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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE RIVER FLOWS BOTH WAYS:
NATIVE LANGUAGE LOSS AND MAINTENANCE

by

LYNNE VALERIE WILTSE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGEE OF

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Lynne Wiltse

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T0G 1E0

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **THE RIVER FLOWS BOTH WAYS: NATIVE LANGUAGE LOSS AND MAINTENANCE** submitted by Lynne V. Wiltse in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF EDUCATION in INTERNATIONAL/INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION.**

.....

Dr. Marilyn Assheton-Smith

.....

Dr. Stan Wilson

.....

Dr. Olenka Bilash

Dated.....

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated

to Jeannie

with love

My Home

In my mother tongue
my hatred is sanguineous
my love soft.

My innermost soul
is in balance
with my language.
The closeness of it
caresses my hair.

It has grown
together with me,
has taken root in me.

My language
can be painted over
but not detached
without tearing
the structure of my cells.

If you paint
a foreign language
on my skin
my innermost soul
cannot breath

The glow of my feelings
will not get through
the blocked pores.

There will be
a burning fever
rising in me
looking
for a way
to express itself.

Pirkko Leporanta-Morley

Minority Education: From Shame to Struggle

ABSTRACT

Aboriginal languages have always been an integral part of Native culture; however, many of these languages are extinct, while others are in varying stages of endangerment. There is a growing concern among Native people for the survival of their languages. Most healthy Aboriginal languages are located in geographically isolated areas. There is a strong tendency for Aboriginal languages to decline in urban environments. The role of community in language revival and maintenance efforts is critical.

The purpose of my research was to situate aspects of Native language in an urban school setting where a homogenous language community cannot be assumed. The fieldsite was one where the students expressed an interest in Native languages although none are officially taught. The research explores the source of this interest and considers how the interest could be brought to fruition.

A qualitative methodology was used, drawing on three data sources: relevant literature; personal teaching experiences; and school-based fieldwork. Seven students from a Native Awareness class in an inner city school and their teacher were interviewed. Their voices substantiated the literature and teaching experiences, in addition to offering a unique insight into the urban experience as it pertains to Native languages.

Consistent in all three data sources is evidence of the commonly held view that English has completely replaced Aboriginal languages is erroneous. Even for Native people who do not use a Native language as their primary tongue, Native language itself still constitutes a significant part of Native identity. The three sources revealed that speaking a Native language at least to the point where it is a *language of identity* is becoming increasingly important.

It seems that the most significant factor in the preservation of Native languages is ongoing use. Challenges to Native language maintenance and opportunities for Native language use are explored. Many people are actively working to preserve Native languages; awareness and understanding needs to be a part of these efforts.

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A very special thanks goes to Linda who patiently saw me through this work from beginning to end.

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PROLOGUE

> ***The river flowed both ways.*** *The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river-watching.* *(Laurence, 1974:3)*

Rather than a description of a research site, what follows is more a log of my journey in the waters of Native language maintenance and survival—the story of the struggles and doubts along the way, and my coming to read the river and trust in its flow.

At the beginning of this journey, standing on the bank, I could see that the river comes from somewhere and it goes somewhere. Therefore, any meaningful navigation of these waters will mean going both upstream and downstream as I tell the story.

When I began to record the journey, there were so many possible starting points. Luce-Kapler begins her thesis, *Never Stepping in the Same River Twice: Teaching and Writing in School* (1994), by noting that it is impossible to step in the same river twice, as the river constantly flows and changes. I had to choose a starting point, step in the water and begin. Said (1979:15-16) speaks about formulating a point of departure:

> A major lesson I learned and tried to present was that there is no such thing as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to *enable* what follows from them...The idea of beginning, indeed the act of beginning, necessarily involves an act of delimitation by which something is cut out of a great mass of material, separated from the mass, and made to stand for, as well as be, at starting point, a beginning; ...

I followed the course of the river, becoming familiar with its ebb and flow. Some days I drifted down calm water; at other times I fought the current. Along the way, I branched from the channel to explore new streams of learning. Wherever I stood in the waters of Native languages, the river flowed both ways.

> *Morag walked through the yellowing August grass and down to the river. On the opposite bank, upriver a little from A-Okay's place, the light-leafed willows and tall solid maples were like ancestors, carrying within themselves the land's past. The wind skimmed northward along the water, and the deep currents drew the river south. This was what Morag looked at every day, the river flowing both ways, and yet it never lost its ancient power for her, and it never ceased to be new.*
>
> *(Laurence, 1974:285)*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a way this thesis began during my first term as a graduate student when I read in a *New Internationalist* (1992) magazine that, of the approximately 5,100 languages presently spoken, all indicators suggest that not more than 100 of these languages will survive into the next century. Indigenous[1] peoples speak 80 to 90 percent of the existent languages, representing almost all linguistic diversity (Bernard, 1993). A few Native language communities are healthy, but many are fragile, with relatively small numbers of speakers. Obviously then, they were the most precarious.

A research interest in search of a research project

Of course the process had actually started long before I read the article about endangered languages. Somehow this information sparked an academic interest, but I doubt if this could have been sustained in the way it has had it not been fueled by work experience with Native students in three rural communities in British Columbia. One possible approach would be to ground an extensive analysis of the literature in my classroom teaching experiences. However, this essentially retrospective inquiry seemed limited in that I needed a new context in which to ask new questions.

My objective was to translate my research interest into a research project for my thesis. One evening in a Native Studies course, a classmate, who knew of my interest in Native languages, made the following comment: **I figure when they're asking, that's the time to talk about it.** She was referring to junior high students who were in a Native Awareness class she was teaching. This was the seed that led to my choice of a research site; the reason is that the subject of their query was Native languages.

This was my opportunity to connect my interest with a fieldsite, albeit with compromises. I knew the Native Awareness class was not a perfect match. These students were in an inner city school; all my experience and most of my literature review related to Native people in more remote settings, often reserve communities. How would I combine the contrasting nature of the fieldsite with my experiences and the literature? I had been particularly engaged with the book, *Two-Way Aboriginal Schooling: Education and Cultural Survival,* (Harris, 1990). He proposes a model of bicultural schooling for Australian aborigines in which aboriginal language/culture maintenance is given equal

---

[1] I realize there are legal and other differences sometimes associated with these terms, but for the purpose of this work, the terms indigenous, Aboriginal, and Native will be used interchangeably. I will use the term which is most accurate for the particular context which I am addressing.

priority to the learning of English. I did not see the model as being particularly relevant for urban students for whom Native language maintenance was not a viable option.

Research Questions

Yet, here was a group of inner city junior high students, in a school that did not offer a language class, expressing an interest in Native languages. While this meant redirecting my focus, it presented me with a new unique opportunity to concentrate on those elements relevant to inner city Native students. Where was this interest coming from? Realistically, how could this interest be realized as a part of their schooling process?

During the course of the fieldwork, I learned much about the source of this expressed interest. However, due to time and other constraints, I had to accept that anything I could do in the way of a project regarding Native language use would be token for these particular students. I began to change the way I thought about my research.

I was drawn to what these urban students shared in common with other Native students. Undeniably, the language circumstances for urban students who do not speak a Native language contrast significantly from students who live in an isolated reserve and speak a Native language as their mother tongue. But there were similarities. I began to visualize Native language issues on a continuum: one end would constitute a setting where a Native language was not spoken in many contexts, as in an urban area; the reverse end would be a setting where a Native language was still being spoken as the language of communication, likely an isolated reserve. Along the continuum the issues are similar; they just manifest themselves in varying degrees at various points.

In an article addressing language issues for Native Canadians, Toohey (1985: 275-276) notes that academic discussions of Canadian Native education often begin with a documentation of failure. She argues

> that the data used to describe this failure are very general and are not gathered on national, provincial, or regional bases. Distinctions are not usually drawn, for example, among Native students schooled in urban settings, in areas close to urban settings or in more remote areas. There is great diversity in the characteristics of communities where Native people live across Canada, as there is in other communities not identified as Native; very few studies of Canadian Native education carefully describe any particular communities, or even kinds of communities. Most available descriptions of Native schools and documentation of results of Native schooling are so general that it is very difficult to identify significant factors contributing to failure.

Drawing on personal experience in the varying types of Native communities Toohey mentions, I agree completely. Not only are there huge differences between urban, semi-urban and remote areas, there are differences within each of those areas.

Yet, it cannot be denied that, in the context of Native education, failure *is* a consistent theme. In a review of ERIC documents related to Native education, Weber-Pillwax (1992:53) found that the wide range of topics and the positions of the writers indicates the predominance of the view that "Native education is a problem;" the problem being that "the Native people keep failing so we must work harder to find a way to educate them." The children lose out as educators debate how better to define the "problems" of schooling Native children.

> If native education is meant to prepare native students for their own society, it has failed because the teachers, predominantly non-native, are unable to recognize that the students are members of a different culture and therefore do not "see" the world in the same way that the teacher does...
>
> If native education is meant to prepare native students for the society of the school, then it has failed because, within itself, and its representative teacher, it has no means of accessing the native reality of the children...
>
> I doubt that anyone would disagree with me that native education has been and continues to be a failing process. Even if we called it "native schooling", it would still be a failure. Any denial would need to refute volumes of related statistics which include low employment, penal system population studies, income level statistics, as well as educational studies of student attrition, absenteeism, and achievement.
>
> (Weber-Pillwax, 1992:61-62)

Whichever perspective Weber-Pillwax takes, Native education (not Native students) has failed. Similarly, Jordan (1988:193) shifts the fault from Native people to the schooling system:

> Indigenous people see two great problems connected with schooling: the loss of identity of their youth, and the massive drop-out rate from educational institutions caused by the alienation of students from their ethnic identity. In every case, they see the faults lying in a white system unadapted to the needs of indigenous people.

The contexts in which the white system of schooling has failed Native students are manifold and interrelated. I have chosen to focus on the crucial role of language. Many of the problems students face are language related; these problems cannot be understood without understanding their historical context.

Native peoples the world over have common stories of language suppression. Indigenous languages were prohibited in mission and residential schools; children were beaten for speaking their native language. The belief that some languages are intrinsically superior to others is widespread, but has no basis in linguistic fact (Crystal, 1987). The destruction of the culture and identity of indigenous people through the structures of

schooling has left a legacy of memories of rejection, of internalization, of negative stereotyping and of the creation of a negative identity (Jordan, 1988:193).

The reasons for the language suppression that Native students have experienced in school vary. While some stem from blatant racism, others result from misunderstanding. Given the view that Native people were best assimilated, facilitating dominant language learning was prioritized, usually with the indigenous language being sacrificed.

Refocusing

The research participants helped me to clarify what I really wanted to do. My goal was to continue in the field of Native language maintenance, but to do work that would be more than token[2]. My commitment was not less, but I was operating from an altered knowledge base which demanded that I be pragmatic. The realization came to me that my thesis was about what I needed to *learn* so that I could *do* work in the field.

Rather than centering my thesis on the students from the fieldsite, I wanted to use them as a starting point, to make a point. Regarding Native language use, they could be considered to be on the "least likely" end of the continuum. Yet, they were still interested in and concerned about Native languages. On the basis of what I had learned through the literature and my experiences, I could also say that for those situated in the "most likely" position there were still obstacles to language maintenance. Rather than a continuum, perhaps a better way of representing these seemingly disparate settings would be as a circle, with Native people from the remote reserve and the inner city as neighbours. At the risk of overgeneralizing, Native people want to maintain their languages; at the same time there are overwhelming obstacles to language maintenance.

To do what I had in mind, I needed to pull the literature together and to incorporate my experiences. The students from the Native Awareness class would actually comprise a third data base, to provide opposition to or agreement with the literature review and experiential data. The three sources informed me in different ways, but naturally there were intersections: most Native languages are in varying degrees of endangerment; many Native people want their languages to be maintained; because of the influence of the mainstream society, it is futile to consider Native languages in isolation from English; the school system needs to be included in any discussion of language which focuses on youth.

The question that I had entered the fieldsite with, "where is this interest coming from?" became a springboard for two layered questions:

---

[2]I had been confusing a minimum two year work contract with a master's research project.

1) Is there an interest in, a need for, and a commitment to Native language maintenance and revival? Having established, through the three information sources, that there is, the second question became:

2) Given the endangered state of Native languages, in addition to the acknowledged need/desire for mainstream academic success, what needs to be known to ensure that efforts towards maintenance will be maximized?

I see the purpose of this thesis as twofold: to collect, synthesize and clarify what I have learned so that it can inform my future work and to present that collection with the hope that it may create awareness and offer information to others working in the field. I am not writing with a specific audience in mind; however, given the topic of endangered languages, if there is to be a modicum of success, support will be needed from many directions: Native and non-Native, teachers and students, parents and children, youth and elders. The thesis follows a thematic structure; particular chapters speak to certain readers.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter two can be considered the methodology chapter. After reflecting upon the epistomological considerations that framed my research process, I describe the methodological approach and technique used in the thesis and introduce the reader to the voices they will be hearing throughout the thesis.

The third chapter takes a departure from the research participants per se. The title, "But my Students all Speak English," can be construed in more than one way: not only is it assumed that all Native students actually *do* speak English, it is also assumed that they *should*. Relying largely on the literature and my teaching experience, I discuss the misunderstandings behind these assumptions. This is followed by a critique of bilingual education for Native students. The chapter concludes with a section on alternative approaches to existent language programming for Native students.

In the fourth chapter I summarise the language loss process and then examine more closely the phenomenon of language shift, distinguishing between historical and current reasons for language shift in indigenous languages. This is of particular consequence for language maintenance. This discussion leads to the point that the choices people make regarding language use should be informed ones. The literature is featured significantly in this chapter, along with the research participants.

Chapter five is devoted to indigenous language revival. After describing initiatives worldwide, I rely on the research participants to provide data about opportunities for Native language use. The desire to keep languages safe is contrasted with the challenges

involved. The chapter concludes with a section on what can be done to keep Native languages safe.

In the final chapter I return to the comment that triggered this thesis: "I figure when they're asking, that's the time to talk about it." This chapter honours the students who participated in the fieldwork by focusing on an unforeseen theme that surfaced in the fieldwork: the importance of having a space in which they could "talk" openly and with acceptance. I offer an analysis of the role dialogue plays in building communities of difference.

CHAPTER 2

BEGINNING THE RESEARCH

SITUATING MYSELF

> There are then two entries into communication—the one by which one depersonalizes one's visions and insights, formulates them in the terms of the common rational discourse, and speaks as a representative, a spokesperson, equivalent and interchangeable with others, of what has to be said. The other entry into communication is that in which you find it is you, you saying something, that is essential. (Lingis, 1994:116)

Of the two entries into communication delineated by Lingis, I know which one I want to take. In some respects, I do speak as a representative in this thesis; however, I do not wish to regard my voice as simply interchangeable with others. I want to find that it is *me, my* saying something, that is essential.

As a graduate student doing research, I have struggled to find the common ground with my life as a teacher. The points at which "research" and "teaching" intersect appear to be infrequent. Previously, my time was consumed with the diverse demands of a classroom teacher: lesson planning, teaching children, recess and lunch duty, field trips, marking, report cards, staff meetings and so on.

When I entered academia from this practical background I found that what I had to think about changed dramatically. I was inundated by a tide of academic literature. Initially, I was not often able to make connections between theory and what I thought of as "real life," which for me meant working with children in schools. I agree with Lather's (1986a:447) comment that "theory is too often used to protect us from the awesome complexity of the world." In many respects, this thesis constitutes my attempt to integrate theory and practice, to bring the strands from my readings, teaching experiences and field work together. This seems to be what I had to do to make meaning of my situation.

As a teacher, I thought that what I did was work *with* people. As a potential researcher, I began to get the impression that research was something one did *to,* not *with,* others. It was the reliability and validity of the data, not the people, that mattered. I was not content with this interpretation of research. I needed a research orientation that was compatible with my research objectives: to work with people and to contribute towards positive social change. A branch from the research literature helped direct my course.

Research from the Margins

"Research from the margins is not research *on* people from the margins, but research *by, for* and *with* them" (Kirby & McKenna's (1989:28). By beginning with the experience and research needs of those who have been silenced, the process of knowledge production is transformed and the ideological power base is challenged.

In a similar vein, Lather (1986a:437-457) "explores what it means to do empirical research in an unjust world." She writes from the perspective of one who believes that, just as there is no neutral education (Freire, 1973), there is no neutral research. As researchers we must avoid what Reinharz (1979) has termed the "rape model of research": career advancement of researchers built on their use of alienating and exploitative inquiry methods. Her opinion is that research should be committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society. For those interested in this type of research, a key issue revolves around this central challenge: how to maximize the researcher's mediation between people's self-understandings and transformative social action *without becoming impositional.*

For me, Lather's challenge to not become impositional was complicated. I mentioned earlier that I taught children—well, I taught Native children.[3] Because of those teaching experiences, I was committed to locating my research in Native education as well. However, being able to translate that commitment into actual research was fraught with conflict. I contrast my situation here as an academic *needing* a research setting with my position as a teacher working with Native children. Needless to say, the question of being an outsider existed there as well, but I did not feel it in the same way, because I took time—the kind of time it takes to build relationships and trust. I have found my position as a graduate student, who does not have that kind of time, to be significantly different.

One manner in which the teacher/researcher dichotomy has been manifested is in having to justify my place. Regarding teaching, in addition to what I mentioned above, there was the fact that the band had *hired* me to teach their children. However controversial, that afforded me a place. This was no longer the case when it came to graduate research. With my introduction to postmodernism came terminology and concepts that were both new and disruptive: essentializing, "other", misrepresentations, crisis in representation. The following is an excerpt from the introduction to a paper I wrote last year for a "Native Education" class.

---

[3]That this needs mentioning will be addressed elsewhere in this thesis.

> Part of my struggle with this paper is that it has forced me to situate myself in the context of Native education and then to question my place. I identified strongly with Celia Haig-Brown's (1992) article, "Choosing Border Work." She agonized over the suitability of centering her research in First Nations education, she pondered about the ongoing debate about the suitability of non-Native writers representing/misrepresenting Native people, and finally accepted herself as a significant member of a 'border culture' because she was there by choice...I'm not at Haig-Brown's stage—I don't have to worry about 'speaking for others' yet—this paper is my attempt to speak for myself and it may help me to determine if I will have any future decisions to make regarding 'representing others.'
>
> excerpt from Native Education paper, April 1994

When I reread this, more than a year later, I cringed, realizing that the referred to time that I was not yet having to face, had arrived. I was no longer writing a term paper, but contemplating research in Native education.

While still in the decision-making stage, I attended a talk given by a fellow student in the same department who had recently finished her thesis, *A Construction and Deconstruction of 'Native' in Native Education,* (Kreiner, 1995). As Monica spoke about the process she had gone hrough in coming to terms with what she would write about for her thesis, she asked herself some of the same questions that I have asked myself this past year. For whose benefit am I writing this thesis? Who's defining who is oppressed? Whose knowledge is important? Monica decided that she had to say "do it for yourself— the 'me' is important in this process." The only way she could honestly write about Native education (as a non-Native) was to write autobiographically about how "Native" is constructed in her. Monica answers her question, "Who would my research benefit?"

> The answer to this question was assumed to justify my request for permission, suggesting people would be more willing to participate if they saw the potential benefit of the work to themselves or others like them.
>
> I had no illusions of helping people, a thesis on a shelf would not contribute greatly to the further understanding of eclectic, healing motivated, aboriginal centred informal adult educational endeavours.
>
> (Kreiner, 1995:16-17)

Like Monica, I had no illusions that my thesis would have a significant life other than collecting dust on a shelf. Nor did I have any problem acknowledging myself as important in the process. Still, her questions and decision perturbed me more than I expected. I understood her choice to write about *herself* in relation to "Native" as she could not justify speaking for "others." I was struggling with something similar, *but* I wanted to make a different decision. I was unable to let go of the possibility that my research could actually contribute in some way to Native language maintenance.

I came to a decision reminiscent of Haig-Brown's. She finally accepted her place in First Nations education because she was there by choice; I accepted mine for that reason, but also because I could do some of the work that needs to be done in language education for Native students. That acceptance did not come easily, though. First, I had to come to terms with the concept of representation.

If I centered my research in Native education, would I be misrepresenting Native people? "Common to the post-modern critique of representation in every field is the view that it involves re-presenting one thing, person, place, or time as (or in) another thing, person, place, or time; it is assumed that the transference is made without loss of content or violation of intention" (Rosenau, 1992:93). I know this reads that there *will be* loss of content and violation of intention. This thesis is a documentation of *my* process, although it does incorporate the voices of Native people. I have made every attempt to represent these voices accurately. Also, I work from the belief that, "despite its apparent problems, the use of 'representation' so far does have certain advantages. One of them is that it may be enriched, if further complicated, by its association with the idea of political representation" (Gidley, 1992:2). Keeping the idea of political representation in mind, I hope that this thesis can be part of the "enrichment" to which Gidley refers.

Shorten, whose book, *Without Reserve: Stories from Urban Natives* (1991), is a collection of autobiographical stories told by Native people in Edmonton, appears to have worked through similar conflicts.

> I am not Native. I am white, a second-generation Canadian of English and Scottish descent. I struggled with the question of appropriation of voice raised by my involvement with this book. I believe I have neither the right nor the ability to tell the stories of Native people for them. I also believe that if I had been denied the chance to learn what I learned, denied the gift of sharing time with these storytellers, of being taken by them to places I would never otherwise have been, both in the physical world and in a very personal sense—that, for me, would have been a great loss.
>
> (Shorten, 1991:viii-ix)

And, while I can only assume, my guess is the loss would not have been hers alone.

Border Work

In my readings I have encountered the term "border" in various contexts: border work; border world; border individuals; border intellectuals; border identities; border crossers. This notion of "border" translates well to my being an outsider in Native education and will recur as a theme at certain points throughout this thesis.

According to Haig-Brown (1992:96), people who work with First Nations education, Native and non-Native, work in a border world. She identifies three categories

of border workers: First Nations people; non-Native people who visit the border; and non-Native people who choose to remain in the border world. Like Haig-Brown, I am one of the non-Native people who chose to stay.

In Lincoln's (1993) *Research with the Silenced,* Native Americans are considered among the "silent" as a research category along with others of non-mainstream gender, class or race. Adopting Giroux's (1991) description, such individuals and groups are said to be living at the margins, or existing at the "borders." Lincoln suggests that while members of minorities are doing research in their own communities, there are too few such individuals (as yet) to conduct the number of required inquiries, so that mainstream researchers will continue to play a role in research for the near future, to present the narratives of "border" individuals. Until structures change, providing accounts which speak to the interests of the silenced will be accomplished partially by individuals who may not be members of such groups.

Something in Lincoln's interpretation of "border workers" troubles me. Not that I would disagree with her that Native Americans have been marginalised. Perhaps I sensed a dichotomy, while not expressly stated, between researcher and researched, a "we will make it possible for the 'silent' to be heard." My uncertainty with her analysis may have something to do with the idea behind McLaren's (1993:224) call for a border identity which is no longer organized along binary systems of thought. Or, as Minh-ha (1991:229-30) challenges, "just as one must situate oneself (in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, difference), one also refuses to be confined to that location."

The way I have come to understand "border work" is similar to the way in which Stairs (1994c:122) describes research relationships in Aboriginal education. In these relationships both insiders and outsiders are changed. Stairs speaks of "ongoing cultural highly participatory research by inside outsiders practicing collaboratively with aboriginal educators in their communities." I like this term "inside outsiders" and prefer to consider myself and others (like Haig-Brown) in this way.

Earlier I made a distinction between teaching and research; here I contrast border workers and border intellectuals. "Border intellectuals" question traditional academic discourse from multiple perspectives (Giroux, 1992). While my understanding of border intellectual is not well grounded, my brief career as a graduate student has certainly taught me to question, not only traditional academic discourse but also much of what I took for granted as a teacher.

McLaren (1993:223) asks us "to construct border identities that speak to the lived experiences of oppressed people—people who have a natural suspicion of academics writing from the high-altitude vistas of Mount Olympus." Here, I admit to my relationship

with academia; at the same time, given where I am coming from (and likely going), I have a natural suspicion of these aforementioned academics. After struggling to read Giroux and McLaren, I am tempted to agree with Gore's (1993) claim that Giroux and McLaren espouse critical educational theory, *not* critical pedagogy. Their vision has not been actualized. This rift between theory and practice has been problematic for me since I began my program in graduate studies.

I wonder how accessible the writings of people like McLaren and Giroux are to the people they write about. It is by virtue of my student status that I have even been introduced to critical theory. As a teacher of these (supposedly) marginalised people, I certainly had no such exposure. At the risk of sounding judgmental, I am somewhat disillusioned with "border intellectuals" who do not cross borders to become "border workers." Tierney's directive regarding praxis echoes my conviction: "....ultimately structures and oppression change, not because of anything I *write*, but because of what I do" (1993a:132).

Praxis

A reference to praxis, which has influenced the way I choose to approach research, leads into the methodology section. My dictionary defines praxis simply as "practice as opposed to theory", but, for Freire (1970), praxis is reflection and action which transforms reality, and Carr & Kemmis (1988:23) refer to praxis as critically informed committed action.

> For praxis to be possible, not only must theory illuminate the lived experience of progressive social groups; it must also be illuminated by their struggles. Theory adequate to the task of changing the world must be open-ended, nondogmatic, informing, and grounded in the circumstances of everyday life; and, moreover, it must be premised on a deep respect for the intellectual and political capacities of the dispossessed.
>
> (Lather, 1986a:442)

I agree with Lather that there is a need for this type of reciprocity in emancipatory research: the give-and-take between researcher and researched and between data and theory. If theory is to change the world, it will *have to be* enlightened by those who are living the struggles. And, what is the purpose of theory, if not to change the world?

Lather's appeal for theory grounded in respect for the "dispossessed" has direct relevance for researchers considering border work. Hampton (1993) voices the need for theory and research that is useful from Indian points of view. There is a need for a research process that "produces not information about something, as is the case with objective studies, but rather intimate knowledge that something is the case, knowledge of, or knowledge for some purpose" (Reinharz, 1979:362).

WHICH METHODOLOGY?

Much of the information in this section pertains to research relationships and relates primarily to the fieldwork component of my thesis. In the introduction I mentioned that my thesis would include data drawn from three sources. I will explain how I have accounted for this in the next section, methodological technique.

Qualitative Research

After taking a required research methodology course in preparation for the thesis, I thought that I should be able to categorize my thesis according to research design. I knew the type of inquiry I wanted to conduct would require qualitative, not quantitative research methods. Beyond that, attempts to pigeonhole my methodological approach have been unsuccessful. Along the way, I let go of the need to categorize and concentrated on what I did need, which was to hear the views of students on issues pertaining to Native language. I framed the methodology in terms of how I could best hear and present those voices, as well as integrate those voices with my other data sources, the literature and my teaching experiences. The research, then, can be considered qualitative and has been shaped by varying influences: action research, hermeneutic inquiry, narrative research, ethnography, critical pedagogy and postmodernism. Rather than account for these collectively, I will let these influences surface when pertinent; sometimes these references will be juxtaposed with why the more "traditional" research would not work for me.

The Research Interest

During my final term, I took an action research course with the idea in mind that perhaps I could do an action research project for my thesis. Elliot (1991:69) defines action-research as "the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it." I wanted my research to be "about" Native language preservation; at the same time, I wanted to ensure that I was doing more than "researching" Native people to get a thesis done. Action research, which offers opportunities for collaboration and change, looked promising. However, due to time constraints, an action research project proved to be unrealistic. Still, my thesis project was driven by some of the principles of action research. An example of this came when we read a dissertation chapter by a student whose work, *The Literary Imagination and the Curriculum* (1994), was described as "hermeneutically inspired action research." The author, Dennis Sumara, visited our class to speak about his research; his words gave me both inspiration and direction.

For various reasons, making a commitment to what is referred to as *the* research question did not come easily for me. In speaking to our class, Dennis suggested that we think about our *interest* as opposed to our *question.* I loved hearing this; I knew my interest, but I was reluctant to translate it into *the* research question. He told us how he was influenced by Gadamer: if you decide in advance what to look for, you will either find it or not. However, you may not find anything else.

> Refining the research topic involves framing a question that will guide you through the research...Traditional research stresses the necessity of framing a single question before beginning to gather any data. The process of researching the margins is more flexible. Occasionally the questions may emerge from the research or crystallize through the process. At other times a specific question may actually hinder the data gathering....However, usually you will find that the more concise the question, the easier it will be to keep focused throughout the process.
> (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:47)

When I first read this, I thought facetiously that this "flexibility" must be why I had chosen "research from the margins." I wanted to leave myself open; at the same time, I knew I needed to be able to justify my research process. With hermeneutic research, inquiry exists in the middle of some matter of interest, rather than proceeding through pre-established questions or methods (Sumara, 1994:76). Although I made decisions regarding methodology, I approached the research propelled predominantly by interest. In describing this type of research, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1993:392) acknowledge that, at times, they yearned for the pre-determined research method as they were "unsure as to whether we were proceeding in the right direction, concerned that our processes sometimes seemed a bit ambiguous, anxious that we could not always spell out for others what it was we were 'really' investigating and what the products of that investigation would be." The other side of this is that they "also learned that feeling uncomfortable leads to learning and insight into the topic(s) of research." I found the ambiguity of my research project somewhat unsettling, but was determined to "let it come" rather than "hunt it down."

> Rare are those who can handle it [structure] by letting it come instead of hunting for it or hunting it down, and filling it with their own marks and markings. Minh-ha (1989:143)

Interpretive Inquiry and Objectivity

The subject of "objectivity" in research/knowledge is another context in which my process has been influenced by hermeneutics, initially through the reading of *Entering the Circle* (Packer and Addison, 1989). With regard to the "scientific attitude," Packer and

Addison (1989:27) note that "being value-neutral, free from prejudice, objective and unbiased (to the small extent that it is possible at all) involves adopting a special posture of distance from or denial of one's personal interests and concerns." I never had any illusions that I could, let alone should, be objective in my research. It is my personal interests and concerns that drive this thesis; why would I deny them? Similarly, I do not *wish* my work to be considered non-political or impartial. At the same time, I prefer to think that what I have produced is "above small-minded doctrinal belief."

> Nevertheless the determining impingement on most knowledge produced in the contemporary West...is that it be nonpolitical, that is, scholarly, academic, impartial, above partisan or small-minded doctrinal belief. One can have no quarrel with such an ambition in theory, perhaps, but in practice the reality is much more problematic. No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. (Said, 1979:9-10)

Through *Entering the Circle*, I was introduced to Heidegger's "essential circularity of understanding." When we try to study some new phenomenon we are always thrown forward into it; the phenomenon is shaped to fit a "fore-structure" that has been shaped by expectations and preconceptions, and by lifestyle, culture and tradition. The circularity of understanding is that we understand in terms of what we already know. That this is true has been has been clarified many times throughout my research process.

> In interpretive inquiry, projection has finally become acknowledged as an inevitable and essential part of our understanding, both everyday and scientific. Consequently, the choice of a point of view or perspective often becomes a careful and deliberate one. And it is often seen to involve establishing a relationship with those who participate with us, and working out a mode of engagement with them. Far from being detached and neutral, we need to adopt a perspective that is engaged and concerned. (Packer and Addison, 1989:34)

The standpoint I have embraced toward the field I have chosen and toward those who will be participating in my research is both engaged and concerned.

Research Relationships, Storytelling and Voice

Tierney (1993a:128-131) condemns the overreliance on standardized goals in research which ignores the process, in turn denying voice to the research participants. In traditional research, the researcher's task is to accumulate knowledge about a topic. The relationship with the researched is relatively unimportant except in terms of how the researched provide the researcher with valid, reliable data. I agree with Tierney that

researchers need to become more fully engaged with those they research. The primary reason for my choice of methodology is that I would rather have face-to-face communication with a limited number of people than survey many people who have voices I cannot hear and faces I cannot see. Time constraints certainly limited the type of relationships I was able to establish with the participants. Still, I ensured that the students and others who contributed to my research were more than research subjects; they were very much "real people" to me.

In the action research class, we discussed how narrative could be a component of action research. Narrative is the study of how humans make meaning of experience by telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988:24). While I am not doing narrative research per se, my fieldwork has a narrative component. Van Manen (1990:156) asks: "Aren't the most captivating stories exactly those that help us to understand better what is most common, most taken-for-granted, and what concerns us most ordinarily and directly in our tactful pedagogical interactions with children?" This certainly has been the case with the students I have been involved with through teaching and fieldwork. "Captivating stories" have great appeal, but as a research strategy, that, in itself, is not sufficient reason for the telling of stories. Carter (1993:11) cautions storytellers that "we will not serve the community well if we sanctify story-telling work and build an epistemology on it to the point that we simply substitute one paradigmatic domination for another *without challenging domination itself."* This is in accordance with Tierney (1993a:4-5) who advises that it is not enough to develop a "catalogue of silenced lives" as if the recording of marginalised lives absolves the researcher of further activity. The collection of stories, then, is one act of resistance. The researcher must be involved both with the "research subject" and with challenging the oppressive structures that create the conditions for silencing.

Lincoln (1993:35), writing about research with the silenced, notes that while listener/researchers must never "put words into the mouths" of respondents, they can provide active counterpoint by describing historical and social contexts in which silenced groups have traditionally found themselves. In the data that was made available to me, I have been able to identify ways in which Native people have been marginalised and discriminated against. I do not take lightly the responsibility of presenting the voices of others and have been diligent in my attempts to not "put words into the mouths" of respondents.

Like Shorten, (above) I believe in stories. Those found in *Without Reserve* "are powerful and speak the 'truth' about being an urban Native in Canada in a way that is

more telling than the most precise of surveys or studies. Their power lies, simply, in the individuals revealed...I did not, in any sense, 'write' this book. Rather, I served as the conduit through which these Native people could make their stories known" (Shorten, 1991:vii). My work differs from Shorten's in various ways; it is a thesis, not a collection of autobiographical stories, and I feel in every sense that I wrote this thesis. But, in terms of attributing the power of the stories to the individuals revealed we are in accordance. This thesis would not exist were it not for the voices of others.

METHODOLOGICAL DETAILS

Nature of the Study

My thesis utilises a thematic structure which draws on three data sources: the literature; personal teaching experiences; school-based fieldwork. This design was chosen in an attempt to incorporate the various settings that spoke to the questions I was trying to answer.

Rather than follow what I had come to think of as the "standard" thesis framework, with a chapter each for the literature review, methodology, findings and conclusions, I saw the need to frame the information I wanted to convey thematically. The fundamental reason for this was that it did not seem *possible* to isolate the literature from how or what I "knew" experientially and from what I had learned through the fieldwork.

Data Selection

Literature

In retrospect, it seems slightly ironic that the literature has been *so* crucial to my research process. During my second term as a graduate student I took a *Native Education* course. My first term had been spent immersed in abstract theoretical literature; given my teaching experience in Native Education, I assumed that the course would be grounded in practice. However, after reading the outline, my expectations appeared incongruent with the course objectives: to know the literature about Native Education as an object of knowledge and to become "critical" in the way we assess that literature. I recall thinking, "this course is not *about* Native Education, it is about what has been *written about* Native Education."

"Knowing the literature" may very well be the nature of graduate level courses, but there was still a thread of logic in thinking. Having taught Native students for ten years, I knew a fair bit *about* Native education, but I did not know the literature. I constantly *read* in relation to my job, but that reading had a practical orientation. As a teacher, there did not seem to be time for "theory."

I had no idea that "coming to know that literature" would influence me so profoundly. I liken the process to a smorgasbord where literature provides the sustenance. Initially, the reason many of the readings were so meaningful was because I could connect them directly to my teaching experiences. I was continually amazed by how much I drew from the literature. What I read interjected new understanding into my teaching, in retrospect. I both recognized and could not find the students I had taught in the literature.

When it came to the body of literature that became my thesis topic, the research was largely self-directed. I built my literature base by following a trail of references. Or, to use the river metaphor, I explored many of the tributaries that branched off from the fountainhead. Sometimes I felt that my search was being guided. Books and articles would make themselves known to me as if by magic. Invariably, the timing of these appearances was opportune.

Various sources fed this research. The theoretical literature addressing Native language loss, maintenance and revival served as the backbone for my study. The empirical literature on the same subjects framed this in an educational context. Appropriate references to methodology directed me as I carried out and wrote up my study. Needless to say, many of these sources intersected and others fell outside these categories.

Experiential Data

I mentioned in the introduction that my academic interest in language loss and maintenance was fueled by teaching experiences with Native children. I also explained that I needed to do fieldwork for my thesis because I had new questions to ask about language. These questions were triggered by the literature and explored through the fieldwork. But, I could not ignore the voices from my teaching experiences. The data from the literature and the fieldwork play a larger role in this thesis than the experiential data. But this is due more to the nature of the research than to the significance of those experiences.

Fieldwork Data

Selecting and synthesizing the literature-based and experiential data was a personal process which needs little explaining. As the research methodology for the fieldwork demands more clarification, I have accounted for that in this section. Data collection techniques include participant observation and field notes, journal reflections, and unstructured interviews. A brief description of the fieldsite will be followed by an explanation of how I collected and analysed the data.

Description of Fieldsite

Fernwood School is an Elementary-Junior High School in Edmonton's inner city[4]. There are 316 students currently in attendance. Approximately 30% of the student population is Native. The school does not have a Native language class, but a Native Awareness class has been developed to accommodate students with Native ancestry. However, the class is open to all students; one of the reasons it had been created was to counter racism. The Native Awareness class is an "options" course, not a core academic subject. There are two sections of the course for Junior High students and classes are held on a weekly basis. The class in which I carried out my fieldwork met on Friday afternoons.

Data Collection

Participant Observation

According to Spradley (1980:54), the participant observer comes to a social situation with two purposes: to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people and physical aspects of the situation. I had a third purpose in mind: to allow time for the students and myself to get to know each other before beginning interviews. I was drawn to do my research in this particular class because they had expressed an interest in my chosen topic; at this time I had not realized that the students were on a semester system. While I could make alternate arrangements for interviewing students, the time I had as a participant observer was limited. I was able to visit the class only half a dozen times before the end of the term.

There was a mixture of students from grades seven, eight and nine. Twenty students were enrolled in the class; however, during the weeks I observed the class there was considerable variance in attendance. The majority of the students were of Native ancestry, but there were several non-Native students, including a boy from El Salvador who speaks Spanish and a Chinese boy who speaks Cantonese.

The first time I visited the class, Kelly introduced me as a classmate from the University who would be doing a project about Native languages with them. She gave me some time to talk to the students so I could explain my objectives for the research project.

On that occasion, Kelly took the opportunity of a guest being present to have the students explain the sweetgrass ceremony, which is their customary ritual for beginning the class. For this purpose, instead of sitting in the desks, the students seat themselves on mats placed in a circle on the floor. The circle is to simulate the teepee, and is crucial to the sweetgrass ceremony. A space between the mats represents the door; we were to walk

[4]The name of the school has been changed.

through the "door" and around the circle clockwise before we sat down. One of the students told me that the three strands of sweetgrass symbolized mind, body and spirit. Kelly continued this discussion, talking about the traditional ways of the elders. It was special for me to take part in the sweetgrass burning, which is both different and similar to the sage smudging I was familiar with from times in Alert Bay.

I made rough notes after each class and typed up more detailed field notes when I returned home. As Native Awareness was the last class on Friday afternoon, Kelly and I usually went for coffee afterwards. During these talks, we reflected on what had happened during the class. In addition, I was able to gather background information relevant to my research project.

Interviewing

Although my time as a participant observer in the class was limited, I was able to establish a measure of rapport with the students before requesting interview volunteers. The students became familiar with me and grew to expect my presence. Each week more of them would approach me to talk. I got the sense that it made a difference to the class that Kelly and I had an established relationship prior to my coming to their class. We were classmates and friends and it was apparent that Kelly trusted me. I feel this may have made it easier for the students to trust me. As the class only met once a week, I handed out the permission letters during an early visit to allow enough time to have the letters signed and returned. In a few cases, I followed up expressed willingness to be interviewed with phone calls to remind students that I needed the forms before they could be interviewed. With each class, I was able to talk to the students more about my research project; this gave students an idea whether they wanted to participate in the interviews or not. The students were asked the following three questions:

1) Do you have parents, grandparents or other family members who speak a Native language?

2) Do you understand or speak (even a bit of) a Native language?

3) Would you be interested to learn, or learn more of, a Native language?

A half dozen students responded affirmatively to the first two questions and the same students plus a few more answered "yes" to the third question. As it turned out, most of these students became the research participants.

I interviewed seven students. They could be categorized several ways; four girls and three boys; two grade sevens, four grade eights, and one grade nine; five with Native heritage and two without. Of the two without, one was a "white" girl, the other a Chinese

boy. I had indicated a desire to interview students from diverse backgrounds. The views of anyone willing to share their thoughts and feelings about language would be valued.

Interviewing students during the Native Awareness class was an option, but I wanted to use that time for participant observation. The principal gave me permission to have students "pulled" from their other option classes for interviews. Kelly had an office right next to the classroom which she let me use for the interviews. This was ideal. Kelly has taken care to make her office a place that reflects her connection to Native tradition. The students obviously felt comfortable in the space that Kelly had created, most of them electing to sit cross-legged on the bear rug while they checked out the awesome collection of Native art and artifacts. The office staff was very accommodating in calling the students out of class as I was ready for them.

Before each interview began I re-explained the ethical aspects of the research process (see ethics). I told the students that I would prefer to record the interviews to have verbatim accounts of their words; no one objected to this, so I tape recorded all seven interviews. Interviews ranged in length from half an hour to an hour. I interviewed Kelly after all the student interviews had been completed. The interview took place at my house, after dinner. I recorded her interview which was close to an hour and a half in length. After each interview, I transcribed the tapes and wrote field notes on my perceptions of what had transpired.

The interview style was informal and unstructured. Like Haig-Brown (1990:235), I felt that "coincidentally, unstructured interviewing—asking lots of questions and engaging in dialogue—allowed me to research in a way which was already integral to the way I made sense of life." The interviews were of a conversational nature. I had a tentative set of questions, but I wanted the process to remain open-ended. With each interview, the questions changed somewhat as issues that had arisen during early interviews shaped subsequent interviews. I began to understand that " in ethnographic interviewing, *both questions and answers must be discovered from informants"* (Spradley, 1979:84).

Ethical Considerations

During my time as a participant observer in the Native Awareness class, I explained to the students why their opinions regarding Native language issues were important to my research. As the research participants were children, informed consent was obtained through parents or guardians signing a consent form which specified the nature and purpose of the research.

I let the participants know that they had the right to withdraw from the research project at any time and assured them that, in such an instance, their contributions would not be included in the research. Similarly, during interviews, participants knew they had the right to end the interview before all the questions had been asked. Each student was asked to choose a pseudonym to ensure anonymity in the thesis.

I returned to Fernwood with transcripts of taped conversations which students were asked to read. This allowed participants an opportunity to verify what was recorded, make changes in the wording, or elaborate their ideas. Concurrently, I was able to ask questions which helped me to clarify any information about which I was uncertain.

Data Analysis

After transcribing each interview, I reread the transcripts and identified key concepts in the margins. Data analysis would enable me to discover and make sense of patterns which were emerging. "Analysis proceeds by examining some phenomenon, dividing it into its constituent parts, then identifying the relationships among the parts and their relationship to the whole" (Spradley, 1979:92). Having become familiar with Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence (1979, 1980) in a qualitative research course, I used this as a starting point. In particular, I focused on "domain analysis." Spradley (1979:117) identifies the goal of a domain analysis as twofold: to identify cultural categories of thought and to gain a preliminary overview of the cultural scene being studied. I found this technique particularly helpful for categorizing the data collected from the interviews and fieldnotes.

The next step in classification was to identify categories and to search for clustering of categories. These categories were then further regrouped under thematic headings. I began to recognize recurring themes in the data. Spradley (1980:141) defines a cultural theme as any principle recurrent in a number of domains, tacit or explicit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning. I found where the fieldsite data intersected with and diverged from the information I had collected from the literature and my own experiences. Connecting the themes with what I had learned through theory was one of the most meaningful parts of the research process for me. A particular cultural scene will likely be integrated around a set of major themes and minor themes (Spradley, 1979:187). This description was applicable to the thematic structure I planned for my thesis, with the chapter headings constituting the major themes and the sub-sections the minor themes.

Interpretation played a part in getting the text to speak. "Data analysis must be something more than the direct description of the data—a creative, constructive affair that

is not simply an act of isolating and describing something that might be considered self-evident" (Powney and Watts, 1987:160-160). The data and interpretation evolved together, informing each other. And, as the writing progressed, the themes crystallised.

Although the themes emerged and developed with relative ease, I struggled to write the data analysis section of this thesis. I wondered why documenting it was proving to be such an obstacle. The answer came indirectly through reading Spradley's chapter on *Discovering Cultural Themes.* Spradley (1980:152) identifies cultural contradictions as a universal theme. Cultural knowledge is never consistent in every detail; rather, most cultures contain contradictory assertions, beliefs, and ideas. One cultural contradiction involves the official "image" that people seek to project of themselves, and the "insider's view" of what really goes on. Rather than apply this theme to the data, I saw its applicability to my position as a graduate student doing research. On the one hand, I am confronted with the post-modern method of analysis, *deconstruction,* which seeks to "undo all constructions," but not to "do them up again" in improved or revised form. Further, post-modernists tell me that it is impossible to represent the object of study "as it really is" (Rosenau, 1992: 97). On the other hand, I am expected to establish credibility for my data by proving it to be reliable and valid.

As far as I am concerned, this dilemma constitutes a "cultural contradiction." Spradley suggests that researchers search for inherent contradictions that people have learned to live with and then ask, "How can they live with them?" Knowing that Lather (1986b:78) is correct when she says that "ignoring data credibility within openly value-based research programs will not improve the chances for the increased legitimacy of the knowledge they produce," I have attempted to negotiate the turbulent waters of these contradictions.

Lather (1986b) suggests four methods for establishing trustworthy data: triangulation; reflexive subjectivity; face validity; catalytic validity. By using multiple methods, data sources and theories, I allowed for *triangulation.* My thesis includes many examples of how my assumptions as a researcher have been affected by the logic of the data, providing *reflexive subjectivity.* In an attempt to establish *face validity,* I allowed the research participants to revisit their comments. None of the participants requested that any changes be made. According to Lather, *catalytic validity* means the research process has led not only to insight, but also to activism, on the part of the participants. The interviews gave the students an opportunity to articulate their thoughts and express feelings about a subject that held personal meaning for them. I cannot predict whether this research project will spark action on the part of any of the student participants. I can only hope that, in some way, it has made a difference.

VOICES YOU WILL BE HEARING

In this section I introduce the research participants whose voices will be heard in the remaining chapters. I lead into the introductions with a brief discussion of two relevant subjects: the "other" and the "inner city."

The "Other"

There have been references to the "other" in this chapter. Who is this "other", anyway? Prior to becoming a graduate student, the word *other* was not clothed in quotation marks. Before introducing the research participants, I need to disrobe the "other." Given my focus area, coming to understand this concept has been a necessary part of my process.

My introduction to the "other" was through Said's analysis of Orientalism, wherein for the European Western, the Orient is "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe" (Said, 1979:1-2). In other words, we need an "other" in order to know ourselves; identity is defined largely by contrast with another.

Said's argument can be (and has been) transferred to Native people. In the introduction to his book, *The Imaginary Indian,* Francis (1992:8) notes that

> non-Natives in North America have long defined themselves in relation to the Other in the form of the Indian...The image of the Other, the Indian, was integral to this process of self-identification. The Other came to stand for everything the Euro-Canadian was not.

So, the Euro-Canadian image of the Indian says more about who we *are not,* then who they *are*. This makes sense to me and I think I understand it in its historical context, but I have difficulty fitting it into my personal frame of reference. That "the Indian began as a White man's mistake, and became a White man's fantasy" (Francis, 1992:5) is not a new idea for me. What is new to me, though, is the discourse.

I take to heart Francis's caution that his book is about Indians, not Native people, and about White, not Native, cultural history. Much of Francis's work does speak to the past. Still, some of the invented Hollywood Indian images linger; however, frequently the other is not the romanticized Indian, but the other "other", the stereotypic lazy drunk.

I am left wondering how to situate myself in this argument. The false images may be a creation, but Native people are not. While I am, in some respects, an outsider, my stance is from a vantage point that makes it difficult for me to "essentialize" or "categorize" all Natives as either the stereotypic "drunken Indian" or the "noble savage." I have had

connections, through personal and work relationships, with Native people since I was a teenager. I do not mean to be obtuse, but when I think of the Native people I know, they are not framed as "other." Rather, they are Kelly, Mike, Amber, Eddy, Agnes, Tyler, Joy, Herbert, Geneva, Darcy, Roger, Crystal, David, Connie...

I know that it is an assumption to think that we can assign individuals to a group based on ascription of values and then use these value systems to predict behaviour (Urion, 1991). But, apparently this is not common knowledge. The way I feel about teaching Native children has been determined partially by the reactions of others. Over time, I became exasperated with the typical negative responses I received when I told people that I taught at the band-operated school on the reserve. I sometimes wonder why the longer I worked with Native children, the more unable I was to validate the characteristics and traits that are so often associated with them: the silent, the right-brained, the non-analytical, the linguistically deprived. Yes, I had silent students—I also had the noisiest ones imaginable. I had students whose thinking was analytical, others who were more artistic. Some of my students excelled in math, some were awe-inspiring creative writers. I had students who lived for baseball, others who were "couch potatoes." There were characters who loved to perform for an audience, and there were those who dreaded drama. I did not see the "silent" student as "silent" because he/she was Indian. Since the majority of my students were Native, perhaps it was easier for me to see my students as a group of individuals (which is what they were). Is it when Native students are in the minority that they are more likely to be categorized as "other?" Unfortunately, this describes the reality of numerous students who left the band-run school on the reserve to attend high school in town.

In spite of the point I have been trying to make, it would be ludicrous for me to insinuate that there is no difference in being Native. There would be no Native schools, no courses in Native education, no thesis on Native language issues were that "difference" not significant. In many respects, that difference is the essence of this thesis. But, I want to present a "different" analysis of difference, one that recognizes that there is no one identifiable Native culture. What Native people share is a history of oppression, of being named "Indian," of being marginalised.

The Inner City Context

I have situated this argument within the boundaries of my experience. It is not surprising to me that I have problems thinking about the Native people I worked with on the reserve as the "other." There, *I* was the "other." When I transfer this discussion to the school where I did my fieldwork, though, the dynamics shift. In retrospect, I realize that

when I began my research, I regarded the Fernwood students as different, as "other." And they were, to my experience, not because they were Native, but because they were from the inner city. In conversations during my fieldwork, I came to recognize that there was an assumed meaning for "inner city," of which I had limited knowledge. For example, the asistant principal told me: "In the inner city, it's not just Native culture, it's a culture of the poor. There's something else interacting here—a tradition of the poor, whether they're Native or not."

By way of illustration, when I asked Kelly to talk a bit about the community in and around Fernwood School, her response was:

> Well, Fernwood is an inner city school but even with some of my other inner city schools, like there's just like, some kids have a real ...when you talk about kids...my comparison between the school where I used to work and Fernwood is that the kids at some of the other schools thought that they knew about the street and what was out there and Fernwood kids *know*, they don't just *think* they know...but it's inner city, being tough and rough and not wanting people coming in and telling them what to do.

When I mentioned to my supervisor how the students at Fernwood were, in many respects, the "least likely" to be interested in Native languages, she said, yes, adding that they were also the "least studied." I could go to the literature to find out where other Native children fit in, but could not do that with these urban students. This corresponds with Shorten:

> These people are all "urban Natives," in the sense that their lives are not reflected in most of the current discourse on Native people. These are individuals without a chief, often without a band or treaty number, people not represented in land claims negotiations or treaty claims; people ignored, for the most part, in discussions about Canada's treatment of its Native population. They show us what should be self-evident: that to talk about "Native people," as though that were in any way an adequate description, is laughable. These people compel us to see them, to listen to them, and to respect them in all their diversity.
>
> (Shorten, 1991:viii)

I agree that to talk about "Native people" as though that were in any way an adequate description, *is* laughable. Having the chance to listen to these "Native students without reserve" emphasised that.

I'd Like You to Meet....

The introductions center around the students' reasons for taking the Native Awareness class as well as their reasons for participating in my research project on Native languages. The theme of identity is emphasised in the students' responses and can also be

found in the words of their teacher, Kelly. This theme flows throughout the course of the thesis.

Kelly

Kelly is the teacher of the Native Awareness class where I conducted my research. She works as a consultant and Native Liaison for Edmonton Public Schools in conjunction with the Sacred Circle project[5]. Kelly's position at Fernwood is half-time; she teaches the Native Awareness class, as well as Arts and Crafts. The remainder of her position is divided between other schools in the district. In addition to teaching, Kelly is pursuing a degree in Native Studies at the University of Alberta. We met in a Native Studies Course, *Development of Native Community Resource Material.*

Kelly and I have had many conversations, but the interview granted me the privilege to record her story in her own words. At the beginning of the interview, Kelly told me a bit about her background:

> I'm from Beaver Lake, it's a really small reserve, about two and a half hours northeast of here. I had two sons, one that lives with me, the other lives with his Dad. My father, he's been dead now since '74, he spoke fluent Cree. My mother, who's also deceased, she was Metis and didn't speak Cree at all, but she did understand the language.

Kelly talked about what she had been like when she was the age of the students in the Native Awareness class.

> I think I kind of had always wanted to speak Cree and you know I was always such a rotten kid when I was growing up and I guess I just had a lot of hatred for non-Native people and so I played sports so that I could beat up on them—*legally* (laughter) If I hit them with a ball when I was playing, well I wouldn't get strapped for it or anything, it was all part of the game and I made sure they got hit. But, it was my way of fighting back, I don't know, it's a sick thing I guess, maybe it all came from the story of my Dad[6] you know and because I hated Catholic priests and nuns so much, I think that's all where that stemmed from. I don't know, I'm only guessing why I was like this.

It is difficult for me to recognize the Kelly I have come to know in this memory. I cannot help but wonder if she is remembered by those on the sports team she played against. If so, their memories would likely provide a striking contrast to mine.

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[5]The Sacred Circle project was developed by the Edmonton Public School District between 1982 and 1985 to address the needs of urban Native students and to build bridges of understanding between Native people and mainstream society (Douglas, 1987).

[6]This story will be related in chapter four.

As an adult, work was a powerful change agent for Kelly. She talked about the catalytic effect of the Native elders with whom she came into contact with while working at the Friendship Centre and through the Four Skies consulting organization.

> I guess I was looking for sort of my roots before I learned about the wonderful traditional values the old people had that I didn't grow up with, you know burning sweetgrass and going to different ceremonies, I didn't grow up with any of that stuff, that when I learned about it then I knew that this search—I'd gone to all kinds of different churches, going from one church to the next church, just on and on, looking for something for me and when I found that I knew that the search was over.
>
> And when I got hired on with Edmonton Public Schools, this became so much stronger because whatever I had I wanted the kids to have, too. I wanted them to at least get the message, at least find something at an earlier age, then finding yourself for the first time at age thirty...

Meet some of the students Kelly has been sharing the message with.

Candy

Candy[7], a grade seven student, has attended Fernwood School since she was in kindergarten. She moved to Edmonton when she was three; before that Candy lived in Evansburg on the family farm where her grandmother still lives.

Candy took the Native Awareness class to learn more about her culture. When I asked what they had talked about that was important to her, she said their past: "what they did, their dances and stuff, what they wore."

Although no one in her family speaks a Native language fluently, Candy was one of the first students in the class to indicate an interest in my research project. She told me that she is fascinated by the subject because she is Native; learning the language would be "kind of cool." If they could learn about Native issues in the Native language, rather than in English "it would be kind of like more Native than it is now, a tradition type thing." Candy was pretty sure her family language was Cree, and she knew how to say grandma and grandpa, but could not speak a sentence. Her little nephew calls her mom and dad grandma and grandpa in a Native language (Cree), but that is the extent to which the language is spoken at home.

Santeca

Santeca, also in grade seven, has lived all her life in Edmonton, although this is her first year at Fernwood School. Her mother and grandmother moved to Edmonton from British Columbia where her father and other relatives still live.

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[7]Student names have been changed.

Santeca took the Native Awareness Class because she thought it would tell her more about Native culture. Something that has been especially meaningful for her was learning about the sweetgrass ceremony. Santeca told me that she "never knew about sweetgrass before, cause our family doesn't talk about Native things."

Although she lives in Cree country, Santeca's family language is Shuswap. As far as she knew, her grandparents were the last to speak the language fluently. Santeca thought learning the language would help her to learn her culture; she would like to learn more about "the way the people used to live."

Fabio

Fabio is in grade eight, and has been a student at Fernwood for the past five years. Before that, he lived in Calgary. His parents are from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

Fabio enrolled in the Native Awareness class because he wanted to learn more about his culture. During my first visit to the class, Fabio was the student who responded to Kelly's request for someone to explain the sweetgrass ceremony to me. He told me that the three strands of the sweetgrass represent mind, body and spirit. During the interview Fabio elaborated: "the sweetgrass ceremony is important because it was part of the culture. It's been a tradition for hundreds of years. It cleanses us, like when you take a bath." Fabio was curious to know more about what kind of culture people have "cause that's kind of fascinating about people, what their roots are."

Fabio was one of the students who responded in the affirmative to my question of whether any family members spoke a Native language. In conversation, Fabio clarified his response: "well, probably my grandma mostly because she's more Native than any of us." His grandmother was born and still lives in Saskatchewan. She speaks Woodlands Cree.

Shelley

Shelley is in grade nine, and has been a student at Fernwood since she was in grade three. Prior to living in Edmonton, Shelley's home was in Morinville.

I asked Shelley if she could tell me why she took the Native Awareness class. "Well, I took it last year and I found it pretty interesting since like I don't look Native but I do have Native in me so I just thought I'd take it again because I like Native Awareness." How had the Native Awareness class made Shelley more aware?

> It's taught me more about sweetgrass and respect for elders, what they know and stuff. Before the class, I knew some things, I knew we smudged to cleanse our souls, but I learned about the circle. Kelly taught me respect for elders, before I didn't really respect my elders as much as I do now.

Discussing her Native heritage, Shelley told me that "actually, the Native is on my mother's side cause my grandmother's Native, that's where I get my Native part from, cause my Dad's not Native, he's Irish. I'm Irish, Italian, Native, French." Shelley was not sure where her grandmother was from as she had moved to Edmonton shortly after Shelley's birth, but she knew that she was Cree. Of the family members, Shelley's grandmother knew the most Cree. Sometimes she would speak Cree to her son, but

> he doesn't really know that much, he's a halfbreed like us. All of us are halfbreeds in our family, except for my Grandma, she's like the most Native.

Johnny

Johnny has lived in Edmonton all his life. A grade eight student, he has attended Fernwood for four years. Johnny signed up for the Native Awareness class because he wanted to know more about his culture. He would like to learn "all the sorts of languages Native people spoke, and where these tribes started off from, like a family tree."

Johnny told me about his Native heritage:

> Where I come from, my band it's Kehewin, and Chief Kehewin was Chief Big Bear's son and his mother was Chief Big Bear's wife...First, my mom grew up in Kehewin and my dad was from Cold Lake First Nation. It's not that far from there.

Johnny still has relatives in Kehewin—grandparents, aunts and uncles—whom he visits fairly often. Some of his visits are fairly lengthy; last summer he spent two months on the reserve. Compared to being here in the city, Johnny described the time he spends in Kehewin as "more relaxing, you can almost do anything you want outside."

Unlike most of the other students in the Native Awareness class, for whom sweetgrass burning had been a new experience, this was a regular occurrence for Johnny.

> Well, I basically do that almost every day we smudge ourselves, ya, at home so it's just regular to me... most of the time like someone leaves early in the morning, at different times, so I just do it to myself.

Tonya

Tonya, a grade eight student, was born in Edmonton. She has been a student at Fernwood since kindergarten, having lived in the neighborhood all her life.

Tonya, one of the non-Native students, enrolled in the Native Awareness class because she is "really interested in other peoples' cultures and things. I decided it would be fun also to learn about other things that I don't know about." One of the reasons Tonya signed up for an interview was "just the fact that I'm not Native but I'm still in the Native awareness class. Well, it's something special just

to be white and in a Native class, and the way that they still look at you, all even." What had Tonya learned about Native culture through the Native Awareness class?

> Well, I've learned about the way that they take care of themselves and how they feel about other things and people. One thing is they care for everything and everyone which means everything equal and most people these days aren't very equal, so it helps a lot, even when I go to Native Awareness class I'm a lot more calm and everything.

I asked Tonya if there were any languages besides English in her life: "No, not exactly, my mother and father are Dutch, but the only time they speak it is when they're talking to relatives long distance on the phone." Her mother was born in Holland, and her father in Indonesia; they are both still fluent in Dutch. Tonya herself knows "a couple of things in Dutch, not much."

Ken

A grade eight student, Ken has lived in Edmonton most of his life and has attended Fernwood School since grade one. His parents came to Canada from China shortly before Ken was born.

Ken signed up for the Native Awareness class because he wanted "to understand Native culture. There's mostly Native people in my class, so I wanted to learn more about them." His impression was "that they're not really working. Most of the Native students in my class, they're below level."

Of the students I interviewed, only Ken is bilingual. His family language is Cantonese.

> Well, we just speak Cantonese at home cause our parents don't know how to speak English, they just speak Cantonese. Well, they've learned just a little English.

Ken has learned most of his English through school. When he started grade one, Ken spoke "a bit of English." How was school for Ken when he didn't speak much English? "Well, I just didn't talk, didn't even speak that much. I only spoke to people who knew how to speak Cantonese." At the time there were about fifteen students in the school who spoke Cantonese.

CHAPTER 3

BUT MY STUDENTS ALL SPEAK ENGLISH

> Lots of important people be at the council of Indian tribes meeting in Calgary. It be kind of mixed up with the Alberta election or something and there be about as many white people there as Indians. Only difference be that the meeting be held outdoors, in the big park near the zoo. If it been a white man meeting it be held at the Auditorium or the Corral, guess after a while Indians believe what they told about themselves[8].
>
> (Kinsella, 1977:126-7)

TWO LANGUAGE DOMAINS[9]

Introduction

From the introductions at the close of chapter two, it is apparent that none of the research participants speak a Native language (though they have expressed a desire to do so). Thus it may seem odd that I am writing a thesis about Native languages with research participants who "all speak English." The title of this chapter is taken from an article which speaks to a common assumption on the part of teachers that all Native students speak English—they do not. The first section discusses the problems that are often associated with this assumption.

However, in addition to addressing a misunderstanding, the comment can also be taken literally, as with the research participants, who all do speak English. With these students, it is correct to assume that they speak English. They do so at the expense of a traditional language which was spoken by family members in previous generations[10]. For these particular students, urban life has likely accelerated the language loss process.

But, it is not only urban Native students who have been alienated from their traditional language and culture. There is a history of Native children who go to school, not just to acquire skills and knowledge, but to learn how to be *not* Native. To be successful they have to put aside their Native identity. A significant aspect of this is that it is *expected* that they speak English only. This expectation in itself is not negative. What is problematic is that the general trend is that, for Native people, the learning of English (or

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[8]After reading a short story by Kinsella, one of my Native students noted that "he writes the way that some white people think Indians talk." I include this as an example of the typical stereotyping discussed in this chapter.

[9]I use domain to refer to the different languages spoken, in this case English and a Native language.

[10]At this point, I am referring to the research participants of Native heritage. Ken is bilingual in English and his family language, Cantonese.

other dominant language) often results in the loss of their own language. The school system has been instrumental in the process.

How do Native people feel about the expectation that their children either do or should speak English[11]? The general consensus is that Native people want their children to be educated for life in two (or more) cultural worlds: the dominant culture and the traditional culture[12]. In terms of language, this means being able to speak the language of the dominant society as well as maintaining their traditional language. As far as I can determine, the school system consistently fails to educate students for success in either cultural world. This chapter addresses the language component of that failure.

Awareness and understanding on the part of educators is essential so that more Native students are given the opportunity to be educated for "both worlds." Being able to learn and speak a Native language should be part of that. For Native students there *are* two language domains, but in school one has been given precedence, and the other one denied.

"Indian English"

During the course of my studies I read an article which addressed language needs and characteristics of Saskatchewan Indian and Metis students (Heit and Blair, 1993). One of the sections,*"But My Students All Speak English": The Nature of Dialects*, caused me to have "teacher flashbacks." As a teacher of Native students, it brought back so many memories, and yes, the subtitle fit: all my students did speak English.

FLASHBACK
August, 1980. I've arrived in Anahim Lake, a predominantly Native community in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of British Columbia, for my first teaching job. A group of curious children from the nearby reserve have come to welcome the new teacher at my teacherage, which is situated on the schoolgrounds. The new principal and his wife are in the other half of the teacherage. In conversation, the children refer to the new principal as 'he', 'his'. Then, I hear someone referring to me as 'him.' I'm confused—I think, hey, what's going on here? They've been calling me *Miss* Wiltse, they know I'm female, don't they?... I know these are backwoods kids, but surely they can tell the difference between men/women. What have I got myself in for here?

> As in many Indigenous languages, Cree classifies things according to whether they are animate or inanimate, and not according to a gender that is masculine, feminine, or neuter as in English. Thus Cree students learning English will frequently use "he" when they mean "she".
>
> (Heit & Blair, 1993:119)

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[11]This chapter pertains to school; however, this comment applies to Native people outside the school system as well.

[12]While acknowledging the dangers, I will be making generalizations in this thesis; they will be based on the literature and my teaching and personal experiences.

This seemingly inconsequential bit of information has a deeper symbolic significance for me. Not only does it mark the beginning of what has become, to date, a career working with Native students, but it represents the vast chasm of miscommunication that frequently exists between Native students and their non-Native teachers. I cannot remember how long it took before I learned about that feature of most Native languages, but it was a while and by chance rather than design that I found out. I feel pained regret thinking about the damage my ignorance may have caused. Unfortunately, these misinformed insidious judgments extend beyond the walls of the classroom, as Kelly's words demonstrate.

> When I went to school, I remember telling my Dad you know that he called he or she, there's kind of one word for the way we differentiate gender and things are just animate or inanimate, you're one or the other and so it wasn't he or she and when he was speaking English he used to call the girls he, and I would always tell him, you know Daddy, girls are *she* and guys are *he* and so for a while when he talked about him he would call him he and an hour later he would fall back to calling him she and I just thought that you know well what's the matter with this old guy? And if I would have known I would have never corrected him, but that's only because of my understanding now.

Many Indian and Metis students speak a dialect of English that is the result of the influence of the Indigenous language on English. The term dialect refers to varieties of the same language; they are not different languages, but are variations of a single language, exhibiting varying degrees of differences in the areas of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and discourse patterns. Research shows dialects of English to be legitimate, systematic and rule-governed. Dialects do not constitute sub-standard or deficient forms of language, yet negative attitudes are often associated with certain non-standard dialects. Differences between standard English and Indigenous English can be identified, as for all dialects, in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse (Heit & Blair, 1993). That certain dialects are accorded more prestige while others are denigrated can be evidenced in Kelly's description:

> ...and I guess that's where I kind of fail because a lot of times our parents don't always understand what the school is trying to tell them and I think that they'd probably understand better if I could speak Cree with them and just with that and just speaking to our older people, and they feel so much more comfortable because our Native people who speak Cree like Ruth[13], she has a really heavy accent of being a Cree speaker and I think that they are kind of embarrassed about their accent you know when people have a

[13]This name has been changed.

> *different* kind of accent like English (from England) or Scottish or Australian, people say that you know it's *so* cute or it sounds nice but when you have a Cree speaker who has a really heavy accent people laugh about that. They have made fun of it for years and they still do. So, our Native people aren't always that anxious to speak English and so what ends up happening is that they would feel more comfortable if they could speak Cree.

The reason given here for Cree speakers not wanting to speak English is legitimate. I can recall hearing jokes told in "Indian English;" the intent was certainly derogatory. Correspondingly, I have memories of people raving over an Australian accent, for example. On the one hand, Native people are expected to speak English; on the other hand they are made to feel shame for the way they speak it.

It is necessary to acknowledge the importance of teacher attitudes to students' language. The lack of knowledge about the nature of dialects has led and will continue to lead to misunderstandings and miseducation of Indian and Metis students when language differences are interpreted as language deficiencies, or when they lead to the formation of stereotypes or misjudgments of someone's ability on the basis of his/her spoken language (Heit and Blair, 1993:121). The authors are careful to note that "this is not intended to blame teachers, rather to inquire whether enough information is being provided by the teacher training programmes and institutions regarding varieties of English and appropriate methodologies for second language/dialect teaching" (Heit and Blair, 1993:123). Based on personal experience, this inquiry would lead to a negative answer. Kelly offers a different perspective.

> ...and I just think that our teachers need to get a grip and understand that there's a total difference with Cree and English and you know they all complain about...or well maybe not complain, but they all wonder why, you know, Native students do so poorly and yet when we have a Native Awareness workshop or inservice, there's usually more Native liaison workers there than there are teachers, so I just said, there's absolutely no way, I said I wasn't going to humour anybody anymore by putting on an inservice when there was always more liaison workers there than there was people from the district.

Toohey (1986) argues that mere documentation of the ways in which students' dialect differs from standard English in a structural sense is not enough. It is not clear how an investigation of "Indian English" concerned with specifying structural features could help teachers in classrooms. There is a need to go beyond specifying discrete formal differences between standard and non-standard dialects if we are to help students acquire the language skills they require for successful participation in classrooms. Toohey's point is that the kind of information structural linguists supply has not been pedagogically

useful; it is not linguists who can tell teachers how to listen to and talk with their students. It is rarely the surface structural differences which confuse or terminate conversations between Native students and non-Native teachers. If I had been informed about some of the structural differences when I was teaching in Anahim Lake, confusion and misunderstanding may have been reduced. However, Toohey certainly has a valid argument. Reflecting on my own teaching memories, I can say that nothing is more important than being able to communicate in a meaningful way with students.

In her study of Warm Springs Indian children, Philips (1993:127) notes that Indian students experience communicative interference on a number of levels: dialect differences; differences in rules for appropriate discourse; and differences in cultural knowledge. In my experience working on reserves, I have been witness to examples of each of these resulting in miscommunication especially between Indian student and white teacher. Miscommunication occurs even when teachers are well-intentioned; if the teacher cannot assimilate what the student is trying to say, by virtue of the teacher's authority, the students are seen as the ones who do not understand[14].

Second Language Learning

Likewise, lack of knowledge about second language learning can have negative repercussions for Native students. In her study of the Cree community in Fort Albany, Toohey (1985) describes the language education programme in the school and evaluates the extent to which students are developing proficiency in English. Although the students in this northern, isolated community begin school speaking either mainly or only Swampy Cree, the medium of instruction is English. Not surprisingly, study results pointed to poor English proficiency. However, I was surprised with Toohey's finding that "teachers clearly did not believe that the language of school instruction was a problem for their students" (p. 278). When I examined my response more thoroughly, I realized it was influenced by my "new-found" learning about language. As a classroom teacher, I knew that many of my Native students experienced difficulty with English language learning. It was obvious that the established language arts programme was not meeting the needs of my students. I grew to detest the basal reading series, thinking instead that "whole language" was the answer. After all, "whole language" is supposed to be "holistic." It is only now that I see the irony in assuming that a language programme for Native students that did not consider the Native language could be holistic.

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[14]Peggy Wilson's (1992) study of Native students in a Manitoban high school offers a powerful example of the kind of poor communication that frequently occurs between Native students and non-Native teachers.

> ...it is important to stress that the native system does not depend on speaking a native language. Cree English retains a basically Cree semantic system and is used in Cree interactional contexts. Language code is, then, a trivial determinant of communicative effectiveness. In fact, the native person whose first or only language is English may be subject to greater communicative difficulty simply because both parties to interethnic communication assume incorrectly that they speak the same language.
> (Darnell, 1985:63)

> ...and it always seems that we have to be grammatically correct and I sometimes correct the kids in school. They never use he and she incorrectly but just other little words you know I may correct them but you know when I think back on what I did to my Dad I keep thinking that *somehow or another you know these kids are Cree speakers.*
> Kelly (my emphasis)

Like myself, the teachers of the students Kelly is referring to would be able to make the statement, "But my students all speak English." However, they are likely unaware the degree to which a Native language can influence English.

Heit and Blair (1993:125) call for teachers to become advocates for their Indian and Metis students in order to dispel the myths of linguistic and cultural deprivation that still exist. Before this can be actualized, teachers (generally) must become better informed. This need is exemplified in Kelly's comment:

> Well, I think some of our teachers have a problem with it and I guess because *we* happen to be in Canada, born here, that everybody, all these teachers seem to think that we should be able to speak perfect English. However, they don't realize that a lot of our kids, that English *is* their second language. There isn't an English as a second language programme for Cree speakers and there should be...they would never think of English as a second language for Cree speakers. Somehow or another there's just absolutely no concept to that. It's unacceptable, almost. Like, what do you mean, you were born in Canada and that's just I don't know, an ignorance of our school system, thinking that, why should we have an English as a second language programme for Cree kids and *even I have a hard time with it and I never spoke Cree.* (my emphasis)

Why is it that Kelly has trouble with English in school, when it was her first language, *and* when she never spoke Cree? I asked Kelly if she thought that similar circumstances applied to her students.

> Ya, because of the way that their parents speak at home, because even if *their* parents don't speak Cree at home *their* parents did and so that influence is coming from a second generation and so I think that maybe when we're doing language arts that we should not only have ESL for immigrants but also for Native Canadians.

In trying to piece this information together, what strikes me as particularly significant is that for many Native students, regardless of whether English or a Native language is their first language, these two language domains influence each other. Yet, all too often this is neither understood nor addressed.

Fredeen (1991:115-6) notes that the prevailing view among many Canadian educators that English has completely replaced indigenous languages can be detrimental. While students may appear to be fluent in English, they may not have the type of proficiency in English that is necessary for academic success. James Cummins, renowned for his work in minority language education, offers an explanation for this occurrence. His "Threshold Hypothesis" states that:

> ...there may be threshold levels of linguistic proficiency which bilingual children must attain in order to avoid cognitive deficits, and allow the potentially beneficial aspects of becoming bilingual to influence cognitive growth. The Threshold Hypothesis assumes that those aspects of bilingualism that might positively influence cognitive growth are unlikely to come into effect until children have attained a certain minimum or threshold level of proficiency in the second language. (Cummins, 1981:38)

Put simply, this hypothesis can be restated to say that in terms of reaching full cognitive potential, a child who is only marginally proficient in two languages is worse off than a child who knows one language very well. Cummins' Threshold Hypothesis has to do with the danger of semilingualism and has implications for Native schooling. It may appear to teachers that students have a sufficient grasp of the English language, when in reality they may need more exposure to intensive language teaching of a meaningful nature; this misunderstanding often results in poor quality English as a Second Language programmes for Indian and Metis students (Toohey, 1986)[15]. There is a need for more ESL teaching in Native education, but also for improved ESL teaching (Burnaby, 1984:11).

The need for close co-operation between English language programmes and Native language and culture programmes is stressed in Burnaby's (1984) article on the Symposium on Language Development for Native Peoples[16]. Participants, who came from all areas of Canada, were adamant that the teaching of official languages not be considered out of the context of Native language use and teaching. The decision was made to consider all types of Native education to be appropriate sites for "bilingual education."

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[15]While Kelly's experience is that Native students do not receive ESL, many Native students are enrolled in ESL programmes.

[16]TESL Canada, *Symposium on language development for Native peoples: Final Report*. TESL Canada, 1982.

This decision, while consequential, is clearly not enough. There needs to be a change in the type of bilingual education Native children are receiving. Toohey (1985:290) discusses what is wrong with bilingual education for Native students.

> If education in northern Canadian Native communities were bilingual education, where serious attention was paid to developing first-language skills, and if teachers in northern Native schools were predominantly speakers of Native languages, and if those persons were trained extensively in teaching second languages, second-language learning results, as well as schooling results generally, might be quite different from current results.

These inadequacies are not unique to education in northern Native communities; Toohey's critique can be applied to the three schools in Native communities where I worked. My understanding of the complexity of second language learning and the interconnectedness between languages was limited. There was very little of the close co-operation between English language programmes and Native language/culture programmes which Burnaby (above) advocates. There was collaboration in terms of the cultural content, but no consultation in language programme planning in the sense that the Native and English language programmes could benefit from such.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR NATIVE STUDENTS

Definitions

In this section, I will outline the types of language programmes Native students receive and discuss their strengths and limitations. First, it is necessary, for the purposes of this thesis, to define what is meant by bilingualism and bilingual education. Here I refer to the work of linguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas who specializes in the issues of minority education, bilingualism language and power.

As there are potentially hundreds of definitions of bilingualism, it is imperative to define "bilingual" every time it is used (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990a:10). Bilingualism as an educational goal for majorities and minorities are often different. According to the author, majorities are mostly interested in the part of the bilingualism goal which has to do with the learning of the majority language by minority children; they tolerate the minority language in the curriculum only if it leads to better proficiency in the majority language. The minorities want their children to become truly bilingual: to learn the dominant language, but not to lose their own language in the process.

Skutnabb Kangas organizes definitions of bilingualism according to the following criteria: origin, identification, competence, and function[17]. The author has designed a definition to fit the situation of immigrant and indigenous minority children. The goal of education should be to make the children bilingual according to this definition:

> A speaker is bilingual who is able to function in two (or more) languages, either in monolingual or multilingual communities, in accordance with the sociocultural demands made on an individual's communicative and cognitive competence by these communities and by the individual herself, at the same level as native speakers, and who is able to identify positively with both (or all) language groups (and cultures) or part of them.
> (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990a:11)

Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) analyses the different types of bilingual education programmes under four main headings: segregation; mother tongue maintenance (or language shelter); submersion and immersion programmes[18]. The author also assesses the degree of success (high or low), the medium of education (L1 or L2) and the linguistic and societal goals of the programme.

Other linguists in bilingual education employ different terminology to describe similar programming. For example, Hollihan (1993) identifies four types of bilingual language programmes for aboriginal students: transitional (premised on an eventual shift to the majority language); monoliterate (in which any language maintenance is short-term); partial (some language will be maintained, and cultural development is utilized and fostered); and full (language maintenance is expected, and there is full cultural development).

"The societal aims of bilingual education span the continuum from transition (shift from minority to majority language use in school and society) to maintenance (continuing use of minority language within the majority language school and society" (Stairs, 1988:308). In the case of indigenous minorities, the transition versus maintenance issue becomes the much more profound question of assimilation and extinction versus survival and evolution of a human culture.

Additive and Subtractive Language Learning

In effect, language programmes are either used to facilitate mainstream language development, or to ensure that independent thought can occur in either language. One factor influencing whether the language learning situation is additive (you add a new language to your existing linguistic repertoire, without losing your mother tongue) or

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[17]See Skutnabb-Kangas (1990:10-11; 1988:20-22) for further information on definitions of bilingualism.
[18]See Appendix 1 for descriptions of these bilingual educational programmes.

subtractive (another language replaces the mother tongue) is the degree to which second language teaching supports or harms first language development (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988:30). While only submersion or transitional programmes (aka "humane linguicide") threaten the mother tongue in a subtractive manner, they are still by far the most common way of educating indigenous minorities in most countries.

The reason these "so-called" bilingual Native language programmes are so common can be explained, at least partially, by another of Cummins' hypotheses, the "Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis", by which Cummins argues that the literacy-related aspects of a bilingual's proficiency in the first and second languages are seen as common or interdependent across languages. Experience with either language is capable of promoting the proficiency that underlies the development of academic skills in both languages (Cummins, 1981:33).

Harris (1990:94-98), relating this to the aboriginal context, explains that if we want aboriginal children to develop competence in English (or other dominant language) one of the most efficient ways to assist this is to first harness aboriginal languages to promote the learning of Western academic skills. The hypothesis suggests that skills learned in the aboriginal language and transferred to English will ultimately allow more efficient learning in English than would be the case if only English were used.

There is a theoretical explanation for the findings showing a strong connection between ancestral language instruction and increased English proficiency. Cummins (1981b:22-25) proposes the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) Model of Bilingual Proficiency in contrast to the Separate Underlying Proficiency (SUP) Model upon which methods such as ESL are based. The SUP model assumes that there is a separate proficiency in each language and therefore content and skills learned in one do not transfer to a second language. The CUP model argues for a single model of proficiency underlying both languages so that experience with either language increases the common language proficiency, assuming that the person has adequate motivation and exposure to both languages in or out of school.

If ancestral language instruction can be equated with improved achievement in English and other academic areas[19], why am I so critical? In the context of minorities with threatened languages, Harris's analysis caused me to consider these results from a different perspective. The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis demonstrates that *not* teaching the aboriginal language can have an adverse effect on academic achievement. Conversely, if the language learning has been transitional or subtractive, this has an adverse effect on the aboriginal language. With this type of programming, children are

[19]For a survey of studies, see Cummins (1981b).

frequently denied the opportunity to learn the first language as an effective instrument for thinking; the result is dominance in the majority language at the expense of the mother tongue. It should be clear that in its unmodified form the motivation for the interdependence hypothesis is to use bilingual education more for academic gain than for minority culture maintenance (Harris, 1990:96-97).

The connection between ancestral language learning and school achievement in the dominant language is documented in the case of the Quechua in Peru. Hornberger (1989) comments that the most effective argument for convincing community members to have the bilingual education programmes in their school is to demonstrate that their children learn to read Spanish better through bilingual education than through traditional Spanish-only education. To this end, programme research has focused on reading in Spanish as a measure of the success of the bilingual programme. It follows that, if community members accept the use of Quechua in their schools primarily because it achieves a more effective teaching of Spanish, then the type of bilingual education applied is likely to be increasingly transitional. In a societal context in which Spanish is the language of prestige, the introduction of Quechua throughout the primary years may paradoxically contribute to shift to Spanish by keeping more Quechua speaking in school longer[20].

Clearly, I am not de-emphasizing the importance of majority language proficiency or improved academic achievement. However, if this is the intention, it should be made evident to those implicated. It is largely a matter of priorities whether or not the aboriginal language is used to ease the transition to English, or to be an equal partner in a bilingual programme aimed at language maintenance. My experience is that many aboriginal people do want language maintenance as opposed to transfer; if this is to be realized, something other than a transitional language approach has to be adopted. All too frequently Native people either have no voice in language programming or those making decisions are doing so without benefit of substantive information. Judgments are often grounded in myths and misunderstandings: one pertinent to this discussion is that second language learning is detrimental to academic progress. Next, I will explain why, for minority language learners, there is some basis to this myth.

Ambiguities, Inconsistencies and Implications

The interdependence hypothesis, detailed above, points to the potential benefits of bilingualism. However, for the interdependence hypothesis to work, the threshold hypothesis has to be working as well. If the children are not proficient in the first language, they do not have the skills *to* transfer to the second language.

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[20]For further studies see Aiko (1991), Briggs (1985), Day (1981), Harris (1990), and Stairs (1988).

In an attempt to resolve the inconsistency that bilingualism is associated with both positive and negative cognitive and academic effects, Cummins (1981b) regards the level of bilingualism that children attain to be a determining factor. Many of the studies with "negative" results involved language minority children whose L1 was being replaced by a more dominant and prestigious L2. The result was that these children developed relatively low levels of academic proficiency in both languages. The majority of the studies with "positive" results involved students whose L1 proficiency was not imperiled, for example French immersion for English Canadians.

The poor academic performance of minority language students has often been attributed to a "linguistic mismatch" between home and school. However, Cummins (1981a:25-26; 1981b:20-40), in an explanation of the nature of bilingual proficiency, cites several studies which show that the use of a minority language in the home is not a handicap to children's academic progress.

Cummins refers to a longitudinal study carried out by Chesarek (1981) among elementary students on a Crow reservation in Montana that is particularly relevant to this thesis. Students who had one or more Crow-speaking parents but were raised as English speakers scored significantly lower on a non-verbal ability test at school entry than either native Crow-speaking children or English-speaking children of two English-speaking parents. Furthermore, in a longitudinal follow-up for grade three students who had been in a bilingual instructional programme in a reserve school, it was found that this group had lower performance on several aspects of English achievement than the native Crow-speaking group. Chesarek notes: "In other words, children who had only three years exposure to English in a bilingual programme context were surpassing children for whom English was the only language" (cited in Cummins, 1981b:30).

The SUP model would have predicted that students who only hear the majority language at home would perform better than those who used only a minority language in the home. Rather, the research supports the CUP model; experience with either language can promote the proficiency that is needed for developing academic skills in both languages. In itself, the language used in the home is not the determining factor for academic development. For minority parents who are not comfortable in English, the decision to use that language in the home may be detrimental, rather than beneficial, as the quality and quantity of interactions may be effected.

I have presented possible explanations for the "unsatisfactory" academic performance of language minority students. Here I speak briefly to the problematic way that performance is often interpreted. When Native and other language minority students perform poorly in the English language medium at school, the assumption is often made

that the solution is increased exposure to English. The counter argument (that simply increasing ESL time is *not* the answer) has received much support (see Cummins, 1981b, 1984; Wells, 1986; Wells and Chang-Wells, 1992). These authors suggest that merely increasing the amount of spoken language in the classroom would not make a significant improvement unless the quality of classroom talk is also addressed since the type of interaction going on in many ESL classes is perceived as not very meaningful. Rather, they argue that focusing on spoken language for *remedial* or *compensatory* purposes may be counterproductive. Teachers need to reexamine their ideas about the appropriateness of the language demands they make on students and attempt to create communities of collaborative inquirers in which "language is less a subject to be taught than it is a set of resources to be drawn upon in carrying out the various activities necessary to conduct an inquiry and communicate the results to others" (Wells and Chang-Wells, 1992:90).

This line of thinking is similar to the position taken by McCarty et al. (1991) in their critique of the educational literature which continues to characterize Native children as nonanalytical, nonverbal learners. The scripted "dialogues" typical of English-as-a-second-language programmes provide just the kind of behavioural evidence that reinforces existent stereotypes. These generalizations are then used to justify nonacademic and nonchallenging curricula for Native students, instead of providing them with opportunities for open-ended discussion and inquiry.

Native Language Programs

In the preceding inquiry into bilingual education, I criticized the transitional approach. This discussion pertains to students who come to school speaking a minority language other than the language of instruction. Essentially, a programme whose agenda is to ease shift from one language to another can hardly be considered bilingual education; certainly it is not going to make children bilingual according to Skutnabb-Kangas's definition.

It must be noted that Native students come from a variety of language backgrounds, ranging from being monolingual in the Native language to being monolingual in the dominant language. The percentage of Native students who do not speak their traditional language, either at all or as the language of communication in the home, is steadily increasing. The reality for many students, *if* they have a Native language programme, is that the Native language is used as a subject of instruction, not as the medium of instruction[21].

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[21]Language as a subject of instruction refers to a language which is taught as the content of a course in a school curriculum (Burnaby, 1980:292). Language as a medium of instruction refers to the language which is used as the basis of communication between the teacher and students (Burnaby, 1980:248-9).

What do language programmes look like for these students? Having worked in three schools where children were receiving Native language instruction, I blend my own reflections with the literature and other data. The scope of the this thesis does not allow for a thorough examination of Native language programmes. Burnaby (1980) provides this in *Languages and Their Roles in Educating Native Children.*

I thought it was "right" that the children I worked with were learning Kwak'wala or Nuu Chah Nulth, for example, instead of French. As I learn more about language in my graduate programme, I begin to get a better sense of what these language programmes were doing, but also what they were *not* doing. Burnaby (1980:183-184) notes:

> There is no doubt that everyone's sense of Native identity has been heightened by the initiation of language programmes and the other projects that have inspired... It seems as if language has become a rallying point around which these mainly English speaking Native communities have gathered to affirm their solidarity in Nativeness. The bulk of the Native language impact in the school programmes is in the learning of symbolic vestiges of the language, the numbers, the names of animals and some traditional objects, some greetings and social formulae and so on. Little or no skill in manipulating the morphological and syntactic patterns of the language is gained.

This description sounds very much like the language programmes I am familiar with. Burnaby's point is that the language is being treated as a treasured artifact that can be identified with; however, the language environment is not demanding enough to motivate learners to actually learn to use the language as a medium of communication.

This came through in Kelly's description of how much Cree she was able to speak after taking Cree classes:

> Well, I was able to introduce myself but not without reading it from a card, so it wasn't so much that I was able to speak but that if people were to speak to me slow that I'd be able to answer them but I wouldn't answer them in Cree, I'd answer them in English, like if they asked me if I spoke Cree, I'd say no or I would say a little bit, but in English or if they asked me how I was doing I'd answer them in English, so I could carry on a conversation with somebody but the whole time they'd be speaking Cree, and I'd be speaking English.

Kelly's comment confirms what I had been thinking for months: these language programmes are not "teaching" people how to speak the language; rather, they are teaching *about* the language *in* another language.

> ...when I was taking Cree, the instructor was teaching Cree in English which was really hard, it should have been almost like a Cree immersion programme. I don't know how they teach it in French but I think probably that's how it should have been taught.

I agree with Kelly that a Cree immersion programme would have had different results. Burnaby notes that her observations of Native language programmes (above) do not include Native immersion programmes. Although most language programmes for Native students can be classed as either transitional or subject of instruction, there are some Native language immersion programmes (see Fuerer, 1993; Spolsky; 1989).

Accepting that students in a language programme other than immersion were unlikely to learn to "speak" the language was difficult for me. Last summer, in an attempt to reconcile some of the conflicts I was struggling with, I wrote a paper which I entitled "Doubt." The following flashback and journal response are from that paper:

FLASHBACK

Ha-Ho-Payuk School, Port Alberni, 1991. It is late June, the last day of school. The hall is packed with students, parents, younger siblings, grandparents. The Graduation Ceremony for the Grade 6's, who will be going on to Junior High, is about to begin. They have been my students for the past two years. They are wearing cedar headbands that they have made in Native studies class. The girls are wearing button blankets, the boys vests; both have been decorated by hand with the family crest. The students are excited and nervous; they have been practicing their speeches for weeks in Native language class. Jackie[22] steps to the center. Her father stands at one side, her mother at the other. Shyly, she makes her speech. It isn't long. Knowing only a few words of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth language, I don't understand much of her speech. But, looking at Jackie's parents, there were other things to understand that day. When Jackie finished, her mother, tears in eyes, stepped forward. She spoke, her voice shaking, of residential school, of being punished for speaking her Native language. She spoke of her shame at no longer being able to speak her given language, and, crying readily, of her pride at having her daughter learn the Nuu Chah Nulth language in school.

JOURNAL RESPONSE

I am aware that the language programme at Ha-Ho-Payuk School, as is, is *not* teaching children to be fluent speakers of the Nuu Chah Nulth language. I know this to be true, though part of me does not want to acknowledge it. English is the language spoken in most homes and it is the language of instruction in the school. They are learning *about* their traditional language, but it is *not* becoming their language of communication. Is this enough? Is it worth it? Would it be better to spend that time improving their English skills? I've read so many studies this year that I'm breathing "data." Some defend Native language maintenance; others promote the dominant language as the "key to success." I can appreciate both arguments. But, for me Jackie and her parents are *real*. They're the individual manifestation of those statistics. I have similar stories of other students that move me as much. I believe that Native language programmes make a difference for Native youth because I have witnessed it. (excerpt from paper, July, 1994)

As Burnaby says:

> It takes more time to see the real social effects of a minority language programme than the academic effects. Goals such as the stemming of the

[22]This student's name has been changed.

> tide of Native language loss are huge and will only be evaluatable in a generation's time if that soon. This aspect of education is inclined to be sacrificed by educational administrators who have stronger pressures on them to show immediate results. But if education is to play a role in real social change, a great deal of patience is required. (1980:188-9)

I strongly agree with Burnaby on this point. I believe that education *can* play a role in positive social change, but it seldom does so, especially regarding "Native education." The information I have presented on Native language programming may seem discouraging; it says more about what is problematic and less about what is working well. Hopefully, some parameters have been established (partially by a process of elimination).

There must be other ways of measuring the value of Native languages; my belief is that Native languages should be given priority in their own right. In the last section of this chapter I will explore possible initiatives that allow for this to be realized.

INDIGENOUS WAYS TO GO TO SCHOOL[23]

World View

In her thesis, Cora Weber-Pillwax (1992:56) makes the comment: "Until I went into a classroom, I could avoid any major personal shifts in my own view of the world." If I changed view of *world* to view of *school*, I could make the same statement. I thought I was prepared for the my first teaching job. I decided to be a teacher when I was seven years old and I never changed my mind. Unlike some of fellow colleagues, I did not feel that I had had a particularly "sheltered" background. My high school years were spent in a very small rural community; there was a nearby reserve and I had Native classmates and friends. I was personally familiar with some of the social problems so often associated with reserves. I had experienced culture shock (along with amebic dysentery and typhoid fever) as a volunteer in an Indian village in the Guatemalan highlands. While I had been effected by many external factors in my life, *my view of school remained largely untouched.*

"What makes it easy for the non-native teachers to 'just teach', in a supposedly neutral position, is that the schooling process is built upon their own societal colors, ideologies and belief systems" (Weber-Pillwax, 1992:56). It was never *easy* for me. I agree with Cora, absolutely, that the schooling process is built upon "our" societal colors, ideologies and belief systems. That is precisely what made it so difficult.

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[23]This title is based on the article, "Indigenous Ways to go to School: Exploring Many Visions" (Stairs, (1994a:63-66).

Cora continues:

> As a native teacher, actively involved in teaching native students, I found myself facing the overwhelming task of integrating two systems of education into some form which would have meaning for native children. Needless to say, I went into this activity and accepted this responsibility with no specific preparatory training from either society. In fact, I went into this position without the level of personal understanding that was required for the task. Over the years, through my own process of self-development, my understanding and awareness of the immensity and the near impossibility of this form of integration became clear. (p.57)

As a *non-native* teacher, actively involved in teaching native students, I found myself facing a similar task. I will never know the reality of what a Native teacher faces, but the common theme is that we were both trying to provide an education that would have meaning for native students (with no specific preparatory training from either society).

I went from the school in Anahim Lake to work at two band-operated schools on Vancouver Island. Compared to my previous experience, my sense of these schools was that they were integrating two systems of education; it is only recently that I am beginning to understand what Cora meant by "the immensity and the near impossibility of this form of integration."

> There has never been any systematic attempt to provide school programmes to Native communities that support the values and philosophy of Natives. The very structure of the "educational system" itself is a totally foreign one; existing "Native Heritage" efforts are for the most part supplementary programmes added to the standard framework. (Tafoya, 1983:38)

This is a fair assessment. When I think of the Native language/culture programmes I am familiar with, Tafoya's (1983:38) observation that "even the heritage programmes designed with the intent to provide our Native communities with revival and maintenance programmes aren't different in essence from the ESL/FSL models, in the sense that the educational approach is similar" rings true. The classrooms, sentence drills, flash cards, grammar lessons, workbooks and so on are all components of the Western school system.

I did not realize that the *way* I think about teaching was so Western. For example, I considered the schools I worked in as being more appropriate for Native students because they included Native language and culture as part of the curriculum. While my students were receiving language instruction in Kwak'wala or Nuu Chah Nulth, they were doing so in "English space." Similarly, in an article documenting the changing patterns of language socialization in Inuit homes in Northern Quebec, the authors note that even though there has been an Inuit-controlled Kativik School Board since 1976, many of the educational practices remain mainstream (Crago, Annahatak, and Lizzie, 1993). Reporting

on education for Inuit youth, Annahatak (1994:17) makes the point that more often than not Inuit values are left out of school. She has coined the term "floating lessons" to describe the type of surface learning (physical aspects of culture such as food, clothing, tools, and customs) that frequently occurs. They are not connected to Inuit cultural purposes and they rarely touch upon students' choices, decisions, and identity. Simply reflecting the local culture/language in the curriculum is not enough if the learning-teaching processes and values remain unchanged.

The inadequacy of the education system for Native students (here I focus on language maintenance) is one of the reasons why I have been so influenced by Stephen Harris's (1990) book, *Two Way Aboriginal Schooling: Education and Cultural Survival.* He proposes a model of bicultural schooling for Australian aborigines in which aboriginal language and culture are taught as legitimate ends in themselves, not merely as a means to more effective learning of English. The reasoning is that a theory of biculturalism which works for people of two dominant world cultures in contact which have similar world views and economy, may not fit for two cultures in contact where the population size, world view, political system and economic structure are highly divergent (Harris, 1990:xiii). Harris's position is that while some cultures are more compatible than others, aboriginal and western cultures as basically incompatible. My introduction to Harris's book coincided with my learning about language programming for Native students, in particular, the transitional approach. Therefore, what he had to say about aboriginal language maintenance made sense: the language teaching methodology needs to be chosen on grounds other than only those of what seems to be the most effective approach to language teaching or to academic growth (Harris, 1994).

It was not until later that I thought more closely about what Harris meant by "incompatible cultures." In other words, which methodology is most conducive for language maintenance is only one element in the overall question of whether schools for Native students will be inevitably asssimilationist. In her thesis, Weber-Pillwax (1992:65) presents "a picture of native education as a process whose movements are very much determined and crippled by a cultural impasse."

In an article about educational programs for youth at the Akwesasne Mohawk Reserve, LaFrance (1994:20), refers to something akin to a "cultural impasse."

> Indigenous people have long understood that education is a lifelong continuum of experience gleaned from interaction with each other and all of nature, seen and unseen, including all of the cosmos...Our experience is that past and current Western schooling separates "education" from living; the experience alienates us from our surroundings and, therefore, from our culture.

Western schooling has served as the primary socialization and acculturation tool for the past several decades; nevertheless, many indigenous peoples are struggling to keep their cultures intact. LaFrance notes that schooling continues to play a major role in this survival, but that "we are now acutely aware and accept that education—either through schooling or life experience—is a cultural negotiation between Native and non-Native" (p.24). The final section of this chapter is an introductory exploration of what is meant by cultural negotiation[24].

Cultural Negotiation of Indigenous Education

Schools are critical sites for and agents of negotiation among cultures in contact, not merely transmitters of the means for success in a dominant culture. The optimistic proposal of cultural negotiation is the potential for evolving cultural identities as a rich range of alternatives to assimilation and cultural loss (Stairs, 199ba:155).

This is hopeful because

> ...the intrusion of formal education into indigenous culture is permanent, and is accepted by Inuit as crucial to their survival in the contemporary world. However, formal education is not only alien to Inuit culture, but is in direct conflict with indigenous modes of transmitting knowledge across generations. (Stairs, 1988:314-315)

While Stairs is referring to Inuit culture, this comment could be transferred to other indigenous people. The motivation to "survive in two worlds" is well documented in the "Native community" literature. A Cree community in Quebec refers to this as its struggle to maintain its own language and culture while encouraging the process of scholarization (Feurer, 1993).

However, there is disagreement as to the role of the school in preparing youth for life in "both worlds." For example, documenting an example of indigenous educational development, Stairs (1988) notes that viewpoints differ as to the dynamics necessary for survival in both the Inuk and qallunaat (white) world. One group favours a cultural-base approach to educational development based on overwhelming evidence on the fragility of Inuit language and culture. The opposing group supports an economic base for survival wherein the school's role is preparation for competition in the dominant culture.

Correspondingly, in a Navajo community, some members described the school's primary job as "teaching the white man's way;" others stated that the school was "the only place where children today can learn about their language and culture" (McCarty et al.

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[24]This theme will also be discussed more fully in chapter five.

1991). A similar pattern can be noted for in the Quechua in Peru (Hornberger, 1989), Aborigines in Australia (Harris, 1990), the Sami in Finland (Aikio, 1991).

I can appreciate both perspectives, but the either /or dichotomy troubles me; I believe it can be both. For example, during the interview Fabio told me he would be interested in taking Cree were it offered in school because wants to "learn to speak Cree more fluently." In the next breath, he was telling me that he intends to improve his writing skills because "writing prepares us for work" and "helps us get a job." The "job" Fabio would like to have is that of pharmacist. Fabio should be able to learn more Cree *and* receive an education which prepares him for the career of his choice.

However, using the "walking in two worlds" metaphor to describe educational goals for indigenous groups can be problematic in itself; it reduces the number of worlds people can walk in. Referring to a Yup'ik community in Alaska, Henze and Vanett (1993) criticize the two worlds metaphor for not giving validity to the other world many Yup'ik students are currently walking in a world that is not just a transitional stage, but one that has a culture, language, and life of its own. This "third cultural world" is acknowledged neither in the school's bilingual program nor by the local people. Stairs (1994a:69) also refers to the "third culture" of schools. Her position is that, if we are not to limit possibilities, the negotiation of indigenous education must be open to many new and recombined forms of traditional and formal learning. Similarly, Harris (1991:148-9) indicates that "a bicultural model of schooling probably needs to recognise that all bicultural people actually live in three shifting worlds: elements of a traditional world—first culture of identity; a middle or third culture—the strongly evolving culture of mixture and compromise; the national, mass culture."

To what extent is it possible to synthesize traditional and formal teaching? Stairs (1991:289-290) notes that while Inuit parents are concerned that children become alienated from their culture as they progress through school, they also fear that children taught native ways in school will not acquire mainstream ways and so will not be able to cope in either world. Given the history of their schooling, this is not an unreasonable concern. A formal education that is incongruous with traditional forms of education has resulted in failure for many Native students. Can this contradiction be negotiated? As with the river flowing both ways, this apparently impossible contradiction, is ever present. With the river, the apparently impossible contradiction is "made apparent and possible." That frames my question: Is there a way to make the cultural contradiction "apparent and possible"?

"The meeting of formal and traditional learning and teaching is very significantly played out in the evolution of new and complementary language forms in indigenous

schools. The Western cultural package of standard literacy is being opened up and challenged" (Stairs, 1994a:63).

> Historically, and in terms of particular programme developments, we began with the 'what' of schooling—the choice of language instruction, content and materials. Increasingly over the last decade we have moved to the 'how' of learning and teaching—attending to cultural models of interaction with the human and non-human world. Now I suggest we are ready for levels of the 'why' of education—cultural values and goals, future pictures, evolving identities and thus of cultural survival.
>
> (Stairs, 1994a:p.73)

Due to community uniqueness, there are variations in indigenous educational designs. For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to highlight the one which has shaped the way I view aboriginal schooling[25].

Two-way Schooling

Two-way schooling is based on the theoretical principle "that bicultural schools in small indigenous societies be organised along two fairly strictly *separated cultural domains:* a Western domain and an Aboriginal one[26]" (Harris, 1994:143).

Harris argues that because of the small size and fundamental cultural differences of remote Aboriginal groups, if Aboriginal languages and culture are to survive, culture domain separation is the most positive form of biculturalism for them[27]. People cannot live in two completely inter-penetrating cultures and still maintain them both, particularly when the balance of power between them is great (Fishman, 1987, in personal communication to Harris, 1990:17). If the school values "cultural differences" and if the weaker culture has a chance to survive, then it has to respect and even strengthen cultural boundaries, concurrent with providing bicultural exposure and expertise.

> Whereas the school must, to some extent, harmonise the two cultures, this does not mean that it should synthesise them. The function of cultures is to be different. All cultures compromise, minority cultures more than most, but minority cultures lack safe havens for indigenousness and schools must provide at least one of these...and may, therefore, opt to leave integration to the stronger sociocultural forces that swirl round about it.
>
> (J. Fishman, personal communication, quoted in Harris, 1990, p.122)

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[25]See Stairs (1994a), Lipka (1991) and McLaughlin (1989) for other examples of indigenous educational developments.

[26]A domain is like a kingdom, where a particular system rules (Harris, 1994:143).

[27]This model of domain theory adapted for bicultural schooling comes from one branch of sociolinguistic theory about how bilinguals decide which language to use (Fishman, 1971).

Harris's theory of bicultural schooling has received much criticism[28]. In a recent article, *"Soft and "Hard" Domain Theory for Bicultural Education in Indigenous Groups,* Harris responds to these criticisms. The most important criticisms of the theory seems to be "that culture domain separation in fairly strict form may only be practicable in geographically isolated places and where contact with the outside world has not yet fostered extensive social change and a wide variety of adaptations" (Harris, 1994:143). This was the predominant reason why I thought the model had no relevance to the setting where I would be conducting my fieldwork. Harris has re-formed his theory so that it has applicability to indigenous people in urban settings and in various stages of integration: a "soft" version of the theory not only allows for accommodation of diverse indigenous groups, but also allows for a broader notion of culture[29]. The key point is that "the main purpose behind the str[illegible] hard or soft versions of domain separation in bicultural schools is to c[illegible]r space for a less powerful language and culture which is in danger of bei[illegible]d by a dominant, pervasive, and invasive culture" (Harris, 1994:151)

> The *reasons* for using Aboriginal languages in schools, the *ways* of using them and the approaches to Aboriginal language *literacy* were often Western.
>
> No school system is culturally neutral. And no vernacular language programme is strong enough to overule the dominant cultural impact of Western-schooling-ways of doing things, the reasons for doing them, and the whole Western "hidden curriculum" message carried by the source of authority, classroom management, timetabling, and organizational structure of the school. (Harris, 1994: 141)

Aboriginal domain skills, knowledge and understandings should as far as possible complement those of the Western domain so the two are not in competition. McConvell (1991:14-15), though, is troubled by the way in which Harris represents aboriginal and Western culture as "totally antithetic."

> The production of lists of polar opposites can easily lead to stereotyping of Aboriginal people (and of white Australians for that matter). This stereotyping is just as misleading when it takes the form of idealisation and romanticisation of Aboriginal people as the spiritual antithesis to Western materialism, as when it leads to the disparagement of Aboriginal people as incapable of intellectual achievement.

In response to McConvell, Harris (1991:20-21) admits there is a danger in stereotyping, but his position is that the danger of not taking full account of cultural difference is greater.

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[28]For critiques of Harris's domain theory, see McConvell (1991b) and Ovington (1994).

[29]See Harris (1994:147-8) for a more detailed explanation of "soft" and "hard" domain theory.

"There *is* overlap between Aboriginal and Westerns of living and there *are* very marked differences...If the difference is real, then we should acknowledge it and fight against stereotyping and the low academic expectations that come with it."

Perhaps, part of the difference in opinion between these two researchers may be due to the fact that McConvell is a linguist and Harris is an educator. This is exemplified in Harris's (1991:22) comment:

> I am interested in what to do on Monday morning in a school that wants to follow a bicultural curriculum. What does McConvell offer the Aboriginal or white teacher on Monday morning? ...I believe McConvell is every bit as interested in Aboriginal empowerment as I am, but his ideology does not allow him to be as pragmatic about it or draw from such diverse non-linguistic sources in thinking about it.

Put another way, a teacher (on Monday morning) cannot *afford* to pursue non-pragmatic sources. As an educator, my outlook is similar to Harris's; I am interested in learning what I can from linguists so that I can use that knowledge to improve language learning for students[30].

Ovington (1994:44) addresses the most powerful criticism of Harris's position: "domain separation as a strategy for cultural survival is unrealistic and indigenous peoples do not necessarily want it." I agree with Ovington that "in a practical sense, it is impossible to separate totally Aboriginal and Western cultures even if Aboriginal peoples wanted it: and it is not clear that they do." I do not think Harris would debate this, either. Rather, Harris (1994:152) is well aware that "there is, of course, overlap and borrowing between the domains." The value of the model lies not so much in its "accuracy" but in its capacity to provide a problem solving theory about what are the Aboriginal ways of doing, being, and going to school.

In regards to Ovington's second point, Harris appreciates that many indigenous people have other priorities than language and culture maintenance; he is not suggesting that all indigenous parents will (or should) support two-way schooling. Harris is suggesting, though, that the type of schooling necessary to promote long-term language/culture maintenance for Aboriginal people will require intensity of commitment. In this regard, my research suggests that an increased awareness of the implications of language loss may lead to an increased commitment towards language maintenance/revival. This theme will be developed in the next chapter.

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[30]I refer to McConvell's work extensively in chapter four; it was invaluable in helping me to understand language shift.

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE DEATH:GENOCIDE OR SUICIDE?

> *Left to itself, the river would probably go on like this, flowing deep, for another million or so years. That would not be allowed to happen. In bygone days, Morag had once believed that nothing could be worse than killing a person. Now she perceived river-slaying as something worse. Now wonder the kids felt themselves to be children of the apocalypse.*
> *(Laurence, 1974:4)*

This chapter provides the background information necessary to an understanding of the processes of language loss, shift and maintenance. Much of it is drawn from the literature, although I depend on the research participants to substantiate the theoretical data. The statistics, process, and implications of language loss are presented, along with a discussion of awareness. An analysis of language shift, focusing on how theories of language shift can contribute to language maintenance follows. This lays the foundation for the final section, informed choice.

ENDANGERED INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Statistics

Of the 5,000 or so languages currently spoken worldwide, 80 to 90 percent of these are spoken by indigenous peoples, representing almost all linguistic diversity (Bernard, 1993). A few Native language communities are healthy, but many are fragile, with relatively small numbers of speakers. Many indigenous languages are already extinct. For example, South American indigenous languages were reduced from 2000 to 600. The number of North American Indian languages has been halved. Of the 500 Aboriginal languages existing in Australia, only 250 remain (Crystal, 1988).

Krauss (1992) distinguishes between what he defines as moribund, endangered and safe languages. Moribund languages are those that are beyond endangerment as they are no longer being learned by children. Statistics on Native languages reveal that 80% of Native North American languages; 17% of Meso-American indigenous languages; 27% of South American languages; and 90% of Australian aboriginal languages are considered moribund. Endangered languages are "those languages which, though now still being learned by children, will—if the present conditions continue—cease to be learned by children during the coming century" (p.6). Krauss regards safe languages as those with official state support and large numbers of speakers. However, few indigenous languages

fit into this category. Conditions for minority language survival are far from optimal; accordingly, Krauss sees a 90% language death rate to be a plausible calculation.

Other linguists utilise different terminology to describe the health of a language. Schmidt (1990), studying Australia's aboriginal language heritage, categorizes the stages of language loss accordingly: healthy, weakening, dying, dead. A healthy language is one which is transmitted to children and actively spoken by all generations in a wide range of social contexts. A weakening language is one which is not fully transmitted to younger generations; its social function is limited. A dying language has extremely limited social use; for example, only a handful of older speakers may retain the language. Dead or extinct languages are those with no speakers remaining.

Similarly, Fredeen (1991), in a sociolinguistic survey of indigenous languages in Saskatchewan, adapts terms used to describe the condition of ill or injured patients in hospitals to report on the status of languages: dead; extremely critical condition; critical condition; serious condition; fair but deteriorating condition; good health, but showing a few symptoms of ill-health.

In a report on indigenous languages in Canada, Foster (1982) categorizes chances of survival for Canada's 53 Native languages as follows: excellent chances of survival; moderately endangered; endangered; quite endangered; extremely endangered; and, verging on extinction. Each assignation is based on number of speakers.

The Language Loss Process

A language is lost in one of two ways; the first occurs when all the speakers of the language die so that there is nobody left to speak and transmit the language. The second type of language loss occurs when speakers of the language choose not to actively speak or transmit their language to younger generations. A language shift process then occurs whereby the local language is gradually replaced by the dominant encroaching code which becomes the first language of the younger generation (Schmidt, 1990).

Schmidt (1990) identifies five stages in the language loss process: most community members are fluent speakers of the language; some people still speak their first language, but other community members are speaking a second language; the language is weakening as it is no longer being passed on to the younger generation; there are no fluent speakers of the language remaining; there are no speakers of the language left.

A major problem for the maintenance of aboriginal languages is the phenomenon of delayed recognition of language loss where speakers do not recognize the threat facing their linguistic heritage until it is almost too late (Schmidt, 1990:31-33). Schmidt notes that, typically, recognition of the impending language threat is triggered by the realisation

that the community's link will be lost upon the death of the remaining older fluent speakers. She likens the process to a silent disease which progresses unheeded until the problem has reached an advanced stage. By the time the full-blown symptoms are apparent, it is extremely difficult to halt the downward spiral of language loss.

This problem is exemplified in a recent study (McAlpine & Herodier, 1994) carried out in nine Cree communities in Northern Quebec to determine how the Cree viewed the state of their language. The most common problem cited was discovering the loss of the language too late to be able to preserve it.

When languages spread, not as an additional language, but as a new mother tongue, this becomes a case of language shift (Paulston, 1986). When such language shift takes place within groups that do not possess another territorial base, the result is language death. In the case of many indigenous groups, they lack critical (language) population mass, where a language is sufficiently large for migration or changed language loyalties by many individuals to not threaten its vitality. If the language of an Aboriginal group dies there is nowhere that subsequent generations can go to renew it (Harris, 1990:69).

> If no one in North America ever spoke another word of English, French, Spanish, Chinese Russian, or Polish, all these languages would continue elsewhere unabated. If our Native languages cease to exist (and some estimate that the nearly 2000 Native languages thought to have been spoken here before Columbus, have dwindled to a little over 250), they are gone forever. Another way of understanding the world has been lost forever.
>
> (Tafoya, 1983:38)

The rapidity of the language shift process varies widely, ranging from abrupt language shift within one generation to a more gradual one lasting four or more generations (Schmidt, 1990:118). This corresponds with Stairs (1988:324) who states that language loss in one generation has been well documented among numbers of indigenous languages. According to Aikio (1991:93-103), language shift has two main phases: in the first phase, the contexts of language use disappear; in the second phase, the language itself disappears. One of the surest signs of language death is the narrowing of the domain of usage of the minority language. For example, when a home language reaches the point where only members of the older generation use it between themselves, the domain of usage is so narrow that language death is possibly only one generation away (Harris, 1990:79).

When a language undergoes language shift, there usually appears a group of semi-speakers who have only partial language knowledge and who are noticeably less fluent than traditional speakers, due largely to limited exposure to the language (Dorian, 1989). The incidence of "passive" speakers (who can "hear but not speak") is problematic for the

ongoing transmission of the language because upon the death of the older generation of active language speakers, there is nobody who can transmit the language to the younger generations (Schmidt, 1990:118-121).

Implications of Language Loss

For me, the implications of indigenous language loss, embodied in the following quotation, are primarily twofold: cultural and political.

> By contrast, language loss in the modern period...is part of a much larger process of loss of cultural and intellectual diversity in which politically dominant languages and cultures simply overwhelm indigenous local languages and cultures, placing them in a condition which can only be described as embattled. (Hale, 1992:1)

Cultural

There is considerable concern over the threat to the world's biological diversity; is not the extinction of a language as much a loss as the extinction of a plant or animal species? Bernard (1992) suggests that the consequent reduction of cultural diversity language loss entails may threaten human survival. Our adaptive success as a species is due to "culture," implying the communication of ideas through language. The loss of linguistic diversity diminishes our ability to adapt because it decreases the pool of knowledge from which to draw. Candy's thoughts touch on these issues, and she has wrapped them with the appreciation of the emotional value people attach to their languages.

> Language is part of our communication and losing languages is kind of like losing part of the world. There would just be like basic languages and it's like we'd be missing a lot of stuff...learning about different cultures because language is a part of culture and if there's no languages left you could really talk about how they talked and stuff and it's part of their ancestors and stuff. It's really important to learn about the past the right way. If you don't know the language, then we can't really talk about it and stuff. I think we're missing out on a lot...It may be painful for those cultures to lose their language because their language is important to them.
> Candy

Linguistic diversity is important to human intellectual life, both in the context of scientific linguistic inquiry and in the cultural realm (Hale, 1992:35-41). A language is the collective unconscious creation of generations and with each language death is lost a distinctive system for encoding experience and a literature of songs and stories. The loss of languages and their associated cultural traditions has meant irretrievable loss of intellectual wealth.

For example, Hale describes a tradition whose decline and virtual disappearance he witnessed in the course of field work with Aborigines in Australia. While working on the syntax and lexicon of Lardil, Hale learned of the existence of an auxiliary language, Damin, which was learned in the context of the practice of initiation. Most men in the community could no longer use Damin[31]. An auxiliary language used for ritual purposes, Damin is a lexicon, not an entire language[32]. Its lexicon is small enough to learn in one day, yet it is rich enough to express all ideas. Hale was awed by the unique abstractness which he found in Damin.

> The last fluent use of Damin passed away several years ago. The destruction of this intellectual treasure was carried out, for the most part, by people who were not aware of its existence, coming as they did from a culture in which wealth is physical and visible. Damin was not visible for them, and as far as they were concerned, the Lardil people had no wealth, apart from their land...the old Damin tradition is effectively lost. And the destruction of this tradition must be ranked as a disaster, comparable to the destruction of any human treasure. (p.40)

I mention this because it illustrates what is valued (and not valued) in modern society. In our materialistic world, wealth means "material" wealth; I can imagine how ludicrous an argument to save Damin would appear to those in positions of power.

Yet, I *know* what Hale means when he equates a language such as Damin with wealth. While working in Alert Bay, I was privileged to be able to witness the potlatch ceremony of the west coast Native people.

> Today, the Kwakuitl potlatch is still going strong. Master carvers make spectacular masks for dances, young people learn songs in Kwak'wala, and feasting and gift-giving retain an important place in the lives of these people... (Jonaitis, 1991:54)

This is true. The students in the school where I worked learned the songs and dances in Kwak'wala class. Even though my understanding was limited, I was aware of the connection between the potlatch ceremony and the Native language. They are inseparable; the songs are steeped in tradition and culture. Kelly emphasises how culture and language are interconnected.

> Ya, well you sort of can't have one without the other and it doesn't matter, even non-traditional people say that, they hook in somehow, they're all tied in together, there's a missing piece without the language. When I say that

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[31]The mission administrating Mornington Island (North Queensland) during the early decades of this century had forbidden the practice of initiation.

[32]The rule in using Damin correctly is this: each lexical item of Lardil must be replaced by a Damin item; the inflectional morphology and syntax of Lardil remains intact.

> our elders spoke in Cree, you lose half of it trying to understand without the language.

Nor, is it a simply a matter of linguistic translation. Tonya, one of the non-Native students in the Native Awareness class, expressed her thoughts on this aspect of Native languages.

> In Native languages you look at most of the words and you translate them and they don't translate perfectly, but most of the words mean something a bit more special than English. Native languages I'd say you could almost call them an art. When you listen to the Natives singing I think it sounds beautiful, it sounds more like they're creating. It's also not knowing what they're saying, in the music they make, you can sort of feel it in what you feel along with the way that it sounds as they speak.

Listening to Tonya speak, I knew what she meant; her words echo how I felt listening to the speeches and songs of the potlatch ceremony in the Alert Bay Big House.

Political

The excerpt (Hale) that appeared at the beginning of this section is from a collection of papers on "endangered languages and the safeguarding of diversity" which appeared in *Language* (1992). In response, Ladefoged (1992) notes that "*Language* seldom publishes opinion pieces, such as that of Hale et al. on endangered languages." Ladefoged's stance is that their argument

> appeals to our emotions, not to our reason. The case for studying endangered languages is very strong on linguistic grounds. It is often enormously strong on humanitarian grounds as well. But it would be self-serving of linguists to pretend that this is always the case. We must be wary of arguments based on political considerations...We should always be sensitive to the concerns of the people whose language we are studying. But we should not assume that we know what is best for them. (p.810)

I have read every paper in "Endangered Languages" thoroughly and my assessment is that Hale et al. show themselves to be very sensitive to the concerns of those whose languages they are studying chiefly *because* they have not presumed to know what is best for them. Dorian's (1993) reply to Ladefoged echoes my conviction that linguistic work is not done in a political vacuum.

> The implication is that apolitical positions can be found and adopted. Scientists of many stripes like to consider their undertakings apolitical and their professional activities objective and impartial. In actuality, linguistic salvage work which consists solely of 'recording for posterity' certain structural features of a threatened small language is inevitably a political act, just as any other act touching that language would be. (p.575)

Before pursuing this subject, I had not realized the complexity of language politics. This applies to linguists, as well as to others who work with languages, in particular with minority languages. With Native languages, the significance cannot be underestimated[33].

> My concern is to point out that education and its use of European language structure has significant political element that most people never consider. The Native children who can only communicate with their parents in English or French will never fully understand their heritage.
>
> (Tafoya, 1983:38)

Awareness of Language Loss

The information presented so far in this chapter has summarized the literature; at this point I turn to the research participants so that their views can be heard. During the fieldwork, a theme that emerged in relation to endangered Native languages was that of awareness.

A case in point is Kelly. I knew she had talked with her class about endangered and safe Native languages in Canada:

> Well, it was also one thing we'd learned about in Native Studies 210. It was part of my Native Studies and part of what I wanted the students to learn, to *know*. I guess, not so much to learn, but at least to have the idea that there's hundreds of languages and people extinct and because there's *so* few Native people that it's really important that we learn our language and have it carry on because it's a possibility even though there are a lot of Cree speakers that Cree could become extinct one day.

I wanted to know if Kelly knew "that Cree could become extinct one day" before learning this in the Native Studies class. The information she learned in the Native Studies class was her first exposure to learning about that degree of Native language loss.

> Ya, but I mean I'd heard about it before,...but in that study I heard that there were just three that had a possibility of surviving[34]. I never knew that languages were,...you know I just thought,...and that was just my ignorance about our Native people, thinking that you know that this was just going to last and that there were few people like me who didn't know how to speak Cree but there's a lot of people.

Kelly's explanation had a powerful effect on me. I took this as an example of what Schmidt (1990) referred to as the delayed phenomenon of language loss (mentioned above), but, there was something else which I do not find easy to articulate. I was surprised that Kelly *thought* she was one of the few who did not speak Cree. I was aware

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[33]"Language politics" will be addressed in greater detail in the remainder of the thesis.

[34]Only three of Canada's indigenous languages are considered to have excellent chances of survival (more than 5,000 speakers) in the foreseeable future: Cree, Inuktitut, Ojibwa (Foster, 1982).

that it was hard for me to imagine how this could happen; with that came a deeper realization that, as an English speaker, I would likely *never* understand that position.

I found that awareness of language loss had an impact on Kelly's students, as well. The language situation in Fabio's family, for example, depicts the language loss process rather aptly. In the interview Fabio told me that while his maternal grandmother is not fluent, she knows "quite a bit" of Cree. His grandmother had passed on "a little bit" of the language to his mother and Fabio knows "a tiny bit."

When asked how he felt when Kelly talked in class about the number of Native languages that have been lost or are endangered, Fabio's response was: "Disappointed and kind of sad to see hundreds of years go down the drain." He saw that "our heritage" is what gets lost when a language becomes extinct. Fabio became concerned about language loss "when I first learned that some of the Native languages could go extinct." It was his impression that other people do not really care: "It seems that they're just careless about it." Fabio thought finding out about language loss would probably make a difference to other Native people. If he talked to people about it, Fabio would ask: "Did you know that in a couple years some languages could go extinct?"

Shelley told me that she did not know a lot about language loss before the class discussions, but she "knew it was happening." She had heard John Cardinal speaking about language loss on the news and her friends had been talking about it being on the news. Had learning more about it in class made a difference?

> well, ya, because before it didn't really matter, but now it does because I know that Native languages are dying out and pretty soon if you say a word in Cree nobody's going to know what you're talking about...since then now I'm more determined to learn that 'cause if they know it then they can pass it on to their kids, it can go from generation to generation.

With 55, 000 speakers, Cree is considered to have excellent chances of survival (Foster, 1982). However, Fredeen (1991:194-5) notes that even for languages that are relatively healthy at present, it is important to take action to support retention. In order for a language to be maintained, there needs to be a critical mass of speakers. Once there develops a sizable number of young parents who are not fluent enough in their ancestral language to use it as their home language, the battle to bring back the language becomes very difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

It is clear that awareness can make a difference. In my case it began with reading the article in *New Internationalist.* I can still recall my shock and outrage when I read about the magnitude of language loss. That was the start of this thesis. The research participants have indicated a concern and they certainly have more at stake than I do. Kelly

thought "that there were few people like me who didn't know how to speak Cree." If you think you are one of the few, then doing something is not as critical. If many others think the same way, then it becomes easy to see why the delayed recognition of language loss constitutes a major problem for Aboriginal language maintenance (Schmidt, 1990:32).

However, if people see "extinction" of Native languages as the reason for their concern, this could be problematic. Extinction or other fears can be mobilizing in the short term, but not in the long term. For their concern to be sustained and acted upon, people need to go beyond the "alarmist" stage. I regard awareness as an initial step. Not everyone will want to take the next step, but awareness of language loss provides people with information on which to base their decisions. My stance is that if people fully understand the implications of language loss, its likelihood will be reduced.

LANGUAGE SHIFT AND MAINTENANCE

> Language shift of any kind is an indicator of dislocation...Such dislocation is to be expected among intruders, be they immigrants or occupants. After all, they have left their old homes, their familiar places, and, often, their cultural self-sufficiency...What, then, must we conclude if we find this same picture among indigenous populations, populations who have *not* left their old homes, nor their familiar places, nor the territorial bases of their cultural integrity and continuity? What we must conclude...is *extremely great dislocation:* the dislocation of conquest, of genocide, of massive population resettlement such that locals are swamped out, engulfed, deracinated and decimated by intruders, be they conquerors or settlers. (Fishman, 1985:66)

Maintenance of Bilingualism

Information about language loss has the potential to increase awareness, but it does not explain why Native languages are experiencing varying degrees of endangerment. For any given endangered language, thinking about attempts to halt or reverse the process requires more careful consideration of the phenomenon of language shift.

Linguists can predict neither when nor what type of changes will occur in language contact situations generally; however, sociocultural factors are more important than linguistic factors in determining whether a language survives or not (Schmidt, 1985). Kulick (1992:8-9) recounts the various causes linguists, sociologists, and sociolinguists attribute to language shift[35], but, like Schmidt, he concedes that while understanding these factors can help to explain language shift, they have minimal predictive power. Attempts to find universal patterns of causality are being replaced by the realization that shift in

[35]These include migration, industrialization, urbanization, proletarianization, and government policies concerning which languages can and cannot be used in schools and other institutions.

language is caused, ultimately, by shifts in personal and group values and goals. Viewed this way, the question that then must be answered is: why and how do people come to interpret their lives in such a way that they abandon one of their languages?

I find McConvell's (1991a) work on language shift (of Australian Aboriginal languages) particularly helpful because he concentrates on *recent* accounts of why and how a language lives and dies. This is not to say that he dismisses the history that is necessary for an understanding of the presents situation[36]. Rather, he chooses to focus on the present and how theories of language shift can contribute to language maintenance, working from the premise that theories of language shift have strong implications for the practice of language maintenance. Most studies of language shift consider what is happening to one of the languages in a contact situation. What is needed is "a framework which looks not at individual languages but at entire bilingual (or multilingual) situations, seeing the functions of each language as fitting together to make a whole" (McConvell, 1991a:144). McConvell deems it necessary to look more closely at the actual process of language shift, how it progresses from stage to stage, and whether this progress is inevitable, or whether it can stop at a given stage[37]. This is of particular consequence for language maintenance. It is important to recognise when and how an entire bilingual situation becomes, as it were, tilted, then overbalances into a rapid shift into monolingualism (Dorian, 1981:51).

Drawing on three approaches to the study of language shift[38], McConvell (1994a:151-2) offers what he sees as a more integrated and realistic theory, the functional choice theory of language shift. According to McConvell, bilingualism (or multilingualism or bidialectalism) has three main functions: the communication function; the social function; and the cultural function. Choice of a language may reflect either the basic communication function, or one or both of the other two (social and cultural functions). Ultimately, though, it is in the area of social function where the drama of language shift and language maintenance is played out .

> In this perspective language shift can be seen as resulting from the loss of the functions of bilingualism, that is, the loss of functional choices between languages, and in the case of the social function, their likely replacement by choices of style within one language. Likewise, language maintenance can be seen as the retention of these choices, or their replacement by other

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[36]For a discussion of the history of massacre, forced movement and institutionalisation of Aboriginal people as well as the prohibition and denigration of their languages see Hudson and McConvell (1984).

[37]Here the interactional-variationist theory can be helpful. It is necessary to remove the historical fatalism from theory, though, which says that once the shift has started it continues in one direction until it reaches the end-point, monolingualism.

[38]See McConvell (1991a:144-149) for a discussion of the domain, the interactional-variationist and the adaptation theories of language shift.

> choices between the languages which still serve the major functions in different ways. We should perhaps speak of the maintenance of bilingualism, rather than maintenance of a language...Survival of the old language depends on the number and importance of functional choices the bilingual situation can maintain. (p.151)

When viewed from the perspective of the functional choice theory, the goal becomes how to achieve bilingualism, *not* language shift. However, the usual sequence of events of a minority language facing the onslaught of a majority language is that the minority young adults tend to become bilingual and their children monolingual in the majority language (Boseker, 1994:151).

Nevertheless, many people take bilingualism (or multilingualism) for granted[39]. For example, during his interview, Ken, the Cantonese speaker, told me that being bilingual is not something he thinks about; losing his family language is something Ken cannot even imagine. He functions well in English in school, but Cantonese is the language spoken at home. Ken has friends who are losing the language because "their families do not speak Cantonese with them that much." Individuals and families may lose the language, but Cantonese will not be endangered. There are more mother-tongue speakers of Chinese (1,000 million) than any other language in the world[40].

People whose ancestral languages are endangered do not have the option of taking bilingualism for granted. McConvell's suggestion to think in terms of "maintenance of bilingualism, rather than maintenance of a language" makes sense to me. It can be assumed that, for Native people, knowledge of English (or other dominant language) is desired. Does knowledge of English necessarily signify loss of the Native language? Why is the maintenance of bilingualism happening so infrequently for indigenous languages?

Transmission

Studies on language shift have concentrated on the speech of adults and on examining the final stages of language shift, when the languages are in their "final death throes." This makes the study of transmission, which Kulick (1992) views as crucial, problematic.

> This issue of transmission is at the very heart of language shift, since languages cannot be said to be shifting until it can be established that children are no longer learning them. By the time the first generation of nonvernacular-speaking children has been raised, the boundary between language shift and incipient language death has in most cases quite intractably been reversed. (Kulick, 1992:12)

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[39]This can be contrasted with people in Western society taking monolingualism for granted, when in fact multilingualism is the natural way of life for hundreds of millions all over the world (Crystal, 1987:360).
[40]Cantonese is a main Chinese dialect.

McConvell (1991b:20) categorizes the conditions enabling successful transmission of a language as either material or ideological. Material conditions involve interaction of time exposure to a language with learnability of the language given the data available to the child[41]. Ideological factors must be examined when the younger generation choose not to learn or use the language. A prestige factor often relates to the role of ideological conditions in language transmission. The positive social meanings of the new language result in the suppression of the old language. In the course of this process, any transmission of the old language is suppressed.

Kulick (1992) also recognizes prestige as a significant factor. In the literature, parents are portrayed as having consciously decided not to teach their children the vernacular. The reasons for this are usually perceived to be related to their opinions about the relative prestige of the language in relation to a language of wider currency.

Both linguists discuss the aspect of choice in transmission; however, McConvell focuses on the choices youth make, while Kulick stresses choices made by the older generation[42]. This corresponds with Schmidt's point (above) that "the second type of language loss occurs when speakers of the language choose not to actively speak or transmit their language to younger generations." These cannot be regarded as the same process, yet the element of *choice* is the consistent thread.

Like McConvell, I want to focus on *recent* accounts of why and how a language lives and dies. However, neither can I negate the past in my desire to understand the present. In the forward to *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Haig-Brown, 1988), Randy Fred recounts past horrors and reflects on their lasting effects:

> The elimination of language has always been a primary stage in a process of cultural genocide. This was the primary function of the residential school. My father, who attended Alberni Indian Residential School for four years in the twenties, was physically tortured by his teachers for speaking Tseshaht: they pushed sewing needles through his tongue, a routine punishment for language offenders.

Randy's entire family was affected by the needle tortures his father endured. His father's attitude became "why teach my children Indian if they are going to be punished for speaking it?" The result in Randy's words: "I never learned to speak my own language. I am now, therefore, truly a 'dumb Indian'" (p.12).

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[41]Separation of children from parents and the mixture of children from different language groups are examples of material conditions responsible for language shift.

[42]Kulick is presenting language shift as portrayed in the literature. His work (1992) does focus on youth.

This sounded similar to the story Kelly told about why she did not grow up speaking Cree, even though her father had been a fluent speaker.

> Well, because of residential schooling, that's probably the main reason for all of us not speaking Cree because when my Dad went to residential school, actually I think that was probably the only time that I ever seen or heard my Dad cry when he told us about how they not only abused them but how they beat up kids in residential school, he showed us his big knuckles (described how they used big rulers to hit them) and then there were big signs all over the place that there was to be no Indian spoken and he said we always wondered what kind of language that was because we spoke Cree, we didn't know what Indian was. But, ya they were beaten for speaking their language and so **he couldn't see times changing** and he was about thirteen when he ran away from there. Just even as a really young man he vowed if he ever had kids that he'd never teach them how to speak Cree and you know back then **he couldn't see times changing.** That was bad for us because you know it would have been nice instead of having to learn Cree at an older age and then maybe we could have taught it to our kids.

Haig-Brown (1988:110) suggests that perhaps the school's biggest effect on language use could be called secondary: although punishing children for speaking their language did not eradicate it, as adults, many consciously did not teach their children a Native language so that they might avoid the punishments incurred through its use at school. This aptly describes the choices made by Randy Fred's and Kelly's fathers.

Linguistic Genocide/Language Suicide

I mentioned earlier that the language loss process has been framed, by various linguists, using the medical model. Two researchers who interpret "language death" somewhat differently, as "language suicide" (Denison, 1977), and "linguistic genocide" (Day, 1985), presuppose that the "speakers" are included in any discussion of language death.

Denison (1977:13) remarks, "it is of course not languages which live and die, but those who speak them."

> ...there comes a time when multilingual parents no longer consider it necessary or worthwhile for the future of their children to communicate with them in a low-prestige language variety, and when children are no longer motivated to acquire active competence in a language which is lacking in positive connotations such as youth, modernity, technical skills, material success, education. The languages at the lower end of the prestige scale retreat from ever increasing areas of their earlier functional domains, displaced by higher prestige languages, until there is nothing left for them appropriately to be used about. In this sense they may be said to "commit suicide." (p.21-22)

Denison's interpretation does take into consideration both aspects of choice in transmission: the parents choosing not to passing the language on and the children choosing not to learn it. However, the reasons given do not accurately portray the circumstances of language loss for indigenous people because he does not consider the active suppression of aboriginal languages by dominant societies.

Day (1985:164) uses different terminology, "linguistic genocide" or "language murder," to describe similar phenomenon. While language shift does not always result in extinction, "there are situations where language shift does result in language death and where the shift, although aided and abetted by some of the language's speakers, was not voluntary."

It is in this context that Day uses the term linguistic genocide: the systematic replacement of an indigenous language with the language of an outside, dominant group, resulting in a permanent language shift and the death of the indigenous language.

> The outsiders play the major role in the death of the Native languages. But it could not be accomplished without the cooperation from the indigenous elite. We must question if linguistic genocide is voluntary, perhaps a type of linguistic suicide (see Denison 1977). The answer must be no, since suicide generally involves committing an act knowing the outcome. In linguistic genocide, the Native speakers of the language do not believe that their language will die; they only see benefits which might accrue from learning the outsider's language. (Day, 1985:180)

When Kelly's father chose not to pass the language on to his children, did he consider his actions as potentially contributing to language death? Given their experiences, the attitudes and resultant choices made by Fred and Kelly's father, are absolutely understandable. However, others in comparable circumstances reacted differently, using language as a cloak of protection for their seemingly fragile identities. Haig-Brown (1988:93-4) describes a student in residential school who held defiantly to her language within herself because there were few others who spoke it. Recognizing the importance of maintaining contact with her roots through language, she kept the words alive in her thinking vocabulary. I include this because I want to emphasize the concept of *choice* as a key issue in the consideration of future language decline.

While Denison raises important points in his argument for language suicide as an explanation for language death, linguistic genocide (Day) offers a more accurate portrayal of the Native situation. I agree with Day that linguistic genocide is not voluntary; outsiders have played the major role in the death of the Native languages. However, the final decision remains the choice of the actual speakers of the language.

In the next section I want to turn my attention to the fact that, although some parents continue to choose not to pass the language on, the specific reasons for that choice have changed. Children are no longer whipped at school for speaking a Native language, but the negative associations of a Native identity have been internalized and persist.

INFORMED CHOICE

Irreconcilable Dichotomy

In her study of Native languages in Canada, Robinson (1985) maintains that language retention may be viewed as a function of past and present experiences: language status is the result of a dynamic process in which individual characteristics such as age and education and environmental factors such as region and past and present residence all play a part.

> The linguistic assimilation of the future Native population will depend on the language use of the present generation. A shift to the use of a non-Indian language in the home will result in the next generation's having a non-Indian mother tongue. The issue of Indian-language maintenance as defined here will not then arise for them because of parental language shift. While Native-language loss need not imply a decline in ethnic-group identity[43], one of the distinctive cultural differences from the dominant society will have been lost. (Robinson, 1985:519)

Of course, the shift Robinson refers to is already well underway. It occurs to me that some individuals in the coming generations will *not* have a choice because of the choices made by others. Johnny, one of the research participants provides an example. I asked Johnny how much Cree is spoken by his parents.

> Well, they (his parents) speak lots to my grandpa and grandma, that's it, they don't speak it to me. My parents are kind of fluent and my grandparents are fluent. I know just a little that I learned mostly at my grandma's.

Similarly, one of the women who attended the Blackfoot methodology course, a teacher now committed to teaching school children Blackfoot, made this comment:

> I have an 11 year old daughter at home who doesn't speak the language, yet my husband and I are both fluent Blackfoot speakers. And I have to ask myself why I didn't pass the language on.

I am *not* presuming to know *why* the language was not passed on in these particular cases, nor to pass judgment. I know "that it is not always clear to what extent a

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[43]This issue of ethnic-group identity will be discussed in chapter five.

parental decision not to pass on their vernacular is a 'direct cause' of shift, and to what extent this decision is a consequence and recognition of shift already under way" (Kulick, 1992:12-13). Clearly, I realize that parental decisions and wishes are among the many factors influencing the language acquisition of children. Furthermore, I am not suggesting that "choice" always implies completely free and independent choice; rather, parental decisions usually reflect complex circumstances. Still, Johnny's situation is representative of someone who, to a large degree, has had language choices made for him.

I return to Robinson's point that the linguistic assimilation of the future Native population will depend on the language use of the present generation. In other words, this generation marks the last chance. Robinson's study looks at the determinants of Native language maintenance among the Canadian Indian population; results suggest that attempts to improve the economic conditions of Native Indians, as, for example, by increasing education levels, may have a cost in terms of cultural maintenance.

Weber-Pillwax (1992:48-49) situates this discussion in an educational framework:

> Its development is often impeded by the popular view that the strength and vitality of Native languages is maintained at the cost of economic development and stabilization of Native communities within a multicultural Canada. Non-Native educators, and even some Native educators who are working in Native communities and who have acquired this misinformed view, can and do carry the message to parents that Native culture and languages in the school will rob the child of opportunities for success. Success in this case means higher levels of achievement, (especially in the English language), as well as higher paying jobs and more employment opportunities in the future. In other words, parents are presented a supposedly irreconcilable dichotomy between Native culture and language (the essence of their world) and improved education and economic development; at the same time, they have no information to use in consideration of this issue.

The seriousness of the message (that Native culture and languages in the school will rob the child of opportunities for success) and its implications is not overstated in the least. For example, Tom Porter, a Mohawk elder speaking at the *Autochthonous Scholars: Toward an Indigenous Research Model* Conference at the University of Alberta advocated the need for immersion programs for Native people, at the same time noting that most resistance to immersion Mohawk programs comes from the Mohawk community itself. The argument behind this is that Native children are going to be handicapped if they learn Mohawk as they will be disadvantaged in school and, in turn, shortchanged when it comes to getting a job[44].

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[44]For further information on this topic see also McCarty et al. (1991), Stairs (1994), Aikio (1991).

Lipka (1994), in an article describing a collaborative research project in a Yup'ik village in Alaska, provides an example of parents being presented with a "supposedly irreconcilable dichotomy[45]." Lipka notes that "the loss of Yup'ik greatly troubles the Yup'ik participants in this project, and simultaneously doubts exist about maintaining Yup'ik because of possible interference with their children's success in the western world. Decisions about language of instruction, too often the province of the school district, have been cast in either-or terms making difficult choices more difficult. The colonial legacy and its message of English and western culture partially created this either-or conception" (p.90). However, the bilingual experts were careful to note that indigenous language fluency can be a positive factor in English language fluency—not subtractive bilingualism but additive bilingualism. Lipka notes that this information (presented to the school administration and to community participants) has altered the district's English-only policy; the district now views Yup'ik as instrumental to the school goal of raising scores. When those concerned have the correct information it becomes clear that the choice between English and an indigenous language does not have to be an either-or-one. It is also clear, though, that the learning of the indigenous language has to be justified on Western terms, in this case, school scores. In other words, it is acceptable *only* if it does not interfere with mainstream schooling.

There does not *have to be* an "irreconcilable dichotomy" between Native culture and language and improved education and economic development. It is critical that parents as well as educators become informed on these issues. Until the fundamental erroneous assumptions are addressed the gaps in life experience will continue.

Need Redefined

I am trying to situate this examination of endangered Native languages in the present. I realize that the learning of languages will be increasingly associated with economic benefits. What I want to broach here and pursue in chapter five is that it is necessary to look at definitions of needing a language which are not based on economic advantages. As persuasive as the economic argument is, there are other reasons for preservation of Native languages, and those reasons should be heard. For example, in Kelly's voice:

> Well, I can only speak for myself, but more and more people are learning about their traditional ways and going to different ceremonies and our elders are always going to speak Cree or some other Native language and it it has nothing to do with anything they can at least speak their own language if say their grandmother comes to the school they can at least tell

[45]The topic of the research project was the language of instruction, English and/or Yup'ik.

> their grandmother in Cree what the heck is going on if she doesn't understand English.

In my opinion, being able to speak to one's grandmother is sufficient grounds for needing to speak a language. Although Kelly makes the statement that "our elders are always going to speak Cree or some other Native language," the elders are only going to be doing so as long as they are alive. Those languages have to be passed on to the younger generations before the elders die.

Considering the marginalisation of Native people and the logic of the "English is the key to success" [illegible] it is easy to see why many have chosen to give up low prestige languages in an attempt to achieve a measure of success. However, giving up a traditional language in favour of English does not guarantee success. Furthermore, the ability to function well in English, and in that sense to be economically successful, certainly does not depend on being monolingual. At the risk of overgeneralizing, the Native people I know who would be considered the most "successful" (by Western standards) are individuals for whom maintaining cultural traditions is a priority in their lives. As was evidenced in chapter three, a solid base in an indigenous language can facilitate English language learning; similarly, a strong sense of cultural identity can increase the likelihood of mainstream "success."

For example, Day (1985), in his study of Chamorro, an indigenous language spoken in Guam, notes that since the late 1960's, bilingual Chamorro parents have been teaching their children English at home. The reasons given are that they believe English to be the key to academic and economic success. Yet, there is no evidence that they have advanced economically and academically. In fact, the reverse is more accurate[46].

In chapter three, I noted that it takes a long time to see the real social effects of a minority language program since goals such as the stemming of the tide of Native language loss are huge (Bernaby, 1980). Conversely, it can take a long time to see the social effects of language loss itself. This is unfortunate because, as the amount of language transmitted from generation to generation is reduced, the threat to the language's survival becomes more intense with each generation.

Dorian (1993:576), referring to the point of view that giving up ancestral language is the price extracted for economic success, notes that "...some of the youngest members of their own kin circles have begun to berate them for choosing not to transmit the ancestral language and so allowing it to die." According to Dorian, this yearning after a

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[46]The unemployment rate for Chamorros is reported at close to forty percent. See Day, (1985:178).

ethnolinguistic heritage which has eluded them is so widespread as to be something of a cliché among immigrant-descended groups.

> Third-generation pursuit of an ancestral language is a phenomenon with a clearly social basis. The generation who do not transmit an ethnic language are usually actively in search of a social betterment that they believe they can achieve only by abandoning, among other identifying behaviors, a stigmatizing language. The first generation secure as to social position is often also the first generation to yearn after the lost language, which by their time is no longer regarded as particularly stigmatizing. (p.576-7)

This occurrence does not apply exclusively to immigrant groups. "In other populations, rising consciousness of cultural loss resulting from a colonial past or other historically disfavoring circumstances produces similar results among modern-day descendants" (p.577). If those who are socially secure are those regretting the loss of their ancestral languages, this certainly constitutes an argument for looking at need differently. Perhaps they are in a position where they can afford to think this way when preceding generations could not. People can have financial security and still need their traditional language. Language should not be viewed solely from a [illegible] perspective.

Linguicism

The notion that indigenous people have to give up their ancestral languages in order to "get ahead" in the modern world is prevalent. At this point, I emphasize that I am not attaching a negative value to "getting ahead." On the contrary, I believe that "mainstream success" should be an option available to indigenous people. However, rather than regarding indigenous languages and improved education and economic development as necessarily mutually exclusive, my understanding of the situation is that maintaining indigenous languages has the potential to expand, rather than limit, opportunities for indigenous peoples. Rather than having an "apparently impossible contradiction", the river can flow both ways.

Nonetheless, an ideology of the survival of the fittest ethnoses, languages and cultures fits well in our competitive world (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990b). The rationale is that the cultures and languages which are going to survive will do so because they are more modern and more adapted to modern life. The majority language and culture always turn out to be the strongest survivors. In other words, indigenous and immigrant minorities have been the victims of linguicism. Linguicism can be defined as "the ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal

division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language[47]" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988:13).

However, the theoretical construct, linguicism, and empirical studies of how linguistic inequality is structurally determined and ideologically legitimated can be a base for contesting inequality and obtaining more justice for dominated languages (Phillipson, 1988). It is my hope that this thesis can play a small part in this struggle because

> at stake is the survival of peoples, an issue that involves such diverse rights as cultural and religious freedom, language rights, and political autonomy ..The past century of "progress" and "civilization" provides good evidence that more indigenous cultures have disappeared than during any previous 100 years...It is impossible to know how many self-identified peoples have disappeared—many were unknown to outsiders—but language provides the best available data. Although it is not a perfect reflection of a people's identity, language is an important window on the world's cultural diversity. (Clay, 1993:64-66)

Learning the dominant language need not imply language shift. However, given the situation of imminent language loss/shift, something akin to informed choice is now needed to mobilize the energy needed to reverse that process. Resistance and determination will be necessary for indigenous peoples wishing to retain linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. This theme will be furthered in chapter five where I offer examples of people who are fighting to maintain their distinct ancestral languages.

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[47]For a detailed analysis of linguicism, see Phillipson (1988).

CHAPTER 5

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN[48]

The Times They Are a-Changin'

Come gather round people wherever you roam
And admit that the waters around you have grown
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
For the times are a-changin' Bob Dylan

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVIVAL

There is considerable conceptual confusion over what constitutes language revival; according to Paulston et al.(1993:275), the term is frequently used synonymously with language revitalisation, and recently, reversing language shift (Fishman, 1990). The authors argue that these are three separate phenomena, subsumed under the concept of language regenisis: language revival is the act of reviving a language after discontinuance and making it the language of communication within a speech community; revitalisation refers to situations where a subordinate language experiences new strength by increased use through the expansion of domains; language reversal means the turning around of present trends in a language, such as the legal acknowledgment of a language (Paulston, 1993:284-5). As this thesis does not allow for a thorough examination of "language regenesis", I will use the terms revival and revitialisation to refer to any language preservations efforts[49].

Making a Comeback

The previous chapter illustrated the severity of indigenous language loss; yet, around the world indigenous peoples whose cultures are under threat are taking steps to teach children in their traditional language. These experiences challenge the bleak pattern of indigenous minority and cultural survival and may offer models to those who are working to preserve and maintain Native languages and culture (Henze and Vanett, 1993).

One of the most successful examples is the revitalised Maori language in New Zealand (Aotearoa). The Maoris have taken the initiative to adopt an effective language

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[48]The title of this chapter is in response to Kelly's explanation as to why her father did not teach his children Cree because he "couldn't see times changing." This chapter aims to show that, for Native languages, times have changed.

[49]Others working in the area use the term language renewal.

maintenance program in response to the escalating crisis of Maori language and cultural erosion (*New Internationalist,* 1993; Benton, 1986; Fleras, 1989, 1993; Spolsky, 1989). Attempts at Maori language revival started in the 1970s when the Maori language was moving towards extinction. The education system in general and schooling in particular are major sites for Paheka (non-indigenous) assimilationist practices and policies. An increasingly assertive Maori minority realized that the revival of their culture was linked to the revival of their language and began to establish their own schools. The movement began with the *Kohanga Reo* (Language Nests), an attempt to immerse children in the Maori language from an early age. Much of the success of the *Kohanga Reo* can be attributed to the incorporation of Maori cultural values and communal organization within a traditional learning context[50].

This endeavor concurs with Fishman's (1985) observation that language concerns are especially noticeable when formerly exploited groups begin to experience cultural development in their own areas of population concentration. Effective language revival appears often to be closely associated with the resurgence of cultural awareness, and the quest for increased political and socioeconomic rights.

> In sharp contrast to the intense assimilatory pressure and stigma attached to Aboriginal languages for most of this century, the past decade has experienced a significant resurgence of language awareness and pride for many Aboriginal groups...This recent resurgence in Aboriginal language pride is conducive to increased language loyalty and use; the survival of Aboriginal languages ultimately depends on how speakers perceive them—their estimation of the social and political value of the languages. In effect, language pride and language use provide the lifeblood to a language. (Schmidt, 1990:21)

In chapter four, I explained how a prestige factor can operate to suppress the old language. McConvell (1991b) notes that it is not only the new language that can take over this way; under certain sociocultural conditions the old language and the ability to code-switch acquire positive connotations and can make a comeback, slowing or reversing a trend towards language shift. Furthermore, the original language may be used as a visible and objective rallying-point for group awareness, and may hold or come to achieve almost spiritual status (Edwards, 1993).

In the previous chapter, the story of Randy Fred's father in residential school provided an example of language suppression. I return to Fred to illustrate how the language is making a comeback.

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[50]Among other effective language renewal efforts are those of the Seneca, the Mohawk and the Navajo. See Schmidt (1991) for details.

> Today Native people are actively restoring and preserving their languages, although many have been lost forever. And Native people are taking more control of the education of their children. They have no choice. The colonial system has failed to educate Native children adequately. Statistics for Native achievement prove this. (Fred, 1988:11-12)

Thank goodness "the residential schools are closed; ...there are no schools in the province which bear any resemblance to those which had such tremendous impact on the lives of so many Native people in this province" (Haig-Brown, 1988:129). Yet, I know of two schools which bear more than a striking resemblance to the residential schools referred to in Haig-Brown's book. I taught in them. I taught in the school where Randy Fred's father had sewing needles pushed through his tongue for speaking Tseshaht. Ha-Ho Payuk, a band-operated school, exists as an alternative to the regular school system *so* the students can learn the Tseshaht language and culture as part of their schooling. Ironically, due to funding shortages, the abandoned residential school is being used.

Similar circumstances were in existence in Alert Bay. Before working there, I had poignant associations of the Alert Bay residential school from reading the novel, *I Heard the Owl Call my Name*. One of the characters, the old carver, talks of the unease in Kingcome Village when the young people come back from the residential school in Alert Bay for Christmas.

> it is always so when the young come back from the school. My people are proud of them, and resent them. They come from a far country. They speak English all the time, and forget the words of Kwak'wala. (Craven, 1967:52)

Today, students learn Kwak'wala in the same school where their relatives began to lose the language. It is difficult to express the peculiar feeling working in these former residential schools gave me; perhaps it is because the ghosts of those times still live and haunt.

While working there, I traveled with my students from Alert Bay to Kingcome Village on a seine boat. For me, the field trip felt like a pilgrimage. Kingcome had been alive in my mind for years. For my students, many of whom had relatives from there, it was a cultural "coming home." As the seine boat floated down the inlet to approach the village I spotted a bald eagle atop a tall cedar tree. Thoughts of Craven's sequel, *Again Calls the Owl*, were on my mind: "For years Kingcome was all but deserted. The tribe had crossed the bridge into the white man's world of modern wonders and marvelous gadgets" (Craven, 1980:117).The day came when Craven learned that "slowly, the Indians were beginning to drift back to Kingcome."

> They have begun to realize that however well they do in the white man's world, nothing can replace their own deep roots that reach back so many hundreds of years. The culture has changed greatly, but it holds the deepest meaning of their lives... The white man's culture can never take its place, nor can they ever become completely part of his culture. Seventy Indians have returned to the village of Quee, 'the inside place.'
>
> (phone call excerpt, Eric Powell in Craven, 1980:77-78)

When I was there, that number had grown. The exodus had become a return as the river flowed the other way. Our students from Alert Bay joined the Kingcome students to host a potlatch for the community in the village Big House. There were people in Kingcome who, like Kelly's father, had been sent to residential school and witnessed changes that brought a decline in cultural practices and the use of Kwak'wala. Likely they could not see times changing either. Nevertheless, they have.

In regard to language revival, the role of the community is critical. Kirkness (1989:26) says that, as a basic principle, language retention must be done, in the first instance, in the community. There is no replacement for the will of the community to have its language survive; the community must be willing to organize itself and create a collective will. Similarly, Schmidt (1990:55) agrees that it is pointless to attempt language revival strategies without the vital ingredient of strong and continuous community support and participation[51]. There is controversy surrounding the issue of the community versus the school as the medium for Native language maintenance and renewal programs. However, Aboriginal communities that control their own schools often see schooling as a means of halting language loss and revitalizing culture (McAlpine & Herodier, 1994).

While the "community factor" surfaces in discussions of Native language revival and retention, "community" cannot necessarily be assumed. Native people are often seen as comprising a "unified group", but this is not so. Due to the diversity of history and development, different formulations of identity in different circumstances, such as rural and urban, must be allowed (Jordan, 1988). The varied settings that comprise this thesis attest to that. As I reflect upon the culture and language-rich experiences of my former students, I remind myself that these children lived in reserve settings. Undeniably, most healthy Aboriginal languages are located away from urban centres. There is a strong tendency for Aboriginal languages to decline in urban environments where communication links and pressures from white society are most intense and direct (Schmidt, 1990:15).

In a survey of indigenous languages in Saskatchewan, which included sampling from reserves, Metis communities and an urban community (Saskatoon), the author notes

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[51]The community factor in language revival is emphasised with: the Navajos (McLaughlin, 1993); the Quechua (Hornberger, 1989); Australian Aborigines (Harris, 1990); and, in Canada with the Inuit (Starrs, 1985, 1991); the Mi'kmaq (Battiste, 1987); and the Cree (Feurer, 1993; McAlpine & Herodier, 1994).

that, predictably, indigenous language use did not appear to be strong in the urban area as cities pose a number or problems for language retention[52] (Fredeen, 1991). However, while indigenous languages in the urban centre of Saskatoon can be considered to be in extremely critical condition, there was a high level of agreement with the position that indigenous languages were important and should be retained and also with the view that they should be included in school programming.

This corresponds with the opinions of research participants. In spite of the fact that these children are among the "least likely" to be using a Native language, it cannot be assumed that these languages do not hold value and importance for them. How can I frame "making a language comeback" for these inner city students? Before I could explore possibilities for these "worst case scenario" students, I wanted to know the source of their desire to keep Native languages safe. I hoped that acquiring an idea as to where the motivation was coming from would help me to think about how to direct that desire. Their voices offer a critical perspective; if trends do not change, their story may also become the story of future generations.

The Desire to "Keep the Language Going"

The reasons for Native language preservation that surfaced in the fieldwork were interconnected; they also intersected with the literature. The reasons from recognizing the need for language diversity, while valuing the uniqueness of Native languages to noting the role language plays in cultural transmission and communication. The thread of identity wound its way throughout.

The importance of language diversity itself surfaced; these students saw that the world would be diminished with fewer languages. Not all languages do the same thing. Simply translating from one language to another does not equate an equal exchange.

> Well, I think it's sad that languages are dying out because languages are something important and just to speak English would be very plain. There's something about individuality and different languages that's just nice. Other languages, they're something special—you can't exactly translate anything perfectly into English. Native languages have lots of words that mean very special things. If it keeps going this way there's just going to be one or two languages all around the world and that wouldn't be very good. Tonya

Hale (1992) discusses the importance of linguistic diversity: from the perspective of linguistic science, if English, for example, were the only language available for the study

[52]Reasons given as to why cities pose a number of problems for language retention include: those who temporarily move from an indigenous language-speaking community to a city may switch to English during and after their stay; because of the variety of indigenous languages and cultures represented in the cities, English tends to be used as the "lingua franca"; the cities are English milieus.

of general grammatical competence, linguists would miss a great deal (see also chapter four). This may indeed be true, but linguists' reasons for wanting to preserve language diversity are going to be very different from youth whose languages are endangered. This can be evidenced by Shelley 's explanation for sheltering other languages when English is already spoken for communication: "Well, a good reason would be that wouldn't be very fair to anybody cause like everyone has their own ways that would be just like making everybody be the same and that's not very much fun." The not "very fair" reference returns in Shelley's words as a theme throughout this thesis.

To Shelley, what gets lost when a language dies is "heritage and like tradition, stuff like that, that would just change everything cause if you can't talk your own language then what's the point?" Her views on endangered Native languages:

> Well, that's not very fair because the Natives were the first ones, they were the first ones here, so like why should they (their languages) have to go first? I don't want the Native language to die out cause that's what they talk and that's like theirs and we don't got a lot cause the Natives were always getting things taken away from them but that's something we do got.

Shelley's comment strikes me as particularly significant, and the last part crucial as it speaks to current reality. I contrast this with Santeca who told me that learning the language would help her to learn her culture. To her culture was "the way the people used to live." When I probed to contrast city life with the "way things used to be," Santeca said she would "like to learn how to hunt and build teepees." I can understand this dream, but that does not make it realistic. Shelley is perfectly justified in saying that what has happened is not fair, but she is hanging on to something that still has possibility. Although she does not speak much Cree herself, she is speaking on behalf of Native people who have lost so much, but still have the language.

Related to this, for these students, none of whom speak the language, was a determination to preserve culture through being able to pass the language on. To be able to pass the language on, it has to "not die." Johnny considered "mostly our culture and our background" to be what gets lost when a language dies. In his words: "We're going to have to be like the children, the students who are going to have to be taught our own language to keep the language going." Fabio said he wanted to learn more Cree "because I want to pass on the language to my children 'cause it will be part of their culture." Santeca wanted to learn her traditional language "so when I have kids I can pass it on to them and then the language can keep going."

None of these Native students come from families where a language other than English is spoken as the first language at home. Still, several of them talked about wanting

to learn their traditional language so that they would be better able to communicate with relatives. If Johnny learned more Cree he would be able to talk to his grandmother more easily because his grandmother "speaks English kind of, but she speaks Cree better." When I asked Santeca what she could do in Shuswap that she could not in English, her response was, "Well I could talk to my grandma and if my uncles back in B.C. spoke Shuswap instead of English, then I could communicate with them, too."

In closing this section, I turn to Kelly. Her reasons for wanting to learn Cree reflect what I was trying to say earlier about how the status of Native languages has changed and how this bodes well for the revival of the language. During the interview Kelly told me why she wanted to learn Cree:

> I think I wanted to speak Cree just so that when I was around non-Native people they wouldn't know what I was talking about and that I'd be able to talk about them right in front of their face and I wouldn't have to sneak around and say anything in back. I could say it right to them and they'd be standing right there and they still wouldn't realize.

She continued:

> And when my Dad got sick with cancer, I guess the one thing I wanted to do was at least say hello to him or whatever in Cree, you know when I used to spend time with him.

Considering the Kelly I have come to know, I told her I assumed her motivations for wanting to learn the language had expanded.

> Ya (laughter) it's because I work with so many Native people the big thing is that with our culture the teaching of some of the traditional ways, they lose their meaning when we translate them into English and especially with our prayers, there's almost no way to translate them. So much of the meaning would be lost of what our elders are trying to say. So that's really the big motivation in wanting to learn the language, it's because of our elders and it seems like so many of the old people speak Cree and the young people even from all the different schools that are happening now are learning it. More and more people are teaching their children how to speak Cree.

In these reasons I see a transformation; while her desire for learning Cree was always related to Native identity, her motivations have gone from rebellion to a personal association and have expanded to the larger Native community. Here I do not mean to equate rebellion with negativity as I believe her resistance was a necessary survival strategy for Kelly. But, she has held on to that identity throughout her process and can now see that times have changed. Not only do the old people speak Cree, young people are learning the language as people are once again teaching their children how to speak

Cree. Perhaps the Fernwood students will be able to realize their dreams of being able to talk to their relatives in a Native language and someday be able to pass that language on to their children. However, this will not happen without concerted effort.

The Times They Keep Changing

> In Northern Quebec, there is a wide river that flows for many miles until its waters reach Ungava Bay. One woman who has lived most of her life on the shores of this river likened the recent cultural changes in the lives of Inuit to the water of the river, perpetually moving and flowing across a bed of time. Life must evolve—it always does—and Inuit, she felt, were adapting the course of their river to meet the flow of time.
>
> (Crago, Annahatak, Ningiuruvik, 1993:205)

In this chapter I have documented evidence to show that times have changed regarding attitudes toward and use of Native languages. In this section, I make the point that it is important to keep in mind that times will continue to change. As can be seen with the Kingcome example (above), it may take a while for people whose culture and language have undergone immense change to realize that nothing can replace their own deep cultural and linguistic heritage[53].

I offer the following account to illustrate my point as it is indicative of the cyclical nature of change. Ovando (1994) investigated the attitudes of students, parents, and teachers toward school and community issues in Nulato, a remote Athapaskan Village in Alaska[54]. Ovando's initial study took place in 1983; he returned in 1992 to reexamine earlier findings.

Ovando (1994) notes that the changes that have occurred in the place of Native language instruction in the curriculum are illustrative of the curricular ebb and flow over the past decade. For example, there was a shift from emphasis on being "Native language bilingual" in the 1980's to being "computer bilingual" in the 1990's. This was related to a decrease in job opportunities in the community. As the pendulum swings again, there is currently renewed concern over the future of the Athapaskan language.

> What does the future hold for Nulato and its school? The community does value maintenance of its cultural heritage, and the main challenge for the 1990s will most likely be to continue to prepare students for participation in the larger socioeconomic structure while also playing an interventionist role in maintaining the culture and vitality of the community. This will involve, among other things, a careful recycling of the valuable experience, knowledge, and wisdom of the village elders. For instance, as the more educated parents of today's children realize their own linguistic

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[53]Others will have different realizations.

[54]Ovando chose Nulato for his study because it was known among Alaska bush schools to have a strong educational programme.

> and cultural disconnectedness from their parents, there is still hope that ties can be reestablished. (Ovando, 1994:58)

Despite the retreat from bilingual instruction in the 1980's, culture and language restoration are becoming high priorities in the 1990's. The principal is currently exploring the possibility of using Athapaskan elders to build language nests with monolingual English speaking Athapaskan children. Patterned after language nesting in New Zealand among the Maoris, the idea will be to surround Nulato's children with a group of Athapaskan speaking elders on a regular basis during the school year to encourage the development of the Athapaskan language.

The fact that this is being suggested for English speaking students with Native heritage is encouraging for students such as those at Fernwood. But, how do youth in Nulato regard the Athapaskan language? A student at the Nulato High School talks of language loss:

> None of the students at my high school, Andrew K. Demoski in Nulato, can speak our Native language, Athapaskan. Instead of learning to speak it we are being taught English. None of us care to sit and try to learn our Native language from the elders in our community; we are all busy watching television and listening to music by Mr. Big and Nirvana. None of the students wear Mukluks; we are all wearing expensive basketball shoes. ("Students Speak," 1992, p.17), in Ovando, 1994:46

It goes without saying that I am in no way suggesting that Native students should wear mukluks rather than costly basketball shoes. This work is not driven from any desire to freeze Aboriginal culture in the past; change and adaptation are inevitable. Hence, some of the same students who now prefer to listen to Nirvana will at another time want to talk to their elders in Athapaskan. Whatever can be done now to keep that option open for the future is of consequence.

CHALLENGES TO INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE PRESERVATION

What about keeping the options open for the Fernwood students? They have expressed their concerns about Native language loss and their desire to be part of the movement to "keep Native languages going." What are the limitations and challenges involved in the efforts to preserve or revive endangered languages? In this section I will explore some of these. Needless to say, there are many other challenges; I have chosen to focus on the ones that are particularly relevant to this research project.

Language Closure

Through the fieldwork and literature I have encountered various types of language closure which limit the possible base of the language survival. One kind is the assumption that Native languages are only for Native people, implying a closing of the group based on ethnicity. The notion that Native languages will only be learned by Native peoples suggests an acceptance of a "low status" position for Native languages. Is it correct to assume that non-Natives will have no reason or interest in learning a Native language? This is certainly not the pattern with many other languages, as people outside an ethnic group learn Spanish, French, German, and so on.

Kelly's comment (above) that "I wanted to speak Cree just so that when I was around non-Native people they wouldn't know what I was talking about" certainly points to this type of supposition. However, there are non-Native people interested in learning a Native language. For example, I asked Kelly if there was a long time period between her desire to learn Cree and her actual enrolling in Cree classes at the University of Alberta.

> Ya, but I was [illegible] interested in the language, but ya definitely. I first talked to som[illegible] the University about doing night classes around 1988 but I didn't w[illegible] go because I was the only Native student that was there, the r[illegible] the people that were going to take the course were all non-Native. Fighting back again, I guess.

The circumstances have been reversed in that Kelly could no longer assume non-Native people would not know Cree. However, if non-Native people learning Cree meant that Kelly would not, this is still a case of language closure.

> It is not only non-Native adults who are enrolled in Native language classes.
>
> In a few communities a fascinating role-reversal is taking place whereby non-Indian students are attending Native-run schools and learning the local Native language. For children attaining a 'sense of place,' isn't this more reasonable than those non-Indian children learning French?
>
> (Randy Fred, 1988:11-12)

This aptly describes the situation in the Native-run schools in which I worked. Although there were public schools nearby, some non-Native parents made the choice to send their children to the schools on the reserve. These children were welcome to attend the schools, although Native students were given priority if space was limited. Non-Native students attended the Native language and dance classes and took part in all cultural activities. Considering where these children lived, I would agree with Fred—learning the local

Native language (at least for some of the students) did seem more reasonable than learning French.

Although Tonya has not had the opportunity, she would be proud to learn a Native language.

> Learning Native languages is something just to feel proud inside that you can speak a different language and you know different things about different cultures. Tonya

Non-Native people learning a Native language has the potential to expand the language base and lend support towards language preservation. There must be reciprocity, though. If Native people do not regard their language as something to be shared and perhaps learned by others, this will not be possible. Tonya addresses this controversial subject.

> Languages are not owned by anybody. Native languages shouldn't be necessarily just for Native people. It's not only languages, but with other things, material things, nothing belongs to any specific person, everything belongs to everybody.

Another type of language closure that surfaced concerns the relationship between elders and youth. Schmidt (1990:20) notes that speaker attitudes can be conducive to a break in the intergenerational language transmission link. She describes the "gemstone" effect, when the language is regarded by its last older speakers as a "gemstone" or treasured link with a threatened cultural heritage. In such cases, it may be common for older speakers not to transmit their language to younger generations for fear that younger individuals (with radically different, often Western-oriented values) would not suitably treasure the language heritage. Schmidt provides an example, in the words of a last speaker of Wagga, an Australian Aboriginal language: "I won't talk language to these young ones. I bin keepin' it a secret 'cause young people they won't look after it. That's why the old people have taken language to the grave with them."

The scope of my research does not take into consideration the elders' perspective, but Shelley touches on the other side of this process.

> Nobody listens to the elders, they've lost their respect for them. It's the 90's. Everybody just stopped listening and nobody cares what they think... If they don't want to listen to them to pass the language on, pretty soon they're not gonna be around no more so like it's not gonna get nowhere if they don't learn it. Ya, if they just keep it to themselves they're gonna die with it, that's just the way it is, because it's the elders who know the language.

Shelley's statement "they're gonna die with it" sounds very much like "taking the language to the grave with them." I asked Shelley if she thought that could change. "Oh probably, if everybody just listened for once instead of just telling them to shut up and walk away." Once again, there is a need for two-way give and take; or, in other words, the river has to flow both ways.

People and Place

The interrelated themes of "whom to learn the language from" and "where to learn the language" arose during the interviews. In terms of the research participants being able to learn a Native language, Shelley raises a valid point with "it's the elders who know the language." Fredeen (1991:194) notes that indigenous languages are retained in part due to the presence in the community of adults and elders who speak only or primarily the indigenous language. As time goes on, there will be fewer such individuals; consequently one more factor which has acted to reinforce indigenous language use will diminish in strength. For the students, there was a realization that, in some cases, the elders are needed for language transmission.

> We're going to have to be like the children, the students who are going to have to be taught our own language to keep it going. I think we should be able to learn our language because if we don't learn it and our elders die then they take the language with them and we don't know what it is and another language is lost after that. Johnny

Johnny is not describing the gemstone effect, in that he is not saying that the elders are *not* willing to pass the language on. Nevertheless, this places a burden on the relationship between elders and the younger generation, especially considering that many youth have parents who do not speak the language themselves. Johnny identified his grandma as someone from whom he could learn Cree: "If I stay at my grandma's I'll learn more because she teaches me a lot."

Shelley also keyed a grandmother as someone from whom to learn the language. "Well, they could ask to learn, they could ask somebody to teach them. Probably the elders would be the people to ask, like if you have a Native grandma that could teach you." However, in terms of being able to learn the language from her grandmother, Shelley did not feel as hopeful as Johnny.

> Actually, my mom doesn't know a lot, a few words. My grandmother knows a little more, but she doesn't talk it because my real grandfather died when I was just newborn and now my grandmother's married to another guy and he's like all white so he doesn't know about the language and stuff, he wouldn't understand it. Sometimes she would talk to her son, but he's moved out now.

Related to whom they could learn the language from, was the question of where they could learn the language. Schmidt (1991:14) notes that, for urban aborigines, there are fewer opportunities to speak an Aboriginal language, in terms of both availability of speakers and suitable context of use.

In her report on indigenous language use in Saskatoon, Fredeen (1991) suggests that individuals' and families' strong ties to indigenous communities outside the city play a critical part in maintaining existing levels of language use[55]. This corresponds with what the research participants had to say. Several of the students had the impression that learning a Native language was dependent on "going somewhere." Considering that they live in inner city Edmonton, this is hardly surprising.

Santeca, whose family language is Shuswap, mentioned that she would likely have to go back to the reserve in British Columbia to learn the Shuswap language. Fabio reported hearing Cree being spoken "lots" when their family goes out to visit his stepbrother who lives on the Long Lake Reserve. His stepbrother's whole family speaks fluently, but Fabio told me that it is "mostly the older people" he hears speaking Cree.

Shelley also talked about going to a reserve to learn the language, at the same time recognizing that that option cannot necessarily be taken for granted (forever), either. We had been talking about the fact that, unlike European languages, there is nowhere to return to in order to learn a "lost" Native language.

> Well, if you went to a reserve maybe not cause somebody could teach you there. But, it will be too late if you don't make it there soon, if you just keep putting it off.

Johnny said that he will probably have to "go somewhere" to learn the language so he can teach his kids. He is fortunate to be one of the students with "strong ties outside the city." Johnny hears the language when he visits his grandma and other relatives on the Kehewin Reserve. Describing his visits, he said "I feel more closer with my grandma. She talks about the culture and she tells me what things mean and stuff like that but I always forget it cause I don't hear it all the time."

"Taught" Language

I noticed that none of the students' responses about what they thought was involved in learning the language related to school specifically. Perhaps responses would have been different had I talked to students who were actually in a language programme.

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[55]Fredeen reports a relatively high level of indigenous language use associated with ceremonies and wakes, both of which typically take place in Indian or Metis communities rather than in Saskatoon.

When I asked the students if they would be interested in learning Cree if it were offered at Fernwood, their responses were predominantly in the affirmative.

I have already mentioned that these particular students are not going to be having a language program at Fernwood School, at least not in the immediate future. Nevertheless, the role of the school in Native language issues is a significant component of this thesis. In chapter three, I outlined some suggestions for *how* languages should/should not be taught. I did not discuss *whether* languages should be taught. At this time, I offer a brief discussion of "taught" language.

Illich (1992) makes the point that traditional cultures lived on vernacular language that was absorbed by each group through its roots. Until recently language was not treated like a commodity; taught everyday language is without precedent in pre-industrial cultures. Language has only in our generation been recognized as a worldwide need for all people which must be satisfied by planned, programmed intervention. The vernacular spreads by practical use, which is not the case with taught language. Rather than placing excessive focus on school as the place where one learns, Illich's perspective minimizes its role.

I agree with Illich that language is learned through meaningful exchange, not through being taught in schools. However, I also agree with Harris (1990) when he says that chances of traditional Aboriginal language survival are fairly slim and therefore the adage "desperate measures for desperate situations" is applicable. In the past, Native people did not have to "teach" their languages; they were passed on naturally. However, for many indigenous languages natural language transmission is not presently an option.

NEWS CLIPPING

Speaking up for a dying language

Cecile Wawanolet hopes to save Abenaki from extinction.

Odanak, Que.

Cecile Wawanolet, standing at a blackboard, is running a race against time. She's 85 years old—though she doesn't look or act like it. Behind her large glasses, her eyes are bright. Her mind seems sharp as a knife blade.

And that's a good thing. For Wawanolet is among a mere handful of people who speak fluent Abenaki[56]—one of the most endangered languages on Earth. Since the spring of 1990, she has been working to pass on her knowledge, hoping against hope that her mother tongue will survive without her.

Every Tuesday evening, Wawanolet spends three hours teaching Abenaki to a small group of students at the Wanaskaodemek Cultural Centre in Odanak, a village near Sorel that is the Abenakis' main reserve in Canada. Most of her listeners are themselves over 50.

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[56]Foster (1982) categorizes Abenaki as "verging on extinction" (fewer than 10 speakers).

> .....Why does that matter? Why is it important that Cecile Wawanolet stands, chalk in a veined hand, at the blackboard in Odanak's cultural centre, patiently explaining the 26 verb forms of Abenaki?
>
> The point is this, perhaps: every language embodies not just a distinct vocabulary and a set of grammatical rules, but also a whole vision of experience. The disappearance of a language, any language, means an impoverishment of life on Earth....
>
> Montreal Gazette, November, 1993

Certainly Cecile Wawanolet's actions could be considered "desperate measures for desperate situations." I am in awe of her dedication and have no doubt that what she is doing *matters*. This does not change the fact that her teaching Abenaki will not likely result in saving Abenaki. "Real" language development does not occur through teaching language, it comes through using languages.

A powerful example of this occurred for me last summer when I attended a Blackfoot Methodology Course offered by one of my professors in Southern Alberta. After a year of reading *about* Native languages, I was excited to have some first-hand exposure to language teaching. The course took place in a school classroom belonging to a teacher who had not participated in the course. Among teaching materials that had been left in the class, I happened to come across the Blackfoot final exam for high school students This was such a disillusioning experience that I wrote about it in my journal after the course.

> As I sit looking at the Blackfoot Language Final Test I recall the mix of thoughts and feelings I had when I came across them at the end of the first day of the course. This one belongs to a grade 11 student; his grade is 40%. There were both higher and lower marks. The same test was used for grades 7-12 with certain sections being omitted for the younger students. I wondered how a Native student learning his traditional language 'at school' would feel when he saw 40% stamped on his final paper. Would he associate this with 'failure'? I think of 40% as a failing grade. I remember being surprised at the content of the test, as well: translating vocabulary words from English to Blackfoot and vice versa, listing the Blackfoot alphabet, writing diphthongs, listing semi-vowels and glottal stops, pluralizing animate and inanimate nouns, writing proper person tense for verb phrases, etc. Honestly, I'd like to know how many of my classmates could even define a diphthong or a glottal stop!
>
> Journal excerpt, August, 1994

This is not to say that language teaching has no place in schools. Given the situation of imminent language loss/shift, if there are no longer "natural" learning environments around, these may have to be recreated, as with the language nests. Harris's (1990) position is that schools can profitably engage in some fairly artificial but acceptable behaviours to achieve particular learning goals, and adopt some rules for language usage which might be naive outside the classroom. Harris acknowledges that some linguists will view his suggestions for making Aboriginal language maintenance possibilities more

accessible to teachers as unnatural and oversimplified[57], adding that "one of the frustrations of reading about language maintenance is that there seems to be a precedent for why almost every practical suggestion is wrong" (p.69). This may very well be true, but does this mean that there is no point in trying?

The controversy is related to the fact that linguistic research in language maintenance focuses on what are the "natural" processes of language shift. However, common knowledge tells us that the majority of Aboriginal languages have already died out through "natural" processes and this trend will likely continue, as Aborigines in remote communities are in a new era of contact with English. The school, if cleverly handled, may be one force that by "non-natural" means could help stem language shift[58].

The primacy of oral language use cannot be underestimated; literacy may broaden the domain of usage of a language, and increase its status, but the life of a language is in its oral functions[59]. Language learning theory demonstrates that language is best learned in conducive social contexts. There needs to be a focus on language learning related to cultural contexts, rather than striving for language maintenance in a contextual vacuum.

Schools can also serve the function of "legitimizing" language. As one of the causes of minority language loss is the status of the larger and dominant language, one of the contributions of bilingual schools to language maintenance is the prestige they add to Aboriginal languages (Harris, 1990: 78).

POSSIBILITIES FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE USE

What does all this have to do with the students at Fernwood who are not learning the language as part of their schooling process? If they were, it would certainly be a case of "taught" language as these students do not have a Native language as a primary means of communication. What are the possibilities then? In the last section I will focus on the identity function of language as that is what I consider to be the most relevant to the students at Fernwood. I will explore possibilities for creating safe language and culture havens and close with general recommendations for mobilizing energy to reverse the process of language loss.

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[57]The rift between linguists and educators was discussed in chapter three.

[58]For more detail see Harris (1990), chapter four, *Oral Language Use.*

[59]Unfortunately, this thesis does not allow for a thorough examination of the literacy function in Native language maintenance and revival. For a fascinating analysis of language and literacy on a Navajo reservation, see McLaughlin (1989a).

Language of Identity

Robinson (1985) notes that while Native-language loss need not imply a decline in ethnic-group identity, one of the distinctive cultural differences from the dominant society will have been lost. Concurring with Robinson, Kulick (1992) states that it is possible for a group to shift languages without substantially shifting its ethnicity[60] and Edwards (1993) claims that continuation of the original group language is not essential for the continuity of group identity. Where the language remains, though, it is indisputably a strong reinforcer and component of that identity. By focusing on Native language revival I am not suggesting that the research participants (or anyone else) would be more Native if they spoke a Native language. However, these statements correspond to what the research participants have shared with me. In talking about their Native heritage, they have expressed a desire to come to know a missing piece of that identity through the language.

Schmidt (1990:34) notes that language performs two basic functions for its speakers—it is a communication device for transmitting information, and a vehicle of identity. During language loss, the communicative function of the language diminishes as speakers become more reliant on the replacing language. For many Aboriginal groups, the identity function of the language remains important long after the language has ceased to be used as the primary code of communication. Edwards (1993) also notes a distinction between the communicative and symbolic value of language. For most majority-group populations these two facets co-exist; however, for many minority groups who have undergone language shift, the symbolic value remains once the communicative function has disappeared. The identity function of language plays an important role in Aboriginal language maintenance and it serves as a major incentive for active use of the language and as a stop-gate for total language loss. As long as Aboriginal people wish to maintain their identity as distinct from mainstream society (and other Aboriginal groups), it is likely that they will retain at least some salient features of their language as verbal markers of that identity (Schmidt, 1990).

Harris (1994:145-6) notes that nowadays to talk about cultural differences or binary relationships may be seen as politically incorrect. One argument is that all is socially constructed; there are no cultural absolutes. Such oversimplified views of cultural identity or difference do tend to produce negative stereotypes which are problematic in ways I have addressed elsewhere in this thesis. On the other hand, the principle of social construction has weaknesses when pushed to the limits with language. Like culture, languages evolve and change, but while it can be argued that cultures are not "lost," languages can be lost.

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[60]The Irish have demonstrated this.

> The social science issue of whether or not cultural identity can be maintained in a new language is not as important as the issue of what the people feel and what type of schooling will support their goals. So, while the principle of the social construction of reality, of culture, and identity is important and true, so is the need people have for roots, symbols, and ideals: hence, the felt need to strive to retain something of the old; hence, the subjective and in my view legitimate perception that there are cultural essences which have to be fought for. (Harris, 1994:146)

Jordan (1988) identifies the real problem of indigenous people to be one of constructing anew an ethnic identity. They cannot return to the past, but they must establish whether there are aspects of the lifestyle from the past which can still be credibly integrated into their contemporary "theorizing" about identity in order to give coherence to the group. One of my questions is whether traditional language is one of those aspects, especially for those (such as the Fernwood students) who speak primarily a mainstream language. Harris's ideas lead me to think that traditional languages can be part of a contemporary lifestyle.

In chapter three, I outlined the differences between the "soft" and "hard" versions of the domain theory which Harris applies to two-way schooling and explained why, initially, I did not see the theory as particularly relevant for those not in geographically isolated places. Narrowing this discussion for the moment to the Fernwood students, the hard domain version is undoubtedly unrealistic as it requires the main language spoken at home to be the indigenous language. While the hard domain version could sustain language maintenance, and possibly language revival, the soft version could not, as it is not complemented by mother tongue language use in the home. In Harris's (1994:148) view the soft version has a reasonable chance of enabling Native language competence at least to the point where it is a *language of identity* and, in his opinion, this is likely to grow in importance in the future. My research certainly supports this view.

Harris (1990:85) suggests that traditional Aboriginal languages will only survive in use by young people through being modernised. Educators need to pay attention to what is meaningful to Aboriginal youth when talking to each other. The school may make a contribution, though not the major one. The peer group value system is a key factor in language maintenance as much language learning occurs in peer contexts. The real challenge in terms of language maintenance is the social function[61], and the identity-making function (p.82).

It strikes me that this aspect of Harris's analysis applies (at least to a considerable degree) whether students are speaking an Aboriginal language or not. Struggling with

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[61]See also the discussion in chapter three on the social function (McConvell, 1991a).

"identity" issues and trying to find some "meaning" in the schooling process are ongoing realities. Of course, this applies to all youth. For Native youth, whose cultural heritage is often not reflected in the school system, negotiating this can be particularly challenging. Educators need to pay attention to what is meaningful to Aboriginal youth, regardless of the language used.

According to Stairs (1994b:167), the deepest issue in cultural negotiation is identity: the cultural negotiation of education[62] is in fact the negotiation of identity as it evolves through interactions of individual and surrounding culture(s), and between cultures. She notes that schools for modern adolescent Inuit (and other indigenous students) must engage them in questions of who they are and where they are going, questions of present and future identity before they will actively attend either to stories of the elders or modern secondary curricula.

> Indigenous education focused at even the highest level of cultural meaning can be tokenistic in its negotiation with mainstream education... It is the depth of active process across all levels of meaning which drives cultural negotiation and which has so often remained an invisible dimension in indigenous educational development...As an example, negotiation at the initial language level can result in a superficial process of introducing add-on "cultural inclusion" (Stairs, 1991) indigenous language classes once or twice a week, unrelated to and with no effect on other school programs. On the other hand, it can result in the deep process of elder and community involvement, collective efforts at language renewal, and the strengthening of local indigenous identity around the language, its use and the cultural values it uniquely conveys. (Stairs, 1994b:165)

Whether the Fernwood students speak a Native language or not, this way of looking at indigenous education allows for possibilities to be explored. I am tempted to say that interviewing elders or talking to family members about language loss would perhaps be more meaningful than pluralizing animate and inanimate nouns in a Cree class[63].

Creating Safe Language Havens

While acknowledging the validity of this, I still want to look at language opportunities for the research participants. Harris (1994:146-7) argues that "there needs to be some clear, symbolically powerful, consistent, and repeatable vision and structure to harness the resources needed to maintain a vulnerable language or culture." Using the Fernwood students as an example, they do point to the fragility of the language/culture. Moreover, they indicate a longing to hang on to and resurrect that vulnerable

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[62]The cultural negotiation of indigenous education was also discussed in chapter three.
[63]These ideas will be discussed in more depth in the final chapter.

language/culture. As an educator, the core of Harris's work is devoted to what to do in schools; my frame of reference is similar.

When I broached the subject, the principal at Fernwood was not opposed to the idea of a Native language program at the school. On the contrary, he saw the possibility as beneficial to the Native students. Factors considered to be problematic were: inadequate funding, the shortage of certified Cree instructors, and limited space in the curriculum. The assistant principal said she considered the Native language to be a huge component of Native Awareness, but that Kelly does not speak Cree[64].

"Two-way schooling" also hinges upon the Aboriginal language being spoken in the home. On both counts, this does not depict the students at Fernwood. Still, there are aspects of the theory that are relevant to this study. I offer a statement, made by a Chilean linguist in communication with Harris, which influenced my thinking:

> I used to oppose this notion of domains...but now I support it in special situations because you just have to drive your stake in somewhere.
> (E. Hamel, personal communication, 1992, in Harris, 1994:147)

Indeed, one of the most salient features of situations in which indigenous languages and cultures have survived is the existence of special domains, such as church activities, in which only that language is spoken. The separate domains (the Native-language domain and the dominant language domain) appear to facilitate language and, by extension, cultural maintenance (Henze & Vanett, 1993:118)[65]. Harris (1994:147-148) maintains that the cultural domain theory does not arise from a desire to be extreme, but from observation of the few groups who have maintained their language when the current was overpowering. Those looking for direction can consult what others have done to keep their languages strong. Groups that have utilised culture domain separation include: certain Australian Aboriginal groups, some Pueblo Indians, the Amish, Hassidic Jews, Gypsies, and some Mohawk immersion/survival schools.

Unfortunately, Hamel's views on "domains for special situations" were not included. What struck me about the comment was the attitude and determination behind "you just have to drive your stake in somewhere[66]." This made me think of Cecile Wawanolet—what a profound example of just driving the stake in she furnishes! Given the overwhelming odds, it would be reasonable for her to consider Abenaki a lost cause and do nothing. Even if her efforts do not result in saving Abenaki from extinction, they

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[64]See Taylor, Crago and McAlpine (1991) and Stairs (1988, 1991) for information regarding the training of Native language teachers.
[65]See also Fishman (1985) for more detail on "special domains."
[66]This thesis is my attempt to "drive the stake in somewhere."

will have a ripple effect, making a difference for others working to save endangered languages. Similarly, because circumstances for the research participants are among the worst possible for the survival and development of Native languages does not mean the situation is hopeless.

A school operating on the soft version of the domain theory would consider school as one of several safe language and culture havens. Harris (1994:148) defines a safe haven as "a site of unambiguous culture expression such as an immersion school, a religious organisation or an adult learning class." Given that the students are not in a bicultural school or enrolled in a language program, what else could constitute what Harris refers to as safe culture and language havens for these inner city students?

After listening to the students, this appears to be largely dependent on family circumstances. Some of the students have "strong ties outside the city" which might be construed as language domains. For those who do not, the need to create safe havens within the city may be more pressing.

While Johnny reported his grandma's place on the Kehewin Reserve to be the primary place where he hears Cree, he also hears the language spoken at powwows; these are on reserves out of Edmonton. When I inquired, Johnny told me that he does not hear the language spoken when he is in Edmonton. Actually, his words were, "here it's just normal."

In addition to hearing Cree spoken when he visits relatives at a reserve outside of Edmonton, places Fabio hears Cree spoken are: in speeches at powwows sometimes, at Poundmaker's, in conversation with relatives in Saskatchewan.

Candy said that she never went anywhere where she heard the Native language spoken, but she spoke about hearing Cree at the Native Awareness Day that Fernwood sponsors each year.

I mentioned in the introductions that Santeca said her family does not talk about "Native things." When asked, she said she had not attended any Native functions outside of school, but that in the summer she was going to sign up at the friendship centre: "You pay $3 for a membership and then you can go on picnics and stuff like that." Santeca said she hoped that she would hear the language spoken some there.

Shelley talked about going with a friend to a picnic which "was like a Native thing to support a band and it was at Rundle Park and there was dancing and singing. Someone gave a talk in the Native language."

Tonya, as well, mentioned the Native Awareness day at Fernwood and how "there were a few Native people there that were speaking the traditional language." She also

reported to have "gone to a lot of Native festivals actually with my parents cause they like it too."

I include these examples because these are options that already exist for these students. Naturally, there are other alternatives. For example, in Fredeen's (1991:115) survey, language and culture retention activities suggested for the urban community of Saskatoon included: adult language classes, summer immersion camps, TV and radio in indigenous languages, resident elders in schools, pre-school immersion, language and culture clubs, recreational activities conducted in Indigenous languages and newspapers in indigenous languages. Those surveyed expressed all but unanimous support for these activities.

While it may be unrealistic to speak about "language revival" for the Fernwood students, it is important they have places where they can make connections with other Native people, hear the language spoken, increase their awareness and strengthen their sense of identity.

Mobilizing Energy

In December, 1994 I attended a Kashtin concert at the Royal Jubilee Auditorium. It was an incredible feeling to look at the mix of people represented in the audience—Native, non-Native, young, not so young. The headline for the Edmonton Journal's (Dec.13th) preview was "**No politics, please:** Innu folk-rockers Kashtin are resisting pressure to be spokesmen for Canada's Natives." Florent Vollant and Claude McKenzie make up the duo, Kashtin, which means tornado in their Native Innu. On the connection between politics and Native music, Vollant says:

> It's not easy, sometimes, to be a hero. For us, we are just two guys who sing in a strange language. It's not easy for us to mix politics and music. We support the goals of Natives by doing what we do in our own language, saying to the rest of the world that we are still alive and that we are proud to share who we are.
>
> I'm not a politician, just a musician, and I'm better to stay that way. If I can help people to discover Native life through our music, that's great, but we've seen political situations separate people. We think our music can get people together.

While only about 12,000 people in Northern Quebec and Newfoundland speak the Innu language, 350, 000 of their first two independently released albums have been sold. I can understand Kashtin's desire to keep music and politics separate. They are just doing what they love to do—sing in their Native language—and are lucky enough to be able to make a living at it. For the time being, though, it may be difficult for Kashtin to escape this type of political representation. It is ironic that, as Native singers, they are considered

to be spokesmen for Canada's First Nations; an English speaking singer would not necessarily be assumed to be driven by political motives, unless the content of his/her music was political. However, Kashtin is part of the "changing times." Their place as role models cannot be overstated. Particularly with youth, the potential influence is profound. My experience is that *nothing* reaches the young as does music. This can be evidenced by the suicide a year ago of Kurt Cobain and the number of copycat suicides that have occurred since.

Unwilling spokesmen though they may be, Kashtin may play an important role in securing a place for those in the future, when singing (or speaking) in a Native language is just an expression of who people are and what they do. In the meantime, Aboriginal language issues will likely remain politicized[67].

Fleras (1993:31) stresses the potential political import of Aboriginal languages.

> Not only are Aboriginal languages perceived as the embodiment of cultural distinctiveness and identity, their preservation is also upheld as a rallying point to mobilize. By rephrasing the language crisis in terms of Aboriginal self-determination rather than as a problem of communication preference, the often abstract demands of Aboriginality are compressed and conveyed in a manner acceptable to central policy structures.

For example, according to Fleras, the social impact and policy implications of the Kohanga Reo (above) have resulted in: the politicization of Aboriginal issues; the legitimation of Aboriginal claims as valid in a bicultural society; the presentation of Aboriginal demands on terms that central policy structures can relate to; and the mobilization of the Maori public around the principle of Maori self-determination. Comparing Canadian and Maori language renewal strategies, Fleras notes that a proposal to employ a system of Native language immersion preschools, similar to those of the Kohanga Reo, has failed to garner political or community support. In her opinion, "failure to politicize the Aboriginal language crisis or to engage in issue-linkage has been partly responsible" (p.31).

Friesen (1991) notes that Native language rights have been largely ignored by government. This situation is changing, however, as many Native leaders believe that language is the primary key to Native cultural survival. Friesen's view is that the persistence of Native languages will rest on two main elements: the will of Native people themselves and the entrenchment of language rights in appropriate legislation by the nation's governments. He argues that when the heart of the concerns of "the Native community in the interest of cultural persistence... and [those of] Canadians in the interest

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[67]Of course, there are many for whom speaking an Aboriginal language is just a natural part of their lives.

of national pluralism... mesh, Native language maintenance will be assured" (p.160). While these elements may indeed be important, in my opinion, language retention is not in any sense simply a matter of will and language policy, but rather language use.

And, if languages are to be used more, people will need to make some changes. On what Native people could do so to keep their languages safe, Shelley said, "Well, they could start talking them more and they could talk to the non-Native people in their family. They could try to get them to understand better." Flowing from this, I asked her what non-Native people need to understand about this. "They could understand, well, how would you like it if we went and took your language and said you can't speak it anymore? They could try to understand that." The type of "mixed" families that Shelley describes are increasingly common, especially in urban areas. The need for communication among Native/non-Native people, within and outside of families, is similar to the need for communication among Native people, within and outside of families. Can Shelley talk[68] about this at home? "Well, maybe, I'm not too sure cause it's just me and mom living there now. With my grandma it's not something you can really talk about cause like her husband, he's white and he doesn't really understand what's going on." The lack of and need for understanding runs through every chapter of this thesis.

My feeling is that if Native languages are going to survive, support will be needed from all directions. In Shelley's words:

> It's kind of like everybody's problem that the Native languages are dying out, it's just not certain people's problem.

Shelley's comment is very discerning. Whether "everybody" will take ownership for this problem is another matter.

Her words call to mind Tom Porter's appeal to non-Native people for assistance in the maintenance and revival Native languages:

> We're not just like you. We have a different story, a different history, a different language. We are not like immigrants who can go back to learn a language. And, as the story is different, so the logic and rationale has to be different, too. We're looking for allies to save Native languages from extinction.
>
> Tom Porter, speech

[68]The importance of "talk" will be explored in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 6

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF DIFFERENCE

DIALOGUE

> Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. (Freire, 1970:81)

In this final chapter the river winds its way back to the Native Awareness class itself and the comment which led to my choosing it as a fieldsite: **I figure when they're asking, that's the time to talk about it.** I went into this class at Fernwood in an attempt to determine where an expressed interest in Native languages was coming from. Through data collection, I gathered information which enabled me to answer that question to some satisfaction. Naturally, while that was my intent, other issues surfaced.

A strong theme that emerged in the course of the interviews concerns the type of "space" that had been created in the Native Awareness class. Although diverse factors came together to create this space, from what I could ascertain, a key element centered around "talk." By this I mean both how the members were able to dialogue with one another, and the freedom they were allowed in what they could discuss. For these students, just being able to talk was one of the features that distinguished this class from others.

As the students talked, I listened to what they had to say about their lives. They talked about culture and Native identity, about real life and racism, about being different and celebrating difference. This chapter is about how I made sense of what I heard. It branches from the subject of languages to exploration of the role dialogue plays in building communities of difference. That is how I came to look at the Native Awareness class—as community of difference.

Time to Talk

When I interviewed Kelly, I was curious to ask her about her comment, "I figure when they're asking, that's the time to talk about it", that had been such a catalyst for me. After all, this was the comment that led to *this* thesis. What had drawn me to the comment, was its referent—Native language. I had been so preoccupied with "language," the significance of the comment itself eluded me. This became apparent through the fieldwork, as we talked *about* language. I am referring simply to the act of listening and

the willingness to talk. As it turned out, Kelly did not really remember the specifics of that conversation. But, when I showed her the card where I had written down her words, this is how she responded:

> Oh, ya. Well, I don't really have like a plan when I go into my Native Awareness class, I always think that things will just happen naturally and I think that that's part of the teaching, but I think that if we don't respond to them, then kids are going to quit asking questions. In our circle when we burn sweetgrass, there are things that kids talk about like a whole thing can just come from one kid sitting down asking a question about this and it may mean that I'll move around the room and draw something on the board just so that they'll understand something a little bit better because very few of them have experienced the Sundance, for example or been part of a sweatlodge. And I share my understanding and interpretation, especially if they ask the questions and I always like to respond to questions.

That Kelly is responsive to students' questions is indicated in the following comments:

> And in Native Awareness you can ask questions. If you didn't know something, like which way to walk in the circle, you could ask that and you wouldn't have to be embarrassed because it's just a normal question, but if you did it in Language Arts or something everyone would laugh at you. Shelley

> In the other classes you can talk when the teacher isn't there or not listening. When the teacher's there you get asked lots of questions. In the Native Awareness class you can ask stuff about yourself, more personal, without getting in trouble. Fabio

When asked what distinguished the Native Awareness class from other classes, several students commented on the oral nature of the class. This emphasis on "the oral" was not by chance; the Native oral tradition is reflected in Kelly's teaching style.

> Well, this one's oral, you talk about it. In the other classes they make you work and write and this one you can feel more relaxed than the other ones cause I don't know... I just feel more relaxed in this one. Johnny

> It's different than the other classes because everything's oral and we get to say whatever we want, anything important and we all just take our time, no hurry or anything whereas in most classes everything's got a total due date....so it helps a lot, even when I go there I'm a lot more calm and everything. It relaxes me to know that everyone in that class cares and they're all listening to what you have to say. Tonya

Johnny and Tonya appreciate the way in which an oral class, without the pressure of written assignments, enables them to feel more relaxed. It also provides an appropriate medium for discussing culture.

> In the other classes we have to write, but this is more oral. We talk about our differences and we learn new things about our culture. Fabio

Fabio likes talking because "it's fun." In the Native Awareness class, talking allows him to explore his interest in cultural roots. He can ask:

> What kind of culture do you have? How much Native are you? or Oriental? Cause that's kind of fascinating about people, what their roots are.

For some of the students, a distinctive feature of the class was that it mirrors "real life."

> We don't write much and it's more interesting than the other classes cause it has to do with your real life and the way we live, like, well, I never knew about sweetgrass before, cause our family doesn't talk about Native things. Santeca

Shelley furthers this "real life" theme.

> Well, in our other classes we write things down but Native Awareness is more about life than our other classes. Our other classes are just about school and this is about life. We don't talk about real life stuff as much in the other classes.

I asked Shelley to tell me what made it about "life."

> Well, it teaches you how to survive, like when you get out in the real world, it teaches you like, if you don't respect your elders, you're not going to get very far.

For the students, being able to talk about what was "real" for them was clearly a vital aspect of the Native Awareness class. From my perspective, I saw also how dialogue was instrumental in helping create the sense of community that existed in the class. Learning about "community" had been one of my original objectives. In my research proposal I wrote:

> The purpose of my research is to situate these aspects of Native language in an urban school setting where a homogenous language community cannot be assumed...Through my research I hope to determine what would constitute an equivalent and functional concept of community in which a Native language program could develop.
> (excerpt from research proposal, January, 1994)

By the time I completed the research, an analysis of "community" remained apropos, though in a slightly different manner than I had anticipated. Before I could conceptualize community in the research setting, I had to determine how I conceptualize community

generally. Community is usually conceived as constituted by a number of individuals having something in common—a common language, a common conceptual framework—and building something in common: a nation, a polis, an institution (Lingis, 1994: ix). This definition seemed appropriate, yet I was intrigued by the title Lingis chose for his book, *The Community of Those who Have Nothing in Common.*

I agree with Gibson (1985) that in education, "community" is often used as a "hurrah-word." He argues that "community" should be a subject for investigation by critical researchers, not a taken for granted consensual slogan. The uncritical privileging of "community" can be problematic. Community is not the cohesive whole suggested; there are always some within a community who are not served by it. Tierney's (1993a:129-30) position is that communities cannot be organized around single ideas of the "common good" because there will always be groups and individuals who have been silenced because of their differences. In this interpretation, difference simply pertains to those who are different from the norm. The problem with this is that it places those who are "different" constantly in relation to what is conceived of as "normal" (and to be desired). Rather than conformity, a critical analysis argues that human solidarity must be based on the concept of difference. Tierney acknowledges that this seems contradictory: How can we create solidarity within community if we are all different? What is it that ties all of us together? His view is that unity comes from the acceptance of difference and the willingness to engage one another in dialogue about it.

The Native Awareness class, with a mix of Native and non-Native students from a variety of backgrounds who came together primarily to "dialogue" provided an opportunity to explore this way of thinking about community.

The Sacred Circle

"Community" in the Native Awareness class centers around the "sacred circle." Kelly conducts the class according to the Sacred Circle Project which

> was to become a sacred circle of people honouring the traditions and teachings of the Native elders in its attempt to address the needs of urban Native children and their families. (Douglas, 1987:187)

Kelly told me that the school motto, "Celebrate our Differences," corresponds with what she is trying to accomplish through the Sacred Circle. Hence, her students "really understand and could relate to the circle and the gifts that we bring to it. We're all different, but we all share." I asked Kelly how she had gone about building a sense of community with her students in the class.

> I really don't know other than the teaching of the circle. The way that I teach it is with the four colours and the gifts that we bring and how we enter into the circle.

The sense of community in the Native Awareness class is based on the belief that the circle is a place to share their gifts. All students are considered to have something worth sharing.

> And so if any kid is there thinking that I'm going to stand out because this is a Native awareness thing I tell him it's a Native perspective because you have a Native teacher. It would be different if this was being taught by a non-Native person. You're getting a Native perspective from a Native teacher.

For Kelly, part of giving a Native perspective means not wanting to lay blame; her objective is not to make anyone, Native or non-Native, feel badly. She told me that she makes a point of saying to non-Natives who feel badly about what has been done in the past, that "what counts is *now*, that you kids can sit around and talk about it."

The school motto, "Celebrate our Differences," is clearly compatible with Kelly's teaching philosophy. I wanted to discover the students' interpretation.

Celebrating Difference

In the interviews I asked the students what the school had done to actualize the school motto, celebrate our differences. Some of their responses refer to Fernwood school in general; others focus on the Native Awareness class itself.

For example, Santeca and Ken's responses were: "they treat everybody the same" and "we don't make fun of different people." Johnny said, "Well, I don't see it happening in Fernwood yet", but in the Native Awareness class "there's more respect for the other person. They treat you better, like there they mind their own business, instead of bugging you." Other students responded at length.

> ...you can compare anything and everything and in some ways they're similar but still there are differences. And differences, as in the motto of the school, are something to be celebrated and these days when people are put down for their differences, here, at Fernwood, we celebrate our differences and we take care of each other *because of* those differences. Tonya

> There's white people, Indian and Chinese, people from all different parts. It's just saying like, respect who you are, who they are, not make fun of them cause they're from a different place. We don't call each other names if we're from different places. In Native Awareness we kind of understand where other people come from...In our regular classes we try to make them feel welcome, but it Native Awareness we do more than that, we try to *understand,* ask questions so we can understand their background, why

> they do certain things, why they don't do other things. Candy

Tonya's response indicates a willingness to go beyond merely tolerating difference to actually celebrating difference in times when "people are put down for their differences." People are taken care of, not in spite of, but *because of* those differences. If difference *is* to be celebrated, Candy's directive "to do more, to try to understand" will have to be adhered to. Candy added that "talking gives a better chance to understand things." Not only do I agree with her, I am tempted to say it gives the *best* chance.

When I mentioned "celebrating difference," Fabio told me that "we're not prejudiced." When I asked how that came to be, his response was "cause we all accept everybody's differences. It's mixed cultures here. We allow people from other cultures to come into our class and learn stuff about us." Fabio talks about the acceptance of difference in much the same way Tierney does. Both Fabio and Shelley (below) utilise the word "allow" which evokes a stronger connotation.

> Well, we allow like Chinese people and normal white people, and Spanish people into the group, we let them into the circle. We kind of learn what other people do for tradition and stuff. Shelley

Their choice of wording strikes me as somehow ironic. I interpret this as saying, "when it comes to 'things Native' the times they are indeed a-changing!" Their analyses of "letting others in" certainly suggest opportunities for cross-cultural learning; in Fabio's description others are allowed in to learn about Native culture, while in Shelley's example the learning situation is reversed. In either case, the students are learning from each other.

Shelley's offhand reference to "normal white people" is even more telling. This concurs with Tierney's interpretation that difference simply pertains to those who are different from the norm. If white people are "normal," what does that make everyone else? Abnormal? So, although the times are a-changing, the effects of assimilation have been internalised so that white is still "the standard." It is easier for Shelley to align herself with Spanish or Chinese people in the group. They would also be categorized as non-white, and therefore not "normal."

By striving to "celebrate difference" the students have come closer to "understanding difference" and are moving towards building "communities of difference."

DIFFERENCE AND IDENTITY

Tierney (1993b:7) rejects the notion that differences across groups create an inability to understand one another. Rather than boundaries that cannot be crossed, he

develops the idea of "border zones," defined as "cultural areas infused with differences." The idea of identity is broken down with the recognition of the multiple and often conflicting identities we simultaneously hold as we span borders.

> The consequence is that we dissolve boundaries and incorporate the idea of borderlands that we all inhabit. Our struggle is constantly to cross these borders and exist in tolerable discomfort with one another as we confront difference. The reason I mention discomfort is that by its very nature "difference" is discomforting; to engage in dialogue and action with individuals who may have conflicting ideas and constructions about the world is hard work, but as I argue throughout this text, such work creates the conditions for change and what I call *cultural democracy*. Cultural democracy involves the enactment of dialogue and action that are based on a framework of trying to understand and to honor cultural difference, rather than of subjugating such difference to mere attributes of an individual's identity. (Tierney, 1993b:11)

In response to Tierney, there are two interrelated points I want to address: the act of reducing difference to mere attributes of an individual's identity and the recognition of multiple and often conflicting identities.

The Imaginary Indian

By way of introducing this, I revisit Francis's, *The Imaginary Indian* (1992), referred to in chapter two. Francis lets the reader know that he does not intend to offer the image of a "real Indian" to replace the fraudulent images of the past; the main argument of his book is that there is no such thing as a real Indian. According to Francis, the notion that we today see Indians more clearly for what they really are is false. Current public discourse is still seeped in stereotypes, myth and prejudice. The students I interviewed are well acquainted with stereotyping and discrimination. Shelley's comment is made in relation to Native language loss.

> Well, that's not very fair because the Natives were the first ones here, so like why should they have to go first? It's unfair because lots of people think like the Natives are bad just because some people drink and they act stupid and they're Native then like Natives get a rep and stuff, same with the blacks too.

> A lot of people they say things like Indians are all drunks, mean things, but it's not true, they're not always like that, it's just a few of them might be, but not all of them. It doesn't mean you should judge all of them by just one of them that you meet. Tonya

The injustice of such labeling is accentuated in these comments. They also provide me with an opportunity to contextualize the notion of essentializing, whereby a group of people (in this case, Native) are seen as having the same "essence." Here, the association

is negative, but essentializing of Native people operates the other way as well. For example, some people have the idea that all Natives are spiritually and artisically inclined[69]. I should note that essentialized identities *can* be used to advantage by groups wishing to make a political statement.

Working within the inner city context made it more difficult for me to reduce identity to cultural attributes. Unlike the on-reserve students I am familiar with, the research participants did not constitute a homogenous tribal or language group. I will elaborate on this aspect of identity in the next section.

Multiple Selves

I recently read a guest column in the Edmonton Journal, "What's in a name? Am I a wagon-burner, an Indian, a Native, an aboriginal, or a First Nationer?" (Noskiye, April 18, 1995). The article is rather facetious, yet asks pertinent questions, more than one of which I have pondered in the writing of this thesis. I have asked the question that Noskiye answers, "What do we call you these days?" Four of the five names mentioned above have been applied in this thesis[70]. But, it is Noskiye's discussion of "identity" that I see as having relevance to the research participants.

> If you think being a Canadian is sometimes having to live with an identity crisis, you should try being a member of one of the First Nations. The identity of our people is always in a constant review. Well, that's not entirely true. I believe the identity, as we understand it, is consistent. We know we come from a proud race, the founding nations of what we call Turtle Island. What I mean by "identity" are the titles, labels, and names that seem to come with each new generation of the indigenous peoples.

After discussing what is problematic with the terms Amerindian, Aboriginal, Indian, C-31ers, halfbreeds, Metis (and others I have not included), Noskiye summarizes his position: "of course we know who we are and that's the important thing. Of course we know we come from a culture so rich and so beautiful that labels would never affect us." Noskiye makes his point, and does so with considerable sarcasm and some humour. Yet, I think of the students who are represented here and wonder if they are so sure of who they are, if their identity is in fact *only* a problem of non-Native people not knowing what to call them. How do these youth situate themselves? How do they make sense of their multiple selves? I wonder how they would be affected by Noskiye's definition of Bill C-31 as "a bill that was passed, essentially giving anyone, and I mean *anyone*, 'Indian

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[69] A powerful example of how essentializing works can be found in Chrystos's poem, "I am not your princess", in *Not Vanishing* (1988).

[70] I discuss terminology used in the thesis in the introduction.

Status.'" Reading this, I hear voices, now familiar, in my head. (Perhaps you will recognize them, too.)

> I don't look Native but I do have Native in me.
>
> All of us are halfbreeds in our family, except for my Grandma, she's like the most Native.
>
> Our family doesn't talk about Native things.
>
> ...my grandma...she's more Native than any of us.
>
> How much Native are you?
>
> My real grandfather died when I was just newborn and now my grandmother's married to another guy and he's like all white so he doesn't know about the language and stuff, he wouldn't understand it.

In an off the cuff (yet profound) remark, Candy mentioned that for the last two years, before Kelly was teaching the Native Awareness class

> if you were Native once every two weeks they would be let out of class to come and talk about Native stuff.

This type of segregation is so typical, but what messages are being conveyed? You are allowed to be Native once every two weeks. You can get all that Native stuff talked about in an hour or two. No wonder there is a discourse that speaks to multiple and conflicting identities!

Jordan (1985:35) notes that, particularly for Aboriginal people who have "passed" into a white world, there are multiple realities in the "world" in which one locates one's reality.

> How does one establish the parameters of the community which "accepts" a person as Aboriginal? Does the definition assume that a person who identifies as Aboriginal lives only within one community and this identification is legitimated by that Aboriginal community? Must Aboriginality be affirmed by Aboriginal people only? Or may people live in a white community and have their Aboriginal identity affirmed by *either* a white community *or* both?

Jordan poses these questions in relation to Australian Aborigines. However, they are germane to the situation faced by many Aboriginal people elsewhere. The research participants whose voices I have recorded struggle with being defined, labeled and categorized. They seek to have their identity confirmed and affirmed. While the academic discourse that speaks to "difference and identity" is far removed from these students, it

offers hope and possibility: the hope that multiple selves will be acknowledged and the possibility that fragmented identities can be integrated.

Breaking Boundaries

I have come to think of the Sacred Circle in the Native Awareness class as a "borderland" in which boundaries have been dissolved and cultural differences are honored. I do not propose that cultural differences are "understood" in any absolute sense, but that hard work is being done to, as Candy said, "try to understand."

What Kelly and the students have created in the class has applicability in a broader context. In the discussion about stereotyping of Native people, Shelley recommended the Sacred Circle as a way to promote understanding.

> Well, they could try to understand the Natives 'cause not all of them are bad, some of them are but not all of them are. Non-Native people need to try to understand, some people don't even try to understand, some of them do. Well, they could try going to Sacred Circle, they could try to listening to what we're talking about. That would be a start. Shelley

I agree with Tierney that differences across groups do not have to create an inability to understand one another. This is not to say that I disagree with those who argue that it is impossible for any affinity group to ever "know" the experiences of another. My experience is that those who have the most rigid opinions of "others" are frequently those with very limited first-hand exposure to these "others." Such rigidity can be destructive. In my opinion, the only hope for changing this is through face-to-face interaction. Dialogue does not assume peace and unanimity but it can facilitate the type of understanding that is needed for people to get along (or perhaps even to survive) in this increasingly complex and diverse world.

> There may be no pat political 'answer' to the world's problems. However, the important point is not the *answer*—just as in a dialogue, the important point is not the particular opinions—but rather the softening up, the opening up, of the mind, and looking at all the opinions. If there is some sort of spread of that attitude. I think it can slow down the destruction.
> (Bohm, 1990:39)

I have presented the Native Awareness class as a place where students are free to talk and to share; this does not mean it was always an "easy" place to be. On the contrary, there was a wealth of conflict. Conflict is assumed when people are authentic. Certainly, it is "easier" to keep the boundaries intact. But unless boundaries are broken, traditional

positions of power and authority will be maintained. The fundamental relationships that lead to exclusion have to be changed. Kelly offers her perspective:

> We *are* different in a way, in some of our beliefs, you know we're different, but we're not really different. I don't know how to explain that, it's just that we have a different way of doing things, but as people we're not different.

I understand what Kelly means—the being different at the same time as being not different, but I do not know how to articulate it either. In Fabio's words:

> Everyody's not the same even if some of us are Indian, nobody's the same.

Through dialogue, we can come to accept difference, at the same time recognizing commonalties. And, for the students in the Native Awareness class, those commonalties need not necessarily exist in being "Native."

> The "right" persons are not found in any particular cultural group or society. They are found individually within all culture, but their beings have transcended cultural boundaries. Their actions express the understanding that it is individuals who co-create their different societies and, at the same time, co-create the global community. They will naturally support any child to live his own culture, and to respect all others.
> (Weber-Pillwax, 1992:91-92)

Weber-Pillwax's vision of those who co-create community is analogous to the image in Mohanty's (1991) "imagined community:" "imagined" not because it is not "real" but because it suggests potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, and "community" because it suggests a commitment to the idea of "horizontal comradeship[71]."

> The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of third world feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. Thus, it is the *way* we think about race, class, and gender—the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. (p.4)

Though Mohanty's reference is to third world oppositional struggles/feminism, it has applicability to my fieldwork. While a cultural base for alliance can be identified in the Native Awareness class, other potential alliances exist.

Personally, I have experienced and witnessed connections that assure me that "we do not have to become each other's unique experiences and insights in order to share what

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[71] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, especially pp.11-16.

we have learned through our particular battles for survival" (Lorde, 1985:8). I wonder if Anderson's "horizontal comradeship" could be equated with Freire's "horizontal relationship"—wherein, founded upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence (1970:79-80).

BUILDING BRIDGES

Making a Difference

I realize that this way of thinking about dialogue may be regarded by some as unreasonably idealistic. Ellsworth's (1989:316) view is that dialogue in its conventional sense is impossible in the culture at large because power relations between raced, classed, and gendered students are unjust and that these injustices cannot be overcome in a classroom, no matter how committed the teacher and students are to just that. Ellsworth's critique calls to mind Ryan, who affected me similarly last year. I refer to his study, an attempt to understand the phenomenon of Native school dropouts in an Innu community: "unfortunately, changing classrooms, or, for that matter, school environments to meet local needs, will not solve these problems if the context within which these schooling practices take place continues to persist" (Ryan, 1990:448).

This deterministic analysis is problematic for me, as it dismisses the possibility of change by both students and teachers. While acknowledging societal influences, I have to believe that change is possible, and that even the smallest change is of value. Otherwise, teaching, life itself, can seem hopeless. To quote Freire:

> Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope...Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it...Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait. As the encounter of [wo/]men seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the dialoguers expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious. (Freire, 1970:80)

I offer a small exemplar from the fieldsite to illustrate what can happen when one acts on hope and expects something to come of one's efforts.

The assistant principal at Fernwood told me that racism had been a problem in the school; two of the measures taken to deal with the racism had been to adopt the motto "Celebrate Difference" and to create the Native Awareness class. Fernwood School also hosts an annual Native festival with storytelling, dances, bannock making, teepees and

such. Several of the students mentioned this festival in their interviews. The assistant principal described the festival as

> an opportunity for the Native kid to be special. It's unbelievable to watch the Native kids telling the others about Native culture or discovering it for themselves and the parents are very pleased. We just "stumbled" onto the idea, but it's turned out to be good...The neat thing is the acceptance, they're proud now. It gives them a chance to say "I'm ok." We never realized the positive consequences; it's had long reaching effects and we've never looked back. Racism has dropped.

That "acts of racism" at Fernwood have dropped was confirmed by one of the students interviewed. When I asked her why, her response was:

> Well, it was like we were all running around with blindfolds on and now it's like they've taken them off for us and we can all see what we're doing, everything is clear to us now. Tonya

I thought this seemed rather simplistic and idealistic, so I asked Tonya how they removed the blindfolds.

> Well, it took at least two school years altogether for us to even everything out. The vp used to go around to the classrooms a lot and she'd supervise a lot at recess, if she'd see anything like that she wouldn't punish the students really but more or less they'd just sit and talk and then every once in a while they'd come into the classrooms and explain what was going on and slowly we just went into it.

I am sure that everything has not "all evened out"—it never is and never will be. But, on the other hand, neither can Tonya's comment be dismissed as either simplistic or idealistic. This approximates another example of what I referred to in the previous chapter, "just driving the stake in." In many schools, the incidence of racism is increasing. Wondering if anything can be done, let alone knowing what to do can be both depressing and overwhelming. At Fernwood, they chose to try *something*, they drove the stake in and, in doing so, made a difference[72]. That "just sitting and talking" had something to do with it, in my opinion, is no coincidence.

Periodically, I remind myself of the privileged position from which I am working and recall how differently I was positioned as a classroom teacher. I can imagine a regular classroom teacher thinking, "But, we can't afford the time to just sit and talk." I have no intention of comparing the Native Awareness class according to the same criteria an academic class where the teacher feels the pressure of having his/her students perform to

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[72] I realize that racism is a complex problem that cannot be "solved" through a cultural festival.

"standard"[73]. I have been there and the "performing to standard" component was an ongoing struggle for me. Kelly may not be held accountable for standardized achievement results in the same way that a regular classroom teacher is; conversely, it would be unfair to assume that she does not have high expectations for her students. Kelly understands the implications of teacher expectations: "Maybe I expect too much of my students, but if you don't have expectations, you don't get anything."

How do the students fit into this discussion? During an early visit, one student filled me in: "You want to know why I took this course? My friend told me it was really easy, you just sit and talk, don't have to do any work. But he lied." When I interviewed the students, Ken was the only one to comment on this aspect of the Native Awareness class, saying that there was "well, less work." My point is that having a "space" to talk appears to be a far more influential factor for most of these students than having a class where "you don't have to do any work." Along with this is the fact that the kind of "talk" I have been talking about in this chapter *is* work, and important work, too. But it is seldom treated as such.

Finding Common Ground

I have used the research participants to concretize the concepts of "crossing borders" and "breaking boundaries." Once again, an analysis of the community inside the Native Awareness class and Fernwood School can be transferred to the outside community. There is a huge need for "border crossing" and "boundary breaking" between the school community and the home community.

The assistant principal told me that Fernwood is working towards improving home- school communication:

> We're trying to get Kelly into the homes more, but it's a process which takes time. It's difficult to get the parents to come into the school...The parents don't feel comfortable in schools. It's too hard for them to come. Hopefully the next generation will feel more comfortable in schools.

This certainly corresponds with what Kelly had to say when I asked her about the home - school relationships:

> Well, the homes that I've visited have been wonderful, they're really supportive of the school, but you know a lot of these people are products of residential schooling and you know when my Dad was going to residential school, his parents didn't have any say in what he did or what he learned and how long he stayed and I think that there's still some of that in people my age and their kids are going to Fernwood. They think it's the

[73] The flip side of having no pressure is there is also less status accorded the "options" classes.

> school's responsibility, they don't think that they have any say for their kids' education. I still think that there's that mindset because of what residential schooling taught...because when those kids were taken off the reserve they were just picked up, the parents had no say. But, you know, I don't know if they know how to articulate that.

My recollections of home-school relationships involving Native students are reflected in Kelly's explanation. By and large, the communication between home and school was far superior when students were attending community schools on the reserve than when they were attending schools away from the local community.

As with other parents, Native parents are more likely to feel comfortable in schools situated within their own community. Moreover, given the history of residential schooling, it is no wonder that many Native parents feel uneasy in schools. Based on experience, my belief is that schools should take some of the initiative to lesson this discomfort.

Even small measures can make a difference and should not be underestimated. For example, Kelly had commented on how so many more students are now learning Cree. I asked her how much of that was coming from home and how much was coming from school.

> I think it's a mix, I think there's a lot of our Native people who know about this, and they're really happy that it's being continued in school. They may understand and feel what it means or how it feels to burn sweetgrass and what it does for them, but when it's explained and taught to them the way I've been taught then there's a mixing of the two and the kids understand and can also be a part of their parents' teaching them.

Kelly's comment shows that the burning of sweetgrass in the Sacred Circle has the potential to bring the school and home closer together. These areas of common ground need to be identified and increased. I stress this because in my experience one of the critical factors as to whether or not students were successful in school was the degree of cooperation between the home and the school. Naturally, this is true for all students. With Native students, though, there is typically less common ground.

While Kelly was speaking about the Sacred Circle and the burning of sweetgrass, there are other possibilities. For example, Fredeen (1991:116) suggests that the inaccurate impression that indigenous languages are no longer part of the picture for students of indigenous ancestry living in the cities may also be associated with the belief that indigenous languages are unimportant to indigenous parents living in the cities. I did not have the opportunity to hear the views of teachers, but my guess would be that this would be a common belief; at the same time, if parents were asked, I imagine it would be found

that indigenous languages are valued (even if they are not spoken). This is indicative of the type of misunderstanding that exists when there is poor communication.

The first step towards rectifying this would be dialogue. The Fernwood students' interest in language surfaced because "time to talk" was made available. If they talk about language at school, perhaps they will talk about language at home as well. As with the teaching of sweetgrass in school there can be a mixing of the two, bringing the school and home closer together. Kelly mentions that the students can be a part of their parents' teaching them; this could also work the other way, with the parents being part of the children teaching them. Students taking Cree in school could teach their parents what they are learning. The Fernwood students (and others who do not at present have the opportunity to learn a Native language in school) could talk *about* language-related issues: cultural identity, loss, revival, linguistic rights. Native languages, in some form, can be part of the common ground.

Communities of Practice

I have recently been introduced to a new way to think about "finding common ground" between the school community and the home community. In chapter three I discussed the motivation to "survive in two worlds." Native students must learn to work and live within the bounds of at least two cultures. At the same time, I acknowledged that formal education structures that are incongruous with traditional forms of education have resulted in failure for many Native students. One of the reasons for this is that too often Native students have been expected to give up their Native identity to survive in school. School is not just about learning, but about identity construction. Children must have a clear sense of their own identity, and identities need to find their home in a community outside the school, as well as within the classroom and school.

Stairs (1994) notes that the construction of identity has been directly equated with learning by some scholars working within the emerging "constructivist" lines of thought and research (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991). "In this view, learning is an active cultural phenomenon and involves increasingly competent participation in a community of practice—whether a cultural community, a trade, or an academic discipline. Through such increasing participation one becomes a member of the community and thus establishes identity" (Stairs, 1994:167-8). At this point, I will be unable to explore this topic in any depth; rather, I will briefly address aspects pertinent to my discussion[74].

In the forward to *Situated Learning,* Hanks (1991:13-14) notes that Lave and Wenger locate learning squarely in the processes of coparticipation, not in the heads of

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[74]For more detail, see Lave & Wenger's *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation* (1991).

individuals. They situate learning in certain forms of social coparticipation, asking what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place. According to Lave and Wenger (1991:52) participation in social practice suggests a very explicit focus on the person, but as person-in-the-world, as member of a sociocultural community.

> As an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities—it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person...To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities.
>
> (Lave and Wenger, 1991:53)

The concept of the student as a member of a community corresponds to my understanding of traditional Native education. Yet, it seems to me that this aspect of learning is exactly what is often overlooked when it comes to schooling for Native students. Mainstream schooling separates students from their social communities; this way of learning can *not* possibly involve the whole Native child. Stairs (1988:315) summarizes and contrasts formal and indigenous teaching.

> Formal teaching is characterized by a high level of verbal mediation in a setting removed from daily life, and is carried out by a specialized individual who has no social role relationship to the child. The predominant goals are individual academic achievement and the skill base for a future occupation. Indigenous teaching involves observation and imitation embedded in daily family and community activities, and is carried out by many individuals with particular kinship roles in relation to the child. Awareness and appropriate skills for integration into the immediate social structure are predominant goals.

From the perspective Lave and Wenger (1991:115) develop, learning and a sense of identity[75] are inseparable: They are aspects of the same phenomenon. If Native students have to give up their identity to succeed in school, how does this affect their learning? The research in this area makes clear that the most important factor for learning is the student feeling that s/he "legitimately" belongs in a group. Yet, how can a student feel belonging in an environment that does not reflect his/her culture?

I have presented the case that students need to be prepared for life in more than one cultural world. There is a need, then, to recognize more than one community of practice and the school needs to involve the student in *both* communities of practice. If the school is seen as one community and the home the other, how do students integrate the two

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[75]The authors define identity as the way a person understands and views himself, and is viewed by others, a perception of self which is fairly constant (Lave and Wenger, 1991:81).

communities of practice? For learning to be meaningful, the school needs to create spaces where the child can experience legitimate membership in both communities. For students attending community controlled schools, there are more natural opportunities for this to happen. For others, as with the Fernwood students, there must be more concerted effort to involve the students in both communities of practice. And, "communities of practice" must also be "communities of difference."

My intention is not to present the school and the home as two separate communities which need to move closer together. Neither community of practice is homogenous or static. Rather, the way in which Lave and Wenger describe community relates well to the way I have attempted to present "communities of difference" in this chapter.

> In using the term community, we do not imply some primordial culture-sharing entity. We assume that members have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity, and hold varied viewpoints. In our view, participation at multiple levels is entailed in membership in a *community of practice*. Nor does the term community imply necessarily co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group, or socially visible boundaries. It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understanding concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. (Lave and Wenger, 1991:98)

What goes on in school must mean something in the lives of the students. If this is to happen there should be some connection to what goes on in their lives outside school, in their communities. The following serves as an exemplar of how the school could involve students in both communities of practice.

In an article about curriculum development for Native American and other minority language learners, McLaughlin (1989b:42) argues that there is a need to build a bridge from where the students are as they come to school to where teachers want them to go. This bridge must connect the linguistic and cultural resources children bring with them to the classroom to skills and concepts that facilitate access to mainstream power and influence. Some see the necessity of building such a span, having the students cross it, and then burning the bridge. Rather, the bridge that McLaughlin envisions is one on which minority students travel back and forth between standard and vernacular forms of knowledge.

By way of illustration, McLaughlin describes a curriculum development program for Navajo students which has applicability for other minority language learners[76].

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[76]The programme's curriculum can be summarized as: C=P+A, or, curriculum equals product plus audience. The C=P+A formulation has allowed for students to use standard and vernacular forms of

The programme "has allowed parents and other community members to participate actively in the school, and it has allowed teachers and school administrators to become subjects themselves who engage along with the students in critical dialogue about issues of consequence in the community" (1989b:58).

This could be seen as a way of building a bridge to connect the two communities of practice: the home and the Native community. Consistent with Lave and Wenger's views, it entails the type of learning that implies social coparticipation, rather than filling the heads of individual learners. In my opinion, it is the also the type of learning that implies dialogue and certainly corresponds to what I witnessed in the Native Awareness class. McLaughlin (1989a:287) maintains that in classrooms with Native and other minority students, "the task becomes one of establishing dialogue. In place of "banking" approaches that emphasize the accurate transmission of presequenced, disembedded knowledge, educators need to employ dialogical approaches[77]."

Looking Ahead

In a thesis about Native language, this chapter has focused largely on dialogue and difference. It should be kept in mind that the classroom in which I did my research was *not* a language class, although an interest in Native languages had been expressed. We did talk about languages issues—my agenda. We also talked about what surfaced in the classes and interviews—the students' agenda. This chapter addresses what emerged as the overlapping of the two agendas—identity.

That the research participants regard Native languages as important in their lives was made apparent in the fourth and fifth chapters. For these inner city students, though, (and I suspect for most) language is only one aspect of a complex identity. I sincerely hope that the Fernwood students will have the opportunity to learn more Cree (or other Native language) sometime in their lives. That may or may not happen; inevitably, though, they will constantly have to deal with the type of identity issues that have been addressed here.

The Native Awareness class proved to be an opportune setting to contextualize the type of identity issues urban Native youth face. Due to the nature of the class, Native students were able to have their identity affirmed; at the same time, non-Native students were able to learn about Native culture in a shared experience. Since there was a genuine intent to celebrate difference, the currents of learning flowed in diverse directions. For

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language in oral and written form in order to interrogate social conditions around them. For a detailed description of this curriculum development program, see McLaughlin (1989b).

[77]For a critique of "banking" pedagogy, see Freire (1970).

example, when I asked Shelley if she would be interested in learning Cree if she had the opportunity, her response was:

> I would like to know more about Cree because like I have so many nationalities in me. But, it's good to know other languages, too. If I had to choose it would be kind of hard because I want to learn Spanish, too. I have a friend who speaks Spanish and he could probably teach me some[78].

What Shelley seems to be alluding to is the increasing importance of multilingualism. "In a world at five to twelve (= on the verge of self-destruction)," Skutnabb-Kangas (1988:38) argues for biculturalism/bilingualism, and in particular for the protection of minority languages. In addition to needing language for analysis and solidarity,

> we need bilinguals as mediators. Those who are bi-something (bilingual, bidialectal, bicultural) have been forced to look at *two* different languages, dialects, cultures from the inside. It is easier for us bilinguals to *understand both parties.*

Tierney (1993:132) urges academics to "learn the discourse of the voiceless, create communities of dialogue based on difference, and work constantly toward the active creation of change." As evidenced in this thesis, the students are certainly not "voiceless." In the Native Awareness class they gave voice to a community of dialogue and difference. For students living in the inner city, it seems to me likely that communities will *have to be* based on difference. The hope lies in the acceptance and understanding which comes through dialogue.

We need to accept diversity, and linguistic diversity is just one element of that. Language is part of the larger picture and cannot be discussed productively in isolation. I agree with Boseker (1994:155) that "the future in terms of preserving Native American languages lies beyond merely linguistics...the future of [these] languages is intertwined with the future of Native American cultures as a whole." Similarly, the past of their languages is intertwined with the past of their cultures as a whole.

For Tonya, what they talked about in the Native Awareness class that was especially meaningful was: "the whole ancestry of Natives, it really means something to me, the way they were treated, and the way it's starting to even out but still in ways it still isn't very even." And, language is one of the instruments for change. Dialogue is essential as we "work constantly toward the active creation of change."

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[78]The friend Shelley is referring to is from El Salvador; he was one of the students in the Native Awareness class.

What can people do now so that Native languages will not be lost?

Start learning them more, find out their roots, like their family tree, talk more to their elders—it's important to go back. Fabio

EPILOGUE

> We're going to have to be like the children, the students who are going to have to be taught our own language to keep the language going. Johnny

The river has not been left to itself, to go on, flowing deep[79]. Due to river-slaying, that was not allowed to happen. As with the river, indigenous languages have endured much language-slaying. But, the river, although polluted, still flows—both ways. And many indigenous languages, however weakened, have survived. They continue to flow. Will the waters continue to flow? Will Johnny and others of his generation be taught their languages so that they can keep the languages going? Has this thesis helped to ensure that the languages will continue to flow both ways?

> *At least Royland knew he had been a true diviner. There were the wells, proof positive. Water. Real wet water. There to be felt and tasted. Morag's magic tricks were of a different order. She would never know whether they actually worked or not, or to what extent. That wasn't given to her to know. In a sense, it did not matter.* ***The necessary doing of the thing—that mattered.*** *(Laurence:1974:452)*

Naturally, a part of me wants proof positive that this thesis will mean something besides me getting my degree. I would like to know if Johnny will learn Cree from his grandmother and pass the language on to his children. But, as with Morag, that is not mine to know. Similarly, Cecile Wawanolet, who has dedicated her final years to saving Abenaki, will not know the outcome of her work. She will die not knowing what will happen to her indigenous tongue. But, for Morag, for me, for Cecile Wawanolet and many others, it is the necessary doing of the thing that matters—the "driving your stake in somewhere."

The river does flow both ways, but for most Native languages, the current is much stronger in one direction. The tide against Native language preservation has been strong, but the current is shifting and the waters are flowing back. There are no guarantees, only the belief that our efforts will make a difference.

> *Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence.*
> *How far could anyone see into the river? Not far. Near shore, in the shallows, the water was clear, and there were the clean and broken clamshells of creatures now dead, and the wavering of the underwater weed-forests, and the flicker of small live fishes, and the undulating lines of gold as the sand ripples received the sun. Only slightly further out, the water deepened and kept its life from sight.* *(Laurence, 1974:453)*

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[79]See quotation at the beginning of chapter four.

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APPENDIX A
Description of Bilingual Programmes

A *mother tongue maintenance* or language *shelter* is a programme where the minority language is valued in itself, so it occupies an important role in the curriculum, not merely as an initial medium of instruction. Societal attitudes to the minority language, related to the oppressed socio-economic position of the minority group, are considered problematic, rather than the minority language itself.

A *submersion,* or sink-swim programme, is a programme where linguistic minority children with a low-status mother tongue are forced to accept instruction through the medium of a foreign majority language with high status, in classes where some children are native speakers of the language of instruction, where the teacher does not understand the mother tongue of the minority children, and where the majority language constitutes a threat to their mother tongue—a subtractive language learning situation.

A *transitional* programme is a programme where linguistic minority children with a low-status mother tongue are instructed through the medium of their mother tongue for a few years and where the mother tongue has instrumental value. It is used in order for the children to learn the majority language better, and in order to give them some subject matter knowledge while they are learning the majority language. As soon as they can function in the majority language orally, they are transferred to a majority language medium programme. A transitional programme is a more sophisticated version of submersion programmes, a more "humane" way of assimilating.

An *immersion* programme is a programme where linguistic majority children with a high-status mother tongue voluntarily choose (among existing alternatives) to be instructed through the medium of a foreign (minority) language, in classes with majority children with the same mother tongue only, where the teacher is bilingual so that the children in the beginning can use their own language, and where their mother tongue is in no danger of not developing or of being replaced by the language of instruction—an additive learning situation.

A *segregation* programme is a programme where students from either majority or minority populations are segregated. Segregation programmes produce poor results, meaning scholastic failure for the majority of those who start school, and low levels in both languages of cognitive/academic achievement.

APPENDIX B

Permission Letter

Department of Educational Policy Studies
7 - 104 Education North
University of Alberta
T6G 2G5
January 16, 1995.

Parent or Guardian of _____

I am a graduate student in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta doing my master's degree in International/Intercultural Education. I am currently engaged in research for my thesis which is entitled *The River Flows Both Ways: Native Language Loss and Revival.* I am concerned about issues related to Native language loss and maintenance and am interested in hearing the views of urban students on this subject.

The classroom where I will be doing my study is the one in which your child is enrolled. I would appreciate permission to interview your child at the school. This would involve discussing the student's views about Native language and exploring concerns. All study participants will be assured of confidentiality when the thesis is written.

My hope is that the students' contributions will provide an original perspective to the work being done to maintain or revive Native languages. Results of the study may assist in future curriculum development involving the inclusion of Native languages in the school system.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Wiltse

Home Phone: 433-4384

I give my permission for _____to take part in school interviews for the purpose of being included in the thesis entitled: *Native Language Loss and Revival.*

_____
Parent/Guardian Signature