a community, people would be able to feel more at ease. You know, maybe they would feel more motivated, knowing that they have their own Cree CEGEP. You know? They'd want to be the person who graduated from that CEGEP or attend that CEGEP and that would really boost up their motivation. I know it would have for me."* (DX)

**Shawn:** *"I've been requesting for a CEGEP for a long time. Even when I was in CEGEP. To have a Cree CEGEP. Because, I knew what I went through and I had a difficult time and for other kids to go through that. They would have a difficult time. For students to come right out of a Native community and right into a city, if they have no experience in living in a city, first year, they'll usually just drop out. There's no question about that because of the culture shock and the demands at the same time."* (SIX)

**Karen:** *"What would a (Cree CEGEP) mean (to the Cree people)? Idealistically, what it would mean, like, it would be another level of the education system that would be under the (Cree people's) control and they could determine what would be included as far as curriculum and what programs they would offer. And, I think for some parents, they probably would be happy to have their kids attend a college within the territory, rather than send their kids down south."* (KXI)

**Greg:** *"With the amount of money that is being spent on sending kids down south and, with the actual (pause) it's frustrating. I think the Crees would be better off with their own CEGEP. (...) In the long run, we'd save a lot more money than what we're spending. When you look at all the costs of accommodation and travel, you know, and the allowances that are being issued. In the long run you would save money if the CEGEP was in a central (Cree) area. (...)I would put it in a central area. Val D'Or or somewhere where people have access to it, you know. And where friends would have an opportunity to see them on a regular basis."* (GXII)

As stated, all of the interviewees responded in a favourable manner to the creation of a Cree CEGEP. When they did raise apprehension, what they did express concern over however was the performance of the school and whether it would be of similar standards to the institutions in the south. Esther responded to the question of the possibility of a Cree CEGEP with a look of astonishment, and then she made the following brief statement and asked to stop the tape so she could speak more openly about how she would be afraid that teaching jobs would go to unqualified recipients:

**Esther:** *"Where are they going to get the teachers?!"* (asks to stop the tape) (EV)

Esther's concern about finding the right teachers centered on her own recent experience within her community, where in she felt the local schools had a hard enough time finding teachers of proper quality and professional standard. Although she herself had a challenging time in CEGEP, she was nonetheless appreciative of the high standards to which the instructors in the south made her accountable. Her worry was that a Cree CEGEP would not be able to attract instructors of the same calibre. Karen also echoed this concern.

**Karen:** "... (T)hey're going to have the same problem that they have in high school. If you can't find the people who are qualified and you can't offer the full slate of courses you would need to get the credits then there is no point to have a CEGEP. Like here, they have a really difficult time finding somebody who can teach biology, somebody who can teach physics. Like they don't even offer these courses because they can't offer specialists in these areas. So, I don't think they would be able to find enough people who would be willing to come up and teach these courses. Even now, under the teacher-training program it's a hit and miss. The courses that are offered don't really do justice to what people need here." (KXI)

Mike expressed his reservations that a Cree CEGEP would degenerate into another La Macaza; an educational creation developed as a Native college in Quebec, that he, along with a number of other participants, described as eventually leading to undisciplined students, low standards of academics, a segregated atmosphere and then the ultimate disappointment of shutting down.

**Mike:** "To be honest with you and this is my own opinion, I don't really, really agree with a Cree CEGEP. And, that's my own opinion. The fact is that they tried that before with La Macaza, I don't know if you've heard of that before, and there was a lot of friction among the different tribes. And, I've seen that myself when I was going to (inaudible) where they try and segregate. There was a place there; a Native facility, like an apartment and there was just too much stuff happening there, parties. Wild parties. There were fights too. And that's what it was like at La Macaza." (MXIII)

**Karen:** "But, like I said, unless we can organize ourselves so it's run properly, I don't think we should even try it. (...) At this time, no, the time is not right. I think it would only be another La Macaza, if we were going to try and set up another college ourselves. (...) La Macaza was just a big party. I think the concept of having a Native college, I don't think there's anything wrong with it. I think what happened there is that a lot of the people who went to La Macaza were just not college material and the first chance they got to leave their community, it was just a big party. That's how somebody described La Macaza to me. I wasn't there myself, but that's how somebody described it to me, it was just one big long party. Even the instructors from some of the faculty, or the staff that was working there, they were just totally out of control, apparently. That's the story I got. I wasn't there myself, but I can tell you that a lot of the people that went there never went back to college. (...) It was an experiment that didn't really amount to anything. It was just a big flop and nothing came out of it." (KXI)

Of those who had doubts about a Cree CEGEP, the common conclusion was for patience in its development and making sure the foundations of a strong elementary and secondary school system were in place within the communities to support the continued

growth of a Cree higher education school. The general trepidation was that this would turn into a failure that would create a set-back in the continuing Cree control over their education and its validity.

**Karen:** *"I think at this stage (a Cree CEGEP) it (would be) a pipe dream. Because, first of all, we weren't graduating students at a high enough rate to maintain a college populated. It would have been very expensive to try and run a college for Crees, when we are not even graduating enough students on an annual enough basis to give it a student body. So, to me it's a pipe dream at this stage. Maybe, once we get the elementary and the high school levels on a stronger footing and we have students who are graduating, I think then we could think about it."* (KXI)

**Craig:** *"Let me tell you something; because of the second language issue, none of our students are academically inclined. What we are trying to do, is that we're trying to give them a different option; more options! (A department in the Cree School Board) is in the process of developing a program called, "Traditional Procedures Program". You have to get it from people who do some artic program, in the bush, you know? So you're going to need skills like hunting, trapping, you know? In the bush. Making snowshoes, those kinds of things. So, we're hoping to the Cree students will broaden their knowledge and maybe go into tourism. Maybe it can be applied you know? (...) So, that's an option. The other option is the training you get from different trades. (...) What I like to do is, and that's my perception of a Cree CEGEP, is hoping to get a training center. Probably some time later, after that, some people would like to have a higher learning. So, these are just the thoughts. (...) Maybe a business administration program. (...) Humanities, social sciences, health. Everything that can't be offered at (the Cree School Board's adult education). There so much we can do, you know? It just takes time to do this. (...) It's not like we want to take away their choice to go down south, it's not that. It's just a CEGEP closer to home and you have that option to go".* (CXIV)

Despite the valid uncertainties expressed by some of the interviewees, all agreed that a Cree CEGEP, if it was sustainable at all levels, would bring pride to their community, give their youth a tangible academic goal to "set their sights on" and, most importantly, do a great deal to ease the culture shock of students who choose to pursue a higher education. In discussing the advantages of a Cree CEGEP, Sarah reflected on the experience she was currently going through at CEGEP and reiterated difficulty she perceives in going down south to study.

**Sarah:** *"... I don't think they were ever aware of, I mean nobody's ever aware of what it is, or going to college or wherever. But if they were to, like, I don't know, be exposed to it more often. Some of them never even come to a city, so imagine coming from a small community*

*and then moving to a big city like this and then going to a big college, it would be culture shock. And, I think they have a harder time adjusting, because they were never exposed to it.” (S1)*

Easing culture shock and removing social problems was a common response to endorsing a Cree CEGEP and all understood that a CEGEP in Cree territory, controlled by the Cree and designed for the Cree would either help them, have helped them or assisted others in their pursuit of higher education. From the interviews, my own experience and the research I have carried out, it is understandable that culture shock is a genuine barrier to academic achievement to higher education.

### **Conclusion**

Other themes that came out of the interviews did, on a conceptual level, have enough merit to be included herein but they did not have the same consistency as the other themes did across all of the interviews. These problems were identified by some of the participants as arising from:

- 1) Difficulty in financial management;
- 2) Problems arising from the age difference of the, on average, older Cree student when relating to their younger non-Native peers;
- 3) And finally, but far fewer than I anticipated, obstructions relating to English or French as the language of instruction in CEGEPs and universities.

I must admit that, based on my own teaching in Cree territory, I thought that language would have played a larger factor in influencing the participants' perceptions of the barriers to higher education, but the interviewees did not express their agreement on this with the same uniformity as they did with the other topics. Nevertheless, I believe that if these other topics were further explored with additional focus and depth, we would no doubt receive interesting and revealing responses.

Although I could relate to many of the experiences of culture shock described by the Cree participants, the encounters of prejudice that they related conveyed a far more significant impediment than I ever had to deal with while living in Mistissini. Above and beyond the elements of culture shock, such as homesickness and cultural uncertainty, disorientation and

tension (Pederson, 1994), the added burden of having to deal with racism may be too much to handle for all but the most secure, confident and committed of students. Recently, the daughter of one of my former CEGEP students from Mistissini called me and told me that she had been accepted to a local CEGEP in Montreal but was having a difficult time finding a place of residence. Being a veteran of student housing arrangements, I found numerous positive leads for apartments in no time at all through the newspaper and online campus residence searches. Encouraged, she hung up the phone and undertook to spend the next two days looking at apartments. Three days later I received a phone call from her as she was heading back to Mistissini: she had been refused at every apartment she visited. I was both shocked and angry but she, surprisingly, was unfazed by what had occurred. I told her that if she felt that people had refused her because she was a Native that this was against the law and that there were people to whom we could refer this matter. However, she would have nothing to do with this and was simply resolute that she was going back to Mistissini. "Maybe next year", she said. But there was no "next year".

The racism she encountered was at the outset enough to discourage her before she even had a chance to deal with the very real further culture shock within the educational setting. This is the experience of a large amount of Cree students when they are faced with the only option of pursuing higher education and must leave their communities. Some, to their great credit, overcome these obstacles, but these are barriers that most do not even want to cope with and we can offer little reason as to why they should do so in the first place.

In the ensuing concluding chapter, I will discuss how the perception of the cultural Other still exists within higher education and how even a solitary encounter of prejudice can lead the ethnic minority student to question his or her place within the school. For the average Cree student, the cumulative pressures of academics, culture shock, prejudice and a history of schooling as assimilation can be too much to tolerate.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

## **Returning to the Research Question**

The intent of this dissertation has been to explore the idea that any lack of success that the Cree people may have had while in or even prior to entering, “southern”, higher levels of education, both university and CEGEP, can be attributed to a number of social and cultural issues. The motivation for this research grew from my own experiences while teaching at the CEGEP level in the Cree village of Mistissini and I have shared my own problematic journey from culture shock to an ultimate sense of belonging within the community to give the reader an idea of what it is like to have such an experience. Within this dissertation, I investigated fifteen Cree individuals who were either studying at a higher education level or had failed or succeeded in obtaining a higher education degree. This was done in order to uncover their perceptions of the cultural differences between the Cree and the location of higher education and any possible consequences arising from them. The main themes discovered were studying outside of their cultural milieu, issues of identity (Sindell, 1969, 1974), culture shock (Pedersen, 1995) and cultural stress (Peregoy, 1990). Further dialogue developed as the participants spoke of issues of racism, the legacy of residential schooling and a school system within Cree communities that was seen as somehow separate from their identity, community and way of life.

The common theme that has grown out of this research is that the relationship between the Cree or the Supratribal student and the schools, which is mired by a long and soiled history, is still fundamentally a distant one. There is distrust among the participants of the schools they attend and it grows as their education advances and is perceived as being less and less Native. Consequently, as the student grows older, the image of the self in school becomes less and less of a conceptual reality for him or her, and certainly less so at the higher level. Compounding this mistrust of schools is the deep sense of culture shock that is further thrust upon the Cree student who has no other option but to attempt to attain higher education outside of his or her own community and cultural comfort zone. In sharing my own participant narrative, I hoped to demonstrate the authenticity of the difference that exists between the two communities and the extended period of time it takes to adjust to your new surroundings. It must be borne in mind, however, that the culture shock that I felt while working in a Cree community was not further complicated with the same colonial oppressive relationship that



most, if not all, Native people have had with the United States or Canada. Prior to living in Cree territory and then completing this dissertation, I had not fully appreciated the great impact that this history and resulting current situation has had on the Cree individual and the collective Pan-Indian as well. Most non-Native North Americans are blissfully ignorant of this reality, which may explain the reluctance for self change in their attitudes towards First Nations people and issues, such as their dilemma with high drop out rates. However, once one learns about the policies of systemic Native destruction, it is not hard to understand why the distrust for an educational system that is widely perceived as “non-Native” by its very nature exists.

### **Strategies of Native Devastation**

The history of North America is filled with examples of oppression, inequitable and violent treatment of its indigenous peoples but, as Chomsky (2003) notes, it has not permeated the collective consciousness of North American society.

Why am I sitting here? Well, I'm sitting here because some religious fundamentalist fanatics from England came over here and started exterminating the local population, and then lots of others followed them and they exterminated the rest of the local population. It wasn't a small affair; it was millions of people. And the people at the time knew what they were doing it. They didn't have any question about what they were doing. But it's been hundreds of years and it's still not part of the consciousness. (Chomsky, 2003, P. 17)

The purposeful exclusion of this historical reality from the non-Native consciousness referred to by Chomsky is made all the more problematic given the relative ease with which one can find information on this subject, especially in regard to the use of schools as one of the many methods of “dealing with the Native problem”. Policies relating to Native education are clear reflections about the mindset of the people who wrote them; when searching for an understanding of the actions and attitudes at a historic point of time, such written policies usually become the factual resource for historians of Native issues (Tyler, 1973; Weaver, 1998). We take for granted that because professionals have designed policies that they are

objectively composed to hold our collective interests at heart. We assume that many of these policies are not representative of the individuals who created them, but are objective designs. However, many scholars argue that educational policies are value-laden documents and have long been used by those who dominate the policy making process to meet their own group's ends (Prunty, 1985). Within Adams' (1995) book, Education for Extinction, the author states in no uncertain terms that "...policymakers sought to use the school house-specifically the boarding house as an instrument for acculturating Indian youth to the "American" way of thinking and living" (P. IX.). It is a stark reality that the dominating cultures of North America attempted to control Native populations through their schools and the policies that guided and governed them in the harshest of manner and it is difficult not to discern the intent and attitudes of the participants who drafted and accepted them (Weissberg, 1974).

It is not to be doubted that this country has been invested with wealth and power, with arts and knowledge, with the sway of distant lands and the mastery of restless waters for some great purpose in the government of the world. Can we suppose otherwise than that it is our office to carry civilization and humanity, peace and good government, and above all knowledge of the true God, to the uttermost ends of the earth? (British Parliamentary Papers, 1837, P. 1)

This quote, from the 1837 British Parliamentary testimony, Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines, provides a good example as to why governmental policies towards Natives, in particular, provide a historical account of the prevailing attitudes and values of that time. It is hard to escape the air of domination in which this quote is steeped and it is in these sorts of policies and preamble to policies that we are able to understand the intent behind the development of Native education throughout history and its implications.

Tyler (1973) asserts that it was the temptation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Europeans to make use of the notion of racial inferiority of the Native Indian as an excuse to create policies that would ensure their domination and control over the newly discovered land, and that the wrapping of this domination under the guise of "policies" created a false impression of objectivity and legitimacy that belied its true nature. Proctor (1991) states that "(a)ny type of public policy bestows advantages on some people more than others. Those who benefit the most are not likely to encourage serious discussions of solutions or radical alternatives" (P.

23). Taylor, Rizvi and Lingard, authors of Educational Politics and the Politics of Change (1997), assert their belief that the policy process is inherently political and value-laden in character. The authors discuss how the entire processes of educational policy formulation “represent compromises over struggles” (P. 26). They continue by stating: “This highlights the value laden nature of policies and again emphasizes the highly political nature of policy processes.” (P. 27). The authors further assert that a major area of sociological study in education should be focused on “whose values are allocated in the policy process and whose interests these values represent” (P. 27). If we are to agree with Taylor, Rizvi and Lingard (1997), Prunty (1985) and Proctor’s (1991) tenets that education-related policies are value laden, then examining policies in hindsight allows us to understand the attitudes of those who created them and reveals their perceptions towards the indigenous people of North America.

For early policy makers ... a major priority was the creation of a mechanism and rationale for divesting Indians of their real estate. (...) In search for a resolution to this dilemma, policy makers were served well by long-standing images of Indians and their lifeways. Basic to all perceptions was the conclusion that because Indian cultural patterns were vastly different from those of whites, Indians must be inferior. (Adams, 1995, P. 5-6)

Many aspects of Native life were used by European policymakers as examples of why Native people should not be considered sovereign and/or civilised and therefore not true owners of the North American land. As Stiffarm & Lane (1992) note, “... a mythology has become firmly ensconced in the popular American consciousness which portrays traditional Native North America as consisting of tiny and widely scattered bands of stone-age hunter-gatherers wandering nomadically about the vastness of North America, leading to the perpetually miserable hand to mouth existence until the more advanced invading culture of Europe came along to show them a better way of life (“The Demography of Native North America”. P. 24). The perceived nomadic lifestyle of a great many of the Native people was a point that was continuously raised to demonstrate that the Native tribes were a rootless people and therefore not true owners of the land. During the onslaught of “land-acquisition”, European settlers and their descendants made no excuses for their discernment of the Natives as an uncivilised race (Adams, 1995; Ellis, 1996; Miller, 1996). The issue of who owned the North

American land was put to rest through the religious logic of the day whereby “(b)oth British and French, as Christian powers, considered that their claims to sovereignty were superior to those of non-Christian peoples” (Dickason, c2002, P. 109).

Within the context of the colonial experience, this is the history of Native people globally, in North America, United States, Canada, Quebec and the James Bay regions. It is a history of unfair and unjust policies that sought to exploit Native people and their resources, and from an educational perspective, the schools functioned as a principal participant in facilitating this task. Furthermore, and this can not be emphasized enough, when you consider that the last residential school closed in the mid 1980s, this is not ancient history. If a nation was willing to commit such acts in our recent times, how far can we have removed our own consciousness and our own perceptions of Native people? As can be read within the interviews, the education system that exists today is still seen by Native people as serving the needs of the non-Native, white population that ultimately controls them. Because of the deep roots of mistrust, even current attempts to bridge gaps between Native culture and western models of education meet limited success and suspicion.

### **A Common Ground for Whom?**

Attempts to find that “middle ground” between traditional Native education and culture and the mainstream education of the South are often filled with problematic results. The 1989 book Cree Trappers Speak can be used as an example of the Cree people’s challenge to join traditional Cree learning with European models of schooling.<sup>38</sup> A friend of mine, who is a member of the Cree Trappers’ Association, explained that during the mid-eighties the Quebec government requested uniformity in the content and delivery of the Trappers education courses. In short, the Quebec government asked the Cree Trappers’ Association to develop a method of imparting trapping and hunting skills in a manner that was more in line with their own “White” conception of educating. The result was the book Cree Trappers Speak, an exhaustive effort by the Cree Trappers Association of Chissasibi to impart a distinctive way of life and relevant knowledge. The above-mentioned Cree informant referred to this book as

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<sup>38</sup> Cree Trappers are Cree individuals who make their livelihood from hunting the local game that inhabit Cree territory. The Cree Trappers Association represents these hunters/trappers.

“more than just a ‘how to book’, but also a code of ethic and code of conduct of all the Cree Trappers”. The difficulty lied in transferring all this into a foreign educational format that had never been used to impart such knowledge.

From an outsider’s point of view, the book reads like an informative perspective on a way of life that is extremely foreign to those of us who are not First Nation Canadian. However, my source from the Cree Trappers Association, who also has input into the teaching of the Cree Trapper courses, believes that the book has an inherent failing. This source believes that a book can never be reflective of the many traditional aspects of Cree trapping and that it cannot be imparted by such a rigid format. From his perspective, “doing” is a more important learning tool than “reading about doing”. In effect, from his perspective, educating in the Cree ways were not always suitable to the European model and efforts to force the two worlds together proved to be more demanding a chore to create than it was useful to the Cree recipients for whom it was intended. He did however recognize its usefulness to the non-Native people who would read the book. This provides an example to what Miller (1997) quoted as “the three Ls” as being a distinct and valid form of teaching and learning to the North American Aboriginal people that are not always respected by the non-Native bodies, such as the provincial MEQ or the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, who still exert tremendous power over Native education. Given the information revealed in this dissertation, I am left with a deep concern as to who the current schools, at all levels, really exist for and whether the schools really are part of the collective Native experience and ownership.

### **Whose Reality?**

One thing for sure (short pause) it’s not the community’s. It’s not a community school. It’s not. No. It’s still like a foreign system. (GXII)

There was awareness amongst interviewees that the school, even at the local elementary and secondary level, did not belong to the Cree community. Given this, what are we to expect their perceptions to be towards institutions of higher education that are both so physically and emotionally far removed from their communities? Higher education is not a conceptual certainty to the Cree youth, in the sense that it doesn’t have the same kind of tangible/physical or ideological presence in the youth’s mind; it simply doesn’t seem to foster

the same kind of matter-of-fact expectations as it does for the youth in the south. This appears to be a result of multiple factors: distance from institutions of higher education; lack of successful role models within the community and; a local school system that seems out of step with the Cree community.

Given this information, we therefore ask ourselves how a Cree individual, who is raised in a milieu that is so different from our own, is expected to immediately function in the CEGEPs and universities of the south. While doing my undergraduate program in the 1990s, I remember reading Mifflen and Mifflen's (1982) transparent statement "that the Native People of Canada experience prejudice and discrimination to an extreme degree" (P. 169). They continued specifically to cite, with little hesitation, ethnocentrism within the educational system as a strong contributing factor to the Native student's negative experience while studying outside of his/her culture. Having worked within the Cree context, I can now state that this is still occurring some twenty years later.

Given that there are no CEGEP/higher education systems within the territory controlled by the Cree, we must therefore ask ourselves the question: are Cree students who desire higher education destined to encounter within the Montreal CEGEPs and universities a prevailing belief "...whether consciously or unconsciously held, that a given culture is superior to another" (Mifflen & Mifflen, 1982, P. 168), or is their educational experience one of cultural embrace where the institution of higher learning sees the Cree students' cultural and social differences as a strength? Can the relationship of the Native individual within an institution of higher education, which has traditionally been designed for a different cultural community or group, be a stressor on achieving his or her educational goals?

John Joseph Peregoy's (1990) Stress and the Sheepskin addresses this last question through phenomenological and symbolic Interactionist approaches to the subjective aspects of human behaviour. Peregoy's research concluded that Native students studying within North American colleges perceived a culturally insensitive setting as being their greatest stressor.

Sometimes I think I'm different. I know it's obvious I'm a minority. And I just think that we're not whatever, one of their people. (Peregoy, 1990, P. 84)

Common Native responses to Peregoy's research, such as the above quote, reflect the Native students' perceptions of real or possible racist attitudes as well as their overall

feeling that they simply did not belong within the college setting. One participant summed up this sentiment by stating, "They intimidate me quite a bit. I think that's one of my major stressors, not being able to socialize with a non-Indian ..." (Peregoy, 1990, P. 83). Peregoy's use of the Interactionist theory revealed that "... (p)ersonal identity ... emerged through this study as sources of perceived stress for the informants involved" (P. 54). Educational stresses were created when the Native students' individual sense of self, developed through their earlier, formative interaction with their own social community, encountered a culture that did not match their own. We are reminded of the importance that the self arises simultaneously with the act of socialization, referred to as Cooley's (1964) "correlative sense of you, or he, or they" (P. 182) and Mead's "reflected self" or the "looking glass self" (Congalton & Daniel, c1976, P. 136). These are the tenets of the Interactionist theory.

As an example of the importance of the Interactionist theory in relation to the proposed research question, a Native student, reminiscing about the defunct Native Manitou College (1972-1976) in Quebec, once reflected on the differences between studying at a Native institution and a "White" institution of higher learning:

"...(T)he other students look at me like I'm weird or something. Everytime anything comes up in class about Indians, the teacher always expects me to know all about it. I guess they don't realize all Indians aren't the same. It was different at Manitou ... it felt different. I don't know ... at Manitou, I felt more like a person ..." (Kilfoil, 1979, P. 63)

Within the Native-centred Manitou College, the above quoted student was free to be perceived by others based on factors outside of her being Indian and she described that she felt "more like a person". Within the "White-man's" college, she continuously felt that society was judging her by her race. Within the setting of a non-Native school, Native students must deal with developing a new perception of themselves within a "new game", within a different society, and, as Miffen and Miffen (1982) have pointed out, they often feel that they are being viewed in a discriminatory fashion. It is the very fact that the multiple theories presented within this dissertation<sup>39</sup> recognise the continuously negotiated development of the individual's sense

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<sup>39</sup>As noted, the Interactionist framework (Peregoy, 1990; Sindell, 1968); those who defined their studies within the anthropological interpretation of Fredrik Barth's Materialist theory (Kilfoil, 1979; Nagel, 1996); and by those who cite the past and current effects of European imperialist philosophies

of self within shifting social and cultural context that make them so relevant to the concerns of this research.

Within our “southern” middle-class culture of Montreal, many educational processes are taken for granted, such as the achievement of a CEGEP degree. This is very much a part of our culture. A large proportion of us believe that we are capable of completing CEGEP because we are surrounded with familiar examples of other people who have or are currently accomplishing such an educational task. The Interactionist theory explains that we, for the most part, believe we are capable of doing such things because we visualize and anticipate our actions and our sense of self by how significant others view and, in this case, portray an *educational* reality to us.

For White students, the college experience is generally an extension of the educational and social institutions of their culture. (Hoffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986, [Electronic Version])

Mead and Cooley state that the established self changes according to one's circumstance or situation; therefore the majority of one's self perception is influenced from his or her early surroundings. “(T)he Indian/Native student is faced with the dilemma of cultural beliefs, values and self concepts as well as the same stresses faced by the white students” (Edgewater, 1981, pg. 28). Sindell's (1968) “Some Discontinuities in the Enculturation of Mistissini Cree Children” studied the development of a child's sense of self and its implications of forced residential schooling. Using an Interactionist perspective, Sindell concluded that “...severe conflicts in identity arise” (Sindell, 1974, P. 340) through the cultural confusion of attending a school outside of one's social environment.

Institutions of higher education reflect the values of the dominant, White middle class and reinforce these prevailing attitudes; the cultural milieu which most White students experience upon entering college is not alien to them. (Peregoy, 1990, P. 7-8)

Those Cree who do conceive of attending CEGEP or university then must overcome a primary and secondary education system that is still suffering from the after effects of

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and practices as having the primary influence on Native identity (Churchill, 1982; Deloria, 1982; Green, 1995; Maybury-Lewis, 1997; Vickers, 1998; Chomsky, 1993; Said, 1997; and Tuhiwai Smith, 2001)



residential schooling. In effect, what we are asking the Cree youths to do is to fully function in a system that is widely perceived as not being a part of their society, culture or identity, an attitude that is largely the product of strained relationships developed with these educational institutions. How can we expect the Cree student to, as Mead (1934) put it, “play in the game”, when they have had imposed on them a position of disadvantage?

### **Playing the Game**

All of these concepts of cultural identity, Interactionism, Barth's (c1999) Materialism and by those who cite the past and current effects of European imperialist philosophies and practices as having the primary influence on Native identity (Churchill, 1982; Deloria, 1982; Chomsky, 1993; Green, 1995; Maybury-Lewis, 1997; Said, 1997; Tuhiwai Smith, 2001; Vickers, 1998), explain that we are a product of how people see us, how we see ourselves and how we develop common meanings and understandings within our society. I believe these theories' common conclusion that our sense of cultural identity is significantly grounded in others' perception of ourselves accurately explains why, when we are taken outside of our own societal reality, we are placed at a disadvantage when trying to cope and succeed. This conclusion explains the low rate of Natives who make the initial attempt to attend institutions of higher education and the even smaller number of Native individuals who graduate from them. While teaching college courses in a Cree village, I always thought back to the Interactionist theory when my students encountered difficulty in adapting to the rigours and expectations of CEGEP life: was this really where they had imagined themselves, were they really prepared by significant others for this challenge and were they presently being validated enough to continue?

Returning to Mead's concept of “playing in the game”, I always thought to myself: “I'm expecting them to “play in my game”, how well would I do if I was playing in “their game”? The opportunity to learn the answer arose when I was asked by a Cree friend to join his family during the spring “goose break”, a time traditionally devoted to goose hunting in the bush for about one to two weeks. I spared myself the embarrassment of looking like a “babe in the woods”, however, as I was fairly sure that I wouldn't last more than a few days in the bush.

Richardson confirmed my suspicion in his entry entitled “bumbling white men”, describing his own brief attempt at life in the bush:

Rose got a lot of amusement from our stumbling efforts to perform simple tasks. We tried to carry the loads of spruce boughs down to the river. They are suspended from a strap around the forehead, and require a strong neck: carrying the spruce boughs is women's work, but we collapsed under the strain several times, Rose doubling up with laughter at our feeble efforts. (Richardson, 1975, P. 130)

Richardson's brave effort substantiates, in a light-hearted manner, the difficulties of living outside of one's cultural norms. It's only when you are truly removed from your own environment that you realize that there are so many different cultural rules and expectations. As noted in the Participant Observation chapter, my own experience living in Cree territory is filled with my own trials and tribulations as my family and I attempted to cope with and understand the local culture. It was only through my own experience that I began to understand and sympathize with the difficulties that Cree students would encounter in the south.

We are all informed and shaped by our individual past experiences – informed and shaped, but of course, not controlled. For an academic, each new intellectual venture is simultaneously a continuity and departure. (Cairns, 2000, P. 11)

What we have created for the Native student is an educational environment where so much of their life experience, culture and history are not acknowledged. The impact of having to simply survive in this educational setting seems to take the place of the usually more lofty goals of intellectually flourishing. As Hoffman, Sill, & Brokenleg (1986) and Peregoy (1990) state, the Native student not only has to deal with academic challenges but also with a confrontation with an educational system that has historically not been welcoming to them. The interviewees discussed this notion, describing how they had to learn to “walk in two worlds” in order to continue studying in southern higher education schools and if they could not do so, they risked failure.

## Current Situation

Regardless of whether you look at the problem of low North American Indigenous educational attainment rates from a quantitative or qualitative perspective, the answer remains the same: the current format used for Native people to achieve a higher education has not and continues to not work at a level that anyone should find satisfactory. Although Caroline Scipio, Interim Director of the Cree School Board's Post Secondary Program, is completely justified in her statement that "There was a slight increase in the number of graduates this year, which is very encouraging"<sup>40</sup>, I'm certain from all my interviews with Cree participants, both formal and informal, that no one is fully content with the graduation percentage data results.

The most recent numbers from the latest Statistics Canada census reports show that whereas 20.2 percent of Canadians, non-Native and Native included, have attained University degrees, Native people alone trail at 7.8 percent.<sup>41</sup> Statistics Canada's journal, Canadian Social Trends note in "Update on Education" (2003), that although the education gap has narrowed slightly between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people at the high school level, "(t)he gap remained high for university graduates: 8% of the Aboriginal working-age population had a university degree, compared with 23% of non-Aboriginals"<sup>42</sup>. Native people from the province of Quebec aged 25 years of age and over with university degrees are at 5.8 percent whereas the Cree of James Bay region of Quebec follow with the same criteria are at 2.6 percent.<sup>43</sup> The breakdown for attainment of a university level degree in each community is as follows:

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<sup>40</sup> Scipio, Caroline. "Cree School Board". [www document]  
URL [http://www.cscree.qc.ca/csb/Publications/a\_report/Posts2.htm]

<sup>41</sup> Statistics Canada. "1996 and 2001 Census." [www document]  
URL [http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/educ/tables/canada/eacanab.cfm]

<sup>42</sup> Statistics Canada. "Update on Education" Canadian Social Trends. Winter, 2003. P. 22

<sup>43</sup> Statistics Canada. "Aboriginal Population Profile: 1996 and 2001 Census; Community Profile." [www document]  
URL [http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01ab/Metadata/ab\_id\_prov.cfm?LANG=E&PROV=24&SEARCH=&Province=10&PlaceName=]

<b>Village</b>	<b>% of the population with a university degree at bachelor's level or higher</b>
Chisasibi:	3.0%
Eastmain:	3.6%
Mistissini:	1.7%
Nemiscau:	0.0%
Ouje Bougamau:	4.2%
Waskaganish:	2.6%
Waswanipi:	2.8%
Wemindji:	2.8%
Whapmagoostui:	3.0%

*Source: Statistics Canada 2001 Census*

Compared to the non-Aboriginal average of 23% and the Aboriginal average of 8%, it is evident, unfortunately, that the Cree numbers fall below both figures at 2.6%. Although university level attainment rates can be clearly defined by a question of "do you have a bachelor's level degree", the question of attainment of post secondary education is more difficult to define. Part of the problem lies in the multifaceted nature of what "post-secondary" education means, as it can be defined as any type of education that has been attained after you leave high school. Therefore, this can include anything from a CEGEP degree within a field that is training you for a semi-professional trade or departments that are preparing their students for further university studies. However, it can also include post-secondary training in numerous vocational instruction through local school boards or private institutions in anything from service industry studies, furniture refinishing to heavy vehicle driving, to simply name a few. There is a large discrepancy in this category and the figures from Statistics Canada are not detailed as to the specifics of this category. Statistics Canada describes the characteristics of this grouping as follows:

Referred to as "Other non-university certificate or diploma" in previous censuses, this sector includes non-degree-granting institutions such as community colleges, CEGEPs, private business colleges and technical institutes.<sup>44</sup>

Add to this that CEGEPs are a uniquely Quebec institution, that school boards across Canada offer post secondary trade related education, this category of "% of the population 25 years of age and over with trades, college or university certificate or diploma (below bachelor degree)" is too loosely defined for us to draw conclusions. The category of university attainment is clearer; either you have a minimum of a bachelor's degree or not. However, the category of post-secondary education is too vague too interpret. In an attempt to find more comprehensive numbers of graduation rates below the bachelor's level from the Quebec Ministry of Education, I quickly discovered that they were not at liberty to release any numbers related to the Cree School Board.

The Cree School Board and the Kativik School Board are, however, not included and the results for institutions under the responsibility of a provincial ministry other than the Ministère de l'Éducation or under the jurisdiction of the federal government are not published. (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2000, P. 16-17)

I contacted the Cree School Board and received negative responses to requests for graduation numbers, so I am unsure as to whether or not the numbers exist (one source told me the figures on post-secondary students had been lost during a computer data transfer) or whether they are reluctant to show them (another individual within the Cree School Board said s/he was simply unwilling to turn the information over due to the sensitive nature of the low graduation rates). In any case, whether the source is from an anecdotal perspective or statistical in nature, it is evident that the overall numbers, although showing a small improvement, are not acceptable.

<sup>44</sup>

Statistics Canada. "Aboriginal Population Profile: College Certificate or Diploma." [www document]  
URL[[http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01ab/Metadata/edu\\_clg.cfm?A=&DataType=1&TypeNameE=Terres%20r%E9serv%E9es&ID=6555&CSDNAME=Chisasibi&D=1&LANG=E&Province=All&PlaceName=Chisasibi&SGC=2499814&SCRIPT1=/english/profil01ab/Details/details1edu.cfm&PSGC=24&CMA=&CSDType=TR&ThisPageNo=Education%20Statistics&ThisPage=1edu&Prov=Quebec&SEARCH=BEGINS](http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01ab/Metadata/edu_clg.cfm?A=&DataType=1&TypeNameE=Terres%20r%E9serv%E9es&ID=6555&CSDNAME=Chisasibi&D=1&LANG=E&Province=All&PlaceName=Chisasibi&SGC=2499814&SCRIPT1=/english/profil01ab/Details/details1edu.cfm&PSGC=24&CMA=&CSDType=TR&ThisPageNo=Education%20Statistics&ThisPage=1edu&Prov=Quebec&SEARCH=BEGINS)]

With the focus of my study on social and cultural issues as impediments on achieving academic success in institutions of higher education, part of the discourse is to seek possible directions for improving the current situation. As I wrote in the introduction, Clarence Toamtuk's belief that a Cree CEGEP would ease many of the problems facing Cree students by allowing them to "pursue post-secondary education in their own environment ..." <sup>45</sup> was a key concept that I explored with the individuals I interviewed.

### **Barriers to CEGEP/Higher Education**

It is possible that some readers may argue that everyone must deal with a certain amount of stress when he or she goes to CEGEP or University, but it is important to remember that although stresses related to "making the grade" upon entering college may indeed be felt by all cultural groups that Native students must also endure added strain when entering a college that is, in great part, "alien to them" (Peregoy, 1990, P. 8). In her interview, Karen succinctly echoed Edgewater's (1981) that "...the Indian/Native student is faced with the dilemma of cultural beliefs, values and self concepts as well as the same stresses faced by the White students" (Edgewater, 1981, P. 28).

**Karen:** *"I think you're aware that we have so very few students who succeed down south when they go to school. I think a major factor in terms of them not succeeding is their perception that they are high school graduates but a lot of them are only reading at a grade nine, or below, level. They're not reading at the college level to even succeed. Plus the fact that they are not prepared, mentally, culture wise, in terms of having the necessary life skills to adjust to the non-Native culture. A lot of them have been down south, they go there as visitors, but when you're a visitor and you don't stay there a long time you don't really get to know everything there is to know about the non-Native culture. Once you find yourself in an environment where you find there are certain expectations of you: you have to go to school every day. If you haven't learned to manage on your own, then it's a very difficult transition, in terms of getting up in the mornings and making yourself go to school. I've heard of a lot of students who will come down there, and they'll sign up and go through the motions but then they don't show up for their class. (...) Basically, they're not ready ... (KXI)*

Even those "cultural Others", groups or individuals, who are also dealing with stresses related to racism and culture shock, do not share in the same roots of the problems from a

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<sup>45</sup> Roslin, Alex. (n.d.). "Crees of Northern Quebec soon will have own College". The Montreal Gazette.

Native North American's point of view. The Natives' issues are unlike the experiences of other ethnic minorities in that they are embedded in the framework of endeavours of cultural genocide, colonization, conquest and attempted genocide (Thornton, 1990, Churchill 1994, 1995, 1998). As was stated in the history chapter, in regard to efforts of colonization and subjugation, schools played a major role in assisting in these processes. Moreover, according to the interviewees, all asserted that encounters with non-Native individuals and institutions still resulted in them receiving hostile reactions to them as "Indians" and stereotypes of their identity. Jim Cummins (1989) emphasizes this notion that the experience and history of Native groups is indeed exceptional in the North American context:

The groups that currently tend to experience the most educational difficulty (Black, Hispanic and Native American) were never given the opportunity to "melt" into the American mainstream. Unlike immigrant groups, these three groups have had the status of "internal colonies" in that they have been conquered, subjugated, and regarded as inherently inferior for generations by members of the dominant Anglo group. (Cummins, 1989, P. 14)

Cummins does frame his view within a Canadian and a US American context and one may argue about including or omitting the Hispanic and/or Black experiences as being similar in magnitude between the two countries, but the history and current situation of Native people has unfortunate parallels of devastation in both countries: that of being a system of education imposed upon the Native people designed to "remove the Indian from the child". The present community based educational system is also problematic in that some within the Canadian government admit, according to a current document from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, that it is a "... non-system not designed to produce results" (Sokolff, 2004, P. A4). Due to this history and continued practices, the relationship between Native populations and schooling is one of distrust at a very early stage. Little is done to alleviate this perception within the secondary level education setting that widens the divide when its employees, school design and curriculum foster a segregated atmosphere from the community.

Henry Mianscum's (1999) report on "Identifying problems attributing to the state of Cree community schools and the Post Secondary Program" makes note of the separation of the school's staff and the community in cultivating the divide and I can't help but correlate that

this contributes to the initial separation between the Cree general public and a school they perceive as foreign.

Many of the teachers in the Cree communities do not participate in community events and activities. This is perceived by the public as a rejection by the teacher of associations with the community. This form of behaviour often offends members of the community and leads to further segregation of the teacher from the community. Teachers on the other hand fear the unknown elements of community life which are often based on secondhand information garnished by peers and union representatives. (Mianskum, 1999, P. 20)

The perception of the school by parents and students is reflective of the history of residential schooling and already fosters distrust in the system. This distrust and alienation is not helped when the predominantly non-Native teachers, educated and trained within the southern model of schooling, make every attempt possible to create the school in their own image, which can sometimes be seen as, aside from their homes, their only safe haven. Given the history of residential schooling, the distrustful attitudes of parents who either attended residential schools or were part of the cycle of after-effects, the current model on which the schools are based within the communities, and the staff that work there, it seems inevitable that Cree students would distance themselves from an institution they feel does not reflect them. This disassociation leads to the origins of the culture shock felt by Cree students when they seek higher education because the local secondary schools still do not provide them with the academic setting they need within a cultural framework of community ownership. It would seem that at every level, from daycare to university, the Cree student must deal with a progressively alien environment where he or she see less and less of his or her own culture, values, traditions, beliefs, history, a positive image of their sense of self in their schooling. Reflecting on this idea, Joe's statement perhaps has greater meaning when you consider he is talking about a Cree child going to a Cree run school:

**Joe:** *"I mean, from the day you go to elementary school (in Cree territory) you're exposed to a different culture already."*(JII)



Unfortunately, for the average Cree student, as with other Native people of North America, the cumulative pressures of academics, culture shock, prejudice and a history of schooling as assimilation can be too much to tolerate.

### **Recommendations**

The interviewees spoke in unison when they forewarned future students considering higher education of the reality that they must deal with in regards to culture shock and racism while attending universities in the south. From this study I have come to the conclusion that any success, or lack of success, that Cree people have had while in, or even prior to entering, southern higher levels of education, specifically but not exclusively CEGEPs, can, indeed, be partially attributed to various significant social and cultural issues. Presented are three categories of matters that I believe cover the major themes addressed within this dissertation: 1) Schools, in general, are still not seen as a reflection of the Cree people; 2) Racism and prejudice against Native people exists within the context of general schooling and higher education; 3) Culture Shock does create excessive stress for the Cree student. In looking at each of these concerns I have come to a number of possible recommendations as well.

#### **1) Schools, in general, are still not seen as a reflection of the Cree people**

As the interviewee, Greg, stated, *"One thing for sure (short pause) it's not the community. It's not a community school. It's not, no. It's still like a foreign system."* A great part of the problem is that the legacy of residential schooling continues to have an impact on perspectives towards education that contribute to a distrust of the educational system and compounds the view that schools are an imposed reflection of white society. The other part of the problem is that the schools do, in great part, reflect southern white society. Although there has been an increase in Cree teachers, there are still large numbers of non-Native teachers at the high school level and, even with the increase of Cree teachers, the model in which the schools function is still very much based on White North American educational designs. Some non-Native teachers who are experiencing their own form of culture shock within Cree communities compound this problem, either because of their own Eurocentric perspectives or

because of the influences of a Eurocentric perspective that are inherent in our North American schools, which then manifest in social and educational negative practices, attitudes and behaviours towards Cree students. In turn, the Cree parents' distrust of the school system fuels this separation between the Cree community further by sending mixed messages to their children regarding academic and behaviour expectations. The students are left in an environment of vagueness between their Cree identity and the school's culture, implying that the two are, for whatever reason, not compatible.

Not giving the Cree high school students the opportunity to prepare themselves within a setting that allows them to feel that the school is reflective of them, and at the same time introducing them to the culture and expectations of the south, leaves them at a disadvantage. According to the participants in this study, if the key to success was figuring out how to walk in two worlds, it would then only seem pedagogically sound that schools in the community must begin to make that connection between themselves, as an institution, and the community, as a people. Whatever direction the school takes, the community must feel it was their decision so it will support it fully. A common Cree community perception of true ownership is fundamental to the school system's long term success, that is, a schooling groundwork that creates an atmosphere of Cree ownership in education and a connecting direction for what function the Cree people expect of their schools. A Cree consensus and dialogue should take place in which the community should once again ask itself the basic questions, "For whom and what do our schools function?" and "What do the Cree people want the end result of schooling in Cree communities to achieve?" Once these questions have been debated, much needed change can take place in the formation of the curriculum, pedagogical implementation and culture of the schools so that a widespread perspective of ownership can take place by the Cree communities.

As a final note to curriculum change within the Cree schools, creating a curriculum that is responsive to the Cree and the wider First Nation view would be paramount. For instance, teaching the saga of residential schooling would not only inform Cree youth about their (and North America's) otherwise ignored history, but would also produce awareness of the cycle of devastation it has wrought by allowing Native people to finally exert some measure of control over it. Critically examining all curriculum and then in equal term, pedagogical implementation and culture within the school from a Cree perspective, must take place so that the student will

feel the same ease of self and belonging in school that other non-Natives benefit from in their own communities.

## **2) Racism and prejudice against Native people exists within the context of general schooling and higher education**

Whether at school or within the community, Cree students will encounter prejudices and stereotypes that will dishearten their efforts to continue with their education, all of which will impact their sense of identity within the school setting. Some participants reported racism and prejudice within their local schools and my own experiences in Cree territory corroborates this experience. Teachers within Cree schools, both non-Native and Cree, should be provided with extra pedagogical schooling in the general area of multicultural awareness and specifically Native studies. The Cree educational context is too sensitive for us to consider that whatever education they received while pursuing their teaching certificate degrees in universities in the south is adequate. What's more, the diversity of content allowed in such courses currently offered to teaching certificate students varies so much between universities and faculty members that it leaves too much to the discretion of the individual and site to trust that such courses adequately cover the needs of the Cree people. Moreover, there are still educators in Cree schools that have no specific education training. At the very least, this essential training should be mandatory for them.

Casual conversations with local teachers in Cree communities reveal that their understanding of Native history and current challenges do not change along with their new addresses. A product of a North American education, many had little knowledge of even the impact of residential schooling or an appreciation for a Native perspective on the colonization of North America. Not understanding the context in which they are teaching ultimately leads the teachers into a distrustful mode of stereotyping and segregation. Karen describes this process well: *"The teachers here are segregated. They segregate themselves from the rest of the community. There are very few teachers, and it's usually first year teachers, who participate in community activities. After the first year, then it completely changes. Gradually, they just withdraw and the teachers just live in their own little world and they don't associate with the community members and vice-versa."*

If teachers were to address this subject prior to actually teaching in Cree communities, the teachers would benefit from a new perspective towards the community, their clientele, the manner in which they create their curricula and how they choose to deliver it. The students would benefit from belonging to a school that reflects their own cultural identity and needs, thereby creating a firm sense of self within the concept of schools. With this basic need of belonging addressed, academic requirements could be delivered with greater depth as the question of racism and prejudice within the school context is greatly reduced.

Higher education students who have the foundations of a primary and secondary education within their community, that have dealt with historic and current issues of paramount concern to Cree and First Nation peoples, will have greater fortitude in their convictions and identity within the academic setting and will be better able to deal with possible racism and prejudice they encounter, whether overt or covert in nature. Empowering the Cree students to see themselves, their perspectives, their history, and their culture within a true and challenging academic environment will prepare them for the challenges they will encounter in schools outside of their cultural comfort zone.

### **3) Culture Shock creates excessive stress for the Cree student**

Literature research and interviews aside, I can safely say from my own experience that Cree culture is different than the dominant White culture of North America. Given that the institutions of higher education of North America are reflective of that dominant White society, the culture shock felt by First Nations people puts the Cree student at a distinct disadvantage. Most participants had strong convictions in stating life in the south was very different and described the experience of attending such institutions as being placed in a state of cultural disequilibrium and social uncertainty. Explaining the unease he felt when he went to university for the first time, Craig said, "*Well, it's just, it was different. It was different; it was a cultural shock for me. It was a different way of life, different things. (...) And I had a hard time. It wasn't just adapting, I had to adjust to new ways of doing things*" (CXIV.) Recall Karen's statement which brings further clarity to the Cree student's challenge.

*(In Cree villages we have) rules in terms of how you behave. Right? But they're not rules that are necessarily congruent to how you should behave*

*in the south. (...) Those (Cree) rules apply here and they're taken for granted, but those rules are very different from the expectations of how you're expected to live when you're in the south. (...) I think when you're in different environments, in different situations, I think at a certain level you have to say to yourself, "Ok, I'm not at home anymore, I'm not in (my village) any more, so I have to conduct myself in a certain manner. So I can survive. So they don't think I'm a loony." (KXI)*

The constant process of acting, reacting, assessing and adjusting to the new environment in which you are now residing, *not visiting but residing in*, is an exhaustive process of coming to terms with culture shock. As has been explained in great detail in this dissertation, studying outside of one's own cultural and social familiarity brings about great stress where the relationship between the communities in which they must study and their own ethnic group has not often, if not ever been equal or fair. Add to this the historic role of "education" as a tool of cultural genocide into the mix of culture shock and the academic chances for the Cree students are even more greatly reduced.

How then can we address this problem? Responding to the first two categories of concerns that I have raised will provide the initial tools to assist the Cree student in dealing with this problem of alienation within the general perception of the school setting and provide him or her with greater confidence in confronting the prejudice they may encounter. But the daily challenges of adapting and adjusting to differing cultural norms and expectations are another dilemma. A first option could be to have greater understanding and sensitivity on the part of CEGEP and university instructors to the difficulties surrounding Indigenous people, but this would be problematic. Most Cree participants I interviewed felt uncomfortable with the idea of preferential or differential treatment, even if it was differential treatment that was designed to accommodate them. It was evident that they did not want to be patronized or given special treatment. Reconsider Melinda statement, *"... I found that I found something kind of weird when I got into college. Within the first few days they pulled me into an office and they told me that my course load was too heavy. (...) After I kept thinking about that. I was like, "Why did they ask me that for? I can do seven classes!" (MIII)* or Sarah's assertion of how deflated she felt when professors at CEGEP suggested they take a reduced course load, *"They see me as (long pause) as a less educated person, I guess. (...) They knew I was Native" (S1).*

Clearly, the students that I interviewed wanted to be treated as "everybody else" and adding to their barriers of achieving a degree in higher education was the self-doubt put into

their heads from, most probably, well-intentioned professors who were trying to recognize and alleviate the stressors, either academic, cultural or social, they felt their students were enduring. Native assistance entities, such as CEGEP & university Native cultural centers and councillors (if they are specialized in this area) probably do help Cree and other Indigenous students. But from the interviews I carried out (with one exception of a participant who thoroughly thanked the Montreal based Cree School Board employees of the mid 1990s for "getting her through"), there was not an overwhelming sentiment that these agencies were the panacea to their culture shock dilemmas. Most of the solutions offered by the interviewees centered around the notion that overcoming culture shock was a slow process of adaptation and accommodation on their part. Although Karen did partially joke that she was a "red-apple" (red skinned on the outside but white on the inside), no one suggested that they were willing to or content with being fully assimilated into the southern culture; just that they felt they were able to "walk in two worlds".

If the only option to attain higher education resides in schools outside of the Cree community, then Cree schools should incorporate programs that prepare their students for the unavoidable culture shock the majority of them will face if they choose to attend CEGEP or university. There is a multitude of ideas that teachers can create within their curriculum that can achieve this end. For instance, from an early age, teachers could introduce children to the realities of what must be accomplished to acquire different jobs. Learning activities could have students searching for requirements for their profession of choice and then have them present their findings to their classmates. Secondary students could begin their exploration of CEGEP or university life by doing biographies or interviews with former or current Cree students who have attended these institutions to discuss their experiences. There are numerous ways in which teachers could prepare their students to be cognizant of the culture and expectations of the south without infringing on their Cree culture.

The onus should not rest solely on the shoulders of First Nations people and their schools, but shared with the North American academic community to adjust the aspects of our own institutions of higher education over which we have control, that is, primarily, what and how we teach. Greater effort must be made to include multiple perspectives within the content of the curriculum and more variety in the methods of instruction.

This is the type of atmosphere that is hoped to be created with the establishment of a Cree CEGEP. Without a doubt, a Cree CEGEP would ease the issues of culture shock, but participants do have the valid concern that the standards might not be the same of those in the south. After all, if their perceptions of primary and secondary schooling are that they are currently not up to par with their southern counterparts, why should a CEGEP be any different? The concerns regarding academic excellence and putting budgetary restraints aside, there is little doubt that a Cree CEGEP should be an inevitable goal for the Cree people. It must emerge as a natural evolution from Cree control of elementary and secondary education and offer their people the same opportunity afforded to the youth of the rest of non-Native Canada; that of achieving the first step of Quebec's higher education system, with the option of continuing on to university.

### **Directions for further study**

Through the process of writing this dissertation, several ideas for further studies arose that I would like to share.

1. Given that there is little written on the James Bay Cree experience in residential schools, a comprehensive examination of this area is needed. The after-effects of residential schooling have been devastating and the answers to empowering the current youth of the Cree communities may lie in the stories of those who lived through the experience.
2. The low graduation rate of Cree high school students, the weak academic standards and poor comportment of students within the high school have become common knowledge in education circles. It would be revealing to examine the perception of the problem from the teachers' point of view, past and present, Native and non-Native alike.
3. I mentioned briefly some ideas about developing a curriculum that alleviates the culture shock of higher education. There is a multitude of syllabus opportunities to create. A practical application to this educational dilemma is desperately needed.
4. A community consultation is needed in the Cree communities to determine what the Cree people want their schools to achieve and how they want them to achieve this end. Do they want the schools to be based on the Western model of education? If so,

are they willing to support the culture and methods of this type of school? If not, are they willing to metaphorically tear down their schools and start anew?

5. Initially, once I heard about La Macaza, I interviewed former students of that CEGEP, both of which were of Mohawk descent, to discuss their experiences in that institution. Among the many interesting points discussed, their conversations covered the positive and negative aspects of the school, the initial ideology that started the school and their viewpoint on why the federal government shut it down. As of yet and to my knowledge, besides Kilfoil's (1979) Education and Identity Change, no one has chronicled the experiences of these students. An examination is due.
6. Finally, the Cree nation needs a thorough examination of other Native groups who have successfully or unsuccessfully opened their own schools of higher education. At a certain point, the Cree people have to make that leap of faith beyond feasibility studies and create this institution with the idea that if it exists, it will motivate. There is a plethora of other Native groups who have been in the same situation; they can learn from each other.

#### **Continuing the Participant Narrative: "Reality is Nothing"**

"The mice think they are right, but my cat eats them anyways. This is the point, reality is nothing, perception is everything." (Goodkind, 1994)

Many writers turn to a quote to not only inspire the reader to plunge into the work they are hopefully about to hungrily consume but also to assist the writer in the struggle to create something that will fashion an appetite as well as leave some sort of lasting impression. Given this, and the obscurity of this quote I have provided for the conclusion of this final chapter, I feel that an explanatory justification of my choice is necessary. But first, let me reiterate that the objective of this dissertation was to question whether Cree students of the James Bay region, studying in institutions of higher education, particularly but not exclusively CEGEPs, outside of their own cultural milieu, perceive cultural differences as having an effect on the academic success that they set out to achieve.

Now that the reader has again been reminded that "perception" plays an integral part in my dissertation, the above quote may seem less strange and perhaps even less so when you learn that this completely atypical and unorthodox source set the tone for my own writing due to the circumstances in which it had been delivered to me. During my studies at university, I attended the informal student function that the department held prior to the commencement of



a new academic semester and, as was usually the case, free wine and food as well as the opportunity to catch up with the progress of your peers was the motivation for one's presence at this event.

As the evening progressed and the professors politely exited, the evening turned to the conversations that young university students often have when wine is offered in five litre jugs, to that of worldly subjects over which we have little control or influence but a lot of opinion, and other politics over which we hold little power, and finally the affairs of the faculty and department in which we were enrolled. We discussed courses and lecturers and it seemingly took little time until someone brought up the unfortunate encounters I had in a specific class in which the professor's perception towards me resulted in great entertainment for my peers but for myself was a weekly frustration that ultimately ended with an upgrading of my course mark through an impartial review. This topic had become a common conversation point between my small group of peers and myself in the way that such undesirable incidents seemingly tend to become the subject matter of gossip within departments. Those who had not heard the complete story pressed me into an explanation of what happened and those peers who had attended the class light-heartedly encouraged my retelling of the unfortunate confrontations between the professor and myself. So I did.

The conflict between the teacher and me stemmed from classroom debates over the effect of British colonialism in regard to education and indigenous people within colonized countries, a subject secondary to the main topic of the class. The professor was of British origin, as was not only evident by his English accent but by the very fact that he made this information readily available. I am of mixed ethnic origin (as discussed in the Methods of Inquiry chapter), one of which is British but which is neither visually evident by my skin colour or accent, which is Canadian. Nevertheless, I was born in England and carried a British passport and had enough practical knowledge of the realities of British colonialism from my British father (again, who is half English and half Italian), who was born and raised under a British flag in Egypt during a time when the British army ruled. All of this, I believed, gave me an insight to critique the colonial practices of England because, after all, wasn't I evaluating part of my own heritage? Regrettably, the professor didn't see my evaluation in the same manner.

Within the first few classroom discussions, it became apparent that the crux of the professor's argument was that the English school system provided a positive model that indigenous people could follow; therefore, indigenous people should hold an appreciative view of the benefits of their colonizers. I took another angle to the subject, mistakenly thinking that if I vocalized a counter perspective, the professor would appreciate my studious efforts and critical self-evaluation. Unfortunately, it became evident, mostly by what I slowly started to interpret by his visually offended reaction, that the professor believed my criticisms were an attack on Britain itself. When I realized that he felt as such, I promptly explained that I myself was British but this seemingly made little impact. As the classes continued, I was often called upon to defend past arguments or current opinions that countered his conventional views. At first I thought he needed a "devil's advocate" to spark discussion in the class, but I soon realized that he was truly offended by my perspectives, as if I had insulted his nationality, his land, his people, his way of life or indeed the very fibre of his being. At one particularly heated moment, I was asked what my nationality was and when I gave the abridged explanation that I was part British, Italian and Iranian he immediately focussed in on my Iranian heritage and seemed oblivious to the rest. It was almost as if a light bulb had symbolically appeared over his head, an epiphany or one of those "a-ha!" moments that revealed all, as if the word "Iranian" explained everything about me and maybe it did.

Soon, I began to preface each of my statements with, "before I begin, let me again remind you that *I am British...*", but this worked to no avail and in fact became counterproductive as the professor visibly appeared as if he thought I was further mocking England. It became evident, at least to me, that he perceived me as a middle-eastern student whose opinions were not derived from intellectual pursuits, but rather from heritage. The irony is that, in a way, I was culling my argument from my heritage, but the British part of that heritage was overtly being denied. Reminding the professor that I was British would elicit a look of total confusion from the lecturer and I soon came to the conclusion, right or wrong, that his own preconceptions limited his ability to look past something visible about me that said, "Foreigner". It was a futile position to be in and I realized that I was typecast according to his perception.

As I finished retelling the story, I concluded with my feelings of not only having been deeply frustrated that the professor had steadfastly refused to see me as anything other than

what he believed my ethnicity to be in his mind, but that this type of behaviour, which I was otherwise socially accustomed to, occurred at the level of university academia. Although I had dealt with these sorts of issues in the past, I couldn't use those experiences to change this professor's perceptions of me no matter how many times I vocalized my point. Everyone sympathised with my predicament and those who had witnessed it in the class suggested that now we could make light of it, believing that now it was behind me. But, it was not behind me; it had left me feeling vulnerable and unsure as to how I should or could proceed in the academic world. I had grown hardened to prejudice in my life, but I didn't expect it within the university setting.

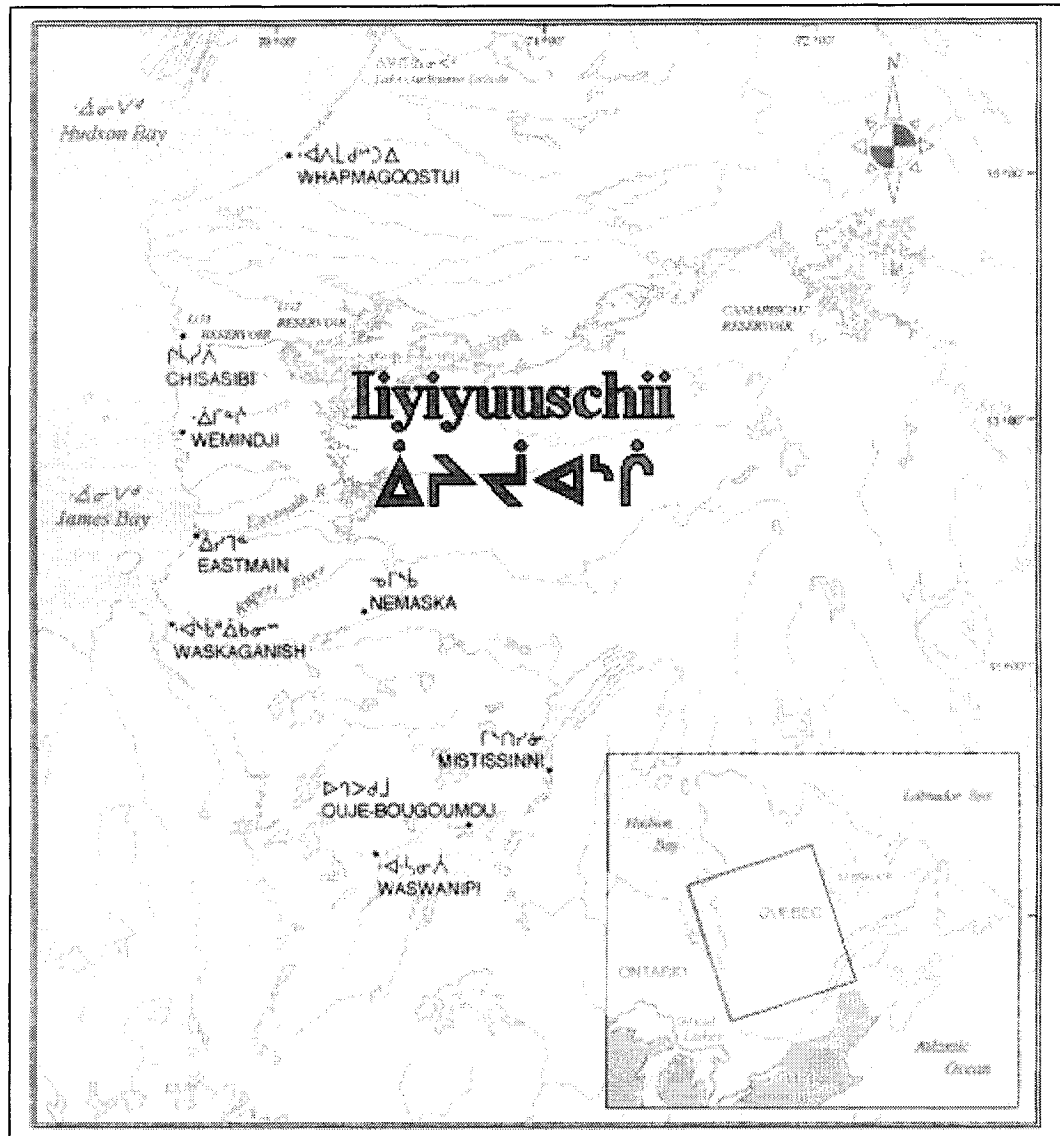
In that moment of awkward silence, when people are not exactly sure what to say when they realize how uncomfortable you are, one student spoke up and said that it reminded him of a passage he had recently read, and cited something to the effect of, "The mice think they are right, but my cat eats them anyways. This is the point, reality is nothing, perception is everything" (Goodkind, 1994). I thought it was a remarkable quote and asked him where he read it and he sheepishly told me that it was from a fantasy novel. (Years later, I stumbled across the quote on the Internet and discovered that it was indeed a quote from a novel character, a character named "Zeddicus Z'ul Zorander", (described as a "wise wizard", no less)). I am slightly embarrassed by the source of the quote, but I will always think about it in the context in which it was told to me, as it spoke volumes about the educational predicament I had encountered during, but not limited to, my studies.

Within the educational institution, the professor had his perceptions which were, by virtue of his position, right; in contrast, my reality meant nothing. In his classroom, I truly felt like the mouse that was about to be consumed by the cat. Unfortunately, this was by no means the only time I had encountered barriers regarding ethnicity within the educational setting and always felt uneasy about the possible "troublemaker" tag I was sure would follow me within the department. For quite some time I felt victimized by the entire event and along with those feelings came the inevitable sense of academic isolation, perhaps a bit of self-pity and self-doubt, the source of which was probably real and imagined. All of this, ultimately, began slowing down my university pursuits and for a moment, a brief moment, I considered dropping out of university. Of course, as is evident by this dissertation, I did not do so. But the experience did provide me with a framework for understanding this subject of North America's

aboriginal population and the similar, albeit more intense and frequent, experiences they must endure within the same institutions.

The culmination of all the work put into this dissertation shows me that the Cree student, or equally the Native student, are placed at a distinctly disadvantaged context within an education system that is historically marred and, despite efforts of numerous well meaning staff, still not able to fully facilitate their needs. I'm confident that the themes developed from the responses of my participants do possess a high degree of transferability to the experiences of many Native readers within North American institutions of higher education and, to some degree, to various ethnic and cultural minorities as well. Everything from statistics to anecdotal observations have validated that there is a problem with indigenous attainment of higher education in North America and the Cree are no exception. My research has demonstrated that culture shock along with other cultural and social barriers associated with the context of schooling, such as encountering racism, stereotypes, cultural and social confusion, a perception of self that is not reflected in the systemic nature of schools and a negative view of schools derived from its use as a tool for assimilation and cultural genocide and more, do indeed play a role in attainment of higher educational success. With these obstacles established, the next step is to develop a school system and curriculum at an elementary and secondary level that addresses the roots of distrust of education in general and places the Cree student confidently empowered within that environment. The next step is more of a leap of faith than a step, as financial forecasts and viability studies must be put aside as a Cree CEGEP should be created to produce the physical reality and expectation of attending such an institution for the young Cree student. Perhaps, with this first stage established within the Cree community, their youth will be given the same advantage of greater ease of transition to university that the students of the "south" have been given, thereby setting the process of greater Cree attainment of higher education in motion.

## Appendix One



Source: [http://www.creeculture.ca/e/land\\_people/map.htm](http://www.creeculture.ca/e/land_people/map.htm)

- I am willing to participate in this study which will involve audio recordings of the interactions between the interviewer and myself, the interviewee.
- I understand the purpose of this study and know about the risks, benefits and inconveniences that this research project entails.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at anytime from the study without any penalty or prejudice.
- I understand how confidentiality will be maintained during this research project.
- I understand the anticipated uses of data, especially with respect to publication, communication and dissemination of results.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

PLEASE SIGN & RETURN BY HAND OR BY FAX TO: (514) 693-9758

## Appendix Four

### Data Sheet

The following data sheet will only be used only for the research project in which you are currently participating. The information requested will be seen only by the researcher in front of you and by no one else. Please answer all of the demographic information questions and return the completed sheet to the person working with you. Thank you.

Please check ✓ where appropriate: ☐

Name: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Present Age:

1. Number of Semesters within CEGEP:

2. Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed

3. Number of Children, if any:

4. Parents current income: Below ☐ \$5,000 ☐ \$5 – 10,000

☐ \$10,000 – 15,000 ☐ \$15,000 – 20,000 ☐ \$20,000 – 25,000 ☐ \$25,000 –

30,000 ☐ \$30,000 – 35,000 ☐ Over \$35,000

5. Are your Parents currently: ☐ Married ☐ Divorced

☐ Separated ☐ Widowed ☐ Never Married

6. How long have they been in this status: \_\_\_\_\_ years

7. How many brothers do you have? \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Number of years of Formal Education for your parents (Degrees or Diplomas as well):

Father: \_\_\_\_\_ Mother: \_\_\_\_\_

9. What do your Parents do for Work (occupation)?

Father:

Mother:

10. Of the last ten years, how many of those years have you been a student?

11. Age when you began CEGEP? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What is your Mother tongue?

☐ Cree

☐ English

☐ French

13. What do you consider to be your Second Language

☐ Cree

☐ English

☐ French

14. Do you speak any other languages? \_\_\_\_\_

15. On a scale of 1 – 10 (10 being the best) how well do you speak French?

(bad) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Great)

16. How far does your nearest relative live from the house you reside in when you go to school? \_\_\_\_\_ miles.

17. What is your current (last) average at school (out of %100)? \_\_\_\_\_

18. What Language do you think in?

☐ Cree only

☐ English only

☐ French only

☐ Cree & English

☐ English & French

☐ Cree & French

☐ French & English

19. With whom do you spend most of your leisure time?

☐ Cree Only

☐ Mostly Cree

☐ Both Cree & Non-Native

☐ Mostly Non-Natives

☐ Non-Natives

20. As you were growing up were your parents or primary caregivers

☐ Very Traditional

☐ More Traditional than Modern

☐ Both Traditional and Modern

☐ More Modern than Traditional

☐ Very Modern

21. How often do you participate in traditional Cree Ceremonies or Activities?



\_\_\_\_\_ Times per year

22. How would you describe your Religious beliefs?

☐ Traditional Cree Religion

☐ Christian

☐ Traditional Cree Religion and Christian

☐ Other, please name: \_\_\_\_\_

23. What is your degree of Cree Blood?

☐ 4/4 ☐ 3/4 ☐ 1/2 ☐ 1/4 ☐ Less than 1/4

Thank you for your time!

## Appendix Five

- a) Have person describe him or herself culturally.
- b) Prior to (thinking about attending, completing, or simply trying) CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION studies, what were your educational aspirations?
- c) What, if any, were the barriers that you thought may have (or will) stopped you from successfully completing your CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION studies in Montreal or another southern village?
- d) If yes, would have studying in this village eliminated those problems or were there different problems?
- e) What does culture mean to you? How do you define it?
- f) Do you think that living, working and studying within the two cultures and social backgrounds did (or would) present a problem to you?
- g) What kind of expectations did (or do) you envision with CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION from the south?
- h) (If the person has not been to CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION) Do you know of anyone who has studied in the south? What are the general impressions they give you of this experience?
- i) On your trips to the South have ever experienced people dealing with you in a different way than in Cree territory?
- j) How do you think you being Cree and your way of life did (or would) affect your aspirations within your CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION life?
- k) What are your views on the history of Cree education? How would you describe the relationship between Natives and the educational system prior to 1972 (the creation of the Cree School Board)?
- l) I have noticed that although there is a growing amount of information about the Native residential schooling experience, there is not much written from the James Bay Cree experience. Why is this?
- m) Do you have any experience, either your own or second hand, that involves negative encounters within residential schools? If so, does this affect the manner in which you deal with schools now?
- n) Do the experiences of other Natives across North America, such as within residential schools, shape your own perceptions?
- o) Does the Cree School Board reflect the traditional methods and content of Native teaching?
- p) Did (or do) you think that your studies at CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION would allow you to use the knowledge you have as a Cree?
- q) How do you think studying at the CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION level within the Cree environment would have helped you?
- r) What reasons do you feel, if any, necessitate the creation of a Cree CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION?
- s) What would a CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION within Cree territory mean to the Cree people?
- t) What are some of the things that stop the Cree youth from attending CEGEP/LOCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION?
- u) Do you have any other comments to make concerning this subject matter?

## **Appendix Six**

### **1. Self Perception & Life History**

- a) Defining of one's Self & Life/Family History
- b) Image of Self in School
- c) Pan-Indian Identity

### **2. Culture**

- a) Perceptions of Cree Culture (defining)
- b) Perceptions towards Culture in Higher Education Settings

### **3. Perception of School**

- a) Quality of Education in Cree Territory & Preparedness for Higher Education
- b) Relationship between Reserve Schools and Native Community
- c) Residential School Experience

### **4. Attending Schools of Higher Education in the South**

- a) Culture Shock
- b) Home Sickness
- c) Time and Pace
- d) Encountering Prejudice (school & community)
- e) Walking in Two Worlds

### **5. Cree Self Control over Education**

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