

**A Culturally Relevant Education for Aboriginal Youth**

**Is there room for a middle ground, accommodating  
Traditional Knowledge and Mainstream Education?**

*by*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to show how a culturally relevant education can play a significant role in making learning interesting and meaningful, and therefore be a key factor in having more Aboriginal students stay in school. The goal is to propose a new approach to education that would combine traditional knowledge, values and ways of learning with academic curricula in the modern context.

The middle ground approach proposed here searches for a learning environment that would combine mainstream educational subjects with traditional knowledge components and would also accommodate teaching and learning styles that would stimulate young students' abilities and creativity. These teaching methods would have a more holistic approach to learning, community circles, encompass family involvement, and artistic means of expression. It is necessary to fully develop and implement that middle ground approach at the very crucial, formative stages of primary and secondary education, that define children's thinking processes, by introducing culturally relevant material, perspectives, approaches and role models. Also the incorporation and accommodation of Aboriginal perspectives into the mainstream education could go a long way in changing negative attitudes towards the significance of traditional Aboriginal knowledge and in creating a more understanding and sharing society.

In searching for the middle ground, this thesis explores the reasons and the roots of the extremely high incidence of drop-out rates among Aboriginal students in North America, with a particular focus on the Mi'Kmaq experience. In the Mi'Kmaq Creation Story, there exists a foundation of knowledge based on the holistic nature of relationships which are expressed more especially between the people, the land and their environment.

The thesis includes an historical analysis; a comparison between the Aboriginal traditional concepts of education and the European assimilative approach; a review of contemporary policies for education of Aboriginal peoples; a presentation of Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge with a focus on Mi'Kmaq knowledge; a case study of the Big Cove First Nation; and finally a literature review on major Aboriginal educational theorists and thinkers whose works will help support the conclusions of this research.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Acknowledgements  |    |
| Foreword  |    |
| Introduction .....  | 1  |
| Purpose of the Research .....   | 1  |
| Biographical Comments .....   | 6  |
| <br>  |    |
| Chapter I   |    |
| An Historical Analysis of how the Church and Government Imposed<br>Mainstream Education on the Mi'Kmaq People ..... | 7  |
| <br>  |    |
| Chapter II  |    |
| The Shortcomings of Mainstream Education for Aboriginal Peoples.....  | 32 |
| a) Mi'Kmaq Perspectives of Knowledge .....  | 33 |
| b) Assimilation and Acculturation in Mainstream Educational Policies .....  | 36 |
| c) Critical Differences between the Two Concepts of Education .....   | 40 |
| d) Aboriginal Peoples Struggle to Gain Control over Indian Education .....  | 45 |
| e) The Work Begins: To Build a New Indian Education .....   | 49 |
| <br>  |    |
| Chapter III   |    |
| Indigenous Science and Philosophies: Holistic Visions .....   | 51 |
| a) An Approach to Mi'Kmaq Knowledge .....   | 52 |
| b) Traditional Aboriginal Knowledge and Science: What it is and what it means..                                     | 61 |
| <br>  |    |
| Chapter IV  |    |
| A Case Study: Using Traditional Knowledge as a Means of Cultural Expression for Healing                             | 72 |
| a) A Community in Dire Need of Cultural Expression .....  | 73 |
| b) Profile of a First Nations Community .....   | 75 |
| c) The Community Takes Charge .....   | 80 |
| d) The River of Fire: A Celebration of Life .....   | 81 |
| e) The Outcomes: Lessons to be Drawn .....  | 82 |
| <br>  |    |
| Chapter V   |    |
| Exploring New Ideologies in Aboriginal Education: The Impact of Aboriginal Educators                                | 85 |
| a) Verna Kirkness .....   | 85 |
| b) Marie Battiste .....   | 86 |
| c) Eber Hampton .....   | 87 |
| d) Ray Barnhardt .....  | 88 |
| e) Gregory Cajete .....   | 90 |
| <br>  |    |
| Conclusion: Is there room for a Middle ground?.....   | 93 |
| <br>  |    |
| Bibliography  |    |

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## FOREWORD

For purpose of understanding, a few points need to be clarified beforehand.

In the context of this thesis, and according to a variety of sources, the terms Aboriginal Peoples, First Nations, North American Indians and Native people have been used to represent the indigenous people of North America. The diversity of Peoples on this continent requires the accommodation of a series of preferences on the terms being used, but generally, each People prefers to be identified by the name of their tribe or nation. In this study, the focus is on First Nations, comprising the registered status Indians of Canada, with a particular emphasis on the Mi'Kmaq people.

The term Mi'Kmaq appears with different spelling, according to the regional variances, the period in time and the sources cited (eg. Micmac, Miqmaq, etc.). Today, the spelling Mi'Kmaq is widely recognized by the majority of the Mi'Kmaq communities.

By mainstream education, I mean a European-based system of education (mainly English or French) that is being used in Canada. The heterogeneity of that education is acknowledged, regarding the time frames, the differences by province, by school board, by public or private models. However, that European-based system of education is the one that has been imposed on First Nations across Canada, without taking into account their respective value systems, histories, languages, or their knowledge.

Whenever there is mention of occidental science in this framework, it refers to "hard" sciences (biology, physics, medicine, etc.) and not social sciences.

I acknowledge the validity and necessity of mainstream educational material in the modern context. It is hoped that this thesis will present a convincing argument towards general acceptance of the equal validity of First Nations' traditional knowledge and approach to learning.

# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

**“Relevant education is the key to our needs as Aboriginal Peoples.”**

The research of this thesis aims to show how a culturally relevant education can play a significant role in making learning interesting and meaningful, and therefore be a key factor in having more Aboriginal students stay in school longer. The goal is to propose a new approach to education that would combine traditional knowledge, values and ways of learning with academic curricula in the modern context. My hope is that this would lead to academic success for Aboriginal students, while allowing them to retain a sense of identity and preserve a precious (and today, fast eroding) knowledge base.

My primary goal is to help create a space, within the educational system, that will carry a record of the legacy of knowledge and accomplishments my extended family has contributed to their community and to the mainstream society. By having our role models, both past and present, recognized in mainstream institutions, by acknowledging the legitimacy of our traditional knowledge and accommodating its place in school curricula, the educational system might well open a new path for so many Aboriginal children who are too often drawn to drop out because of a sense of alienation.

It is essential to recognize that our ancestors not only were carriers of values that shaped our collective survival, but also were real libraries of knowledge, preserved through oral tradition, that allowed our people to thrive in their environment (as shown in Chapter III, Traditional Knowledge). That culture has, for the most part, been kept alive to this day, against all odds and despite all attempts at eradication (see Chapter I, Historical Background). That preserved knowledge can and should be retrieved and passed on to future generations.

The middle ground approach I propose searches for a learning environment that would combine mainstream educational subjects with traditional knowledge components and would also accommodate teaching and learning styles that would stimulate young students' abilities and

creativity. These teaching styles would incorporate a more holistic approach to learning, community circles, encompass family involvement, and artistic means of expression (see Chapter IV). It needs to be stressed that this proposed middle ground should be phased-in at all levels of education, starting with the lowest grades. To a certain extent, it already exists in some higher institutions of learning (some universities, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, En'owkin International School of Writing) but it is only accessible to a very small proportion of Aboriginal students and comes too late for the vast majority who have long dropped out of the system. In most First Nations communities, there are now some preschools and kindergarten programs that have integrated some cultural material, especially concerning language, songs, etc., but not teaching styles which remain very much in the domain of mainstream educational standards.

But it is necessary to fully develop and implement that middle ground approach at the very crucial, formative stages of primary and secondary education, that define children's thinking processes, what they will study and whether they will study at all. Therefore, introducing culturally relevant material, perspectives, approaches and role models would greatly reduce young Aboriginal students' stress of "being out of place," give them more confidence, and by giving them something to look back upon, give them something to look forward to: a continuity of their culture. A further potential benefit to mainstream education, would be the incorporation and accommodation of Aboriginal perspectives such as oral traditions, gatherings, the meaning of sacred circles and medicine wheels, field trips, and visits to Aboriginal communities as "new" teaching and learning tools. That different approach to learning could enhance among youth, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, a sense of connection, of purpose, and motivate them to further their education. It could go a long way in changing negative attitudes towards the significance of traditional Aboriginal knowledge and in creating a more understanding and sharing society.

In searching for the middle ground, this thesis will explore the reasons and the roots of the extremely high incidence of drop-out rates among Aboriginal students in North America, with a particular focus on the Mi'Kmaq experience. I review various attempts to introduce the Mi'Kmaqs to an European educational system and culture; describe the divergence between the Aboriginal traditional concepts of education and the European assimilative approaches; review contemporary

policies for education of Aboriginal peoples, and offer a case study of the Big Cove First Nation, where traditional material was incorporated to successfully transform a government-designed upgrading program. Then an analysis of Traditional Knowledge illustrates some attitudinal barriers. Finally, a literature review focusses on major Aboriginal educational theorists and thinkers whose works will help support the conclusions of this research (RCAP 1997; Hampton, 1987; Cajete, 1995).

In the Mi'Kmaq Creation Story, there exists a foundation of knowledge based on the holistic nature of relationships which are expressed more especially between the people, the land and their environment. The inter-connectedness of the Aboriginal spiritual and physical worlds explains the principles and values of their nature-based philosophies. This is shown in the way that an elderly Mi'Kmaq person will relate many incidents and related facts surrounding a specific location when called upon to answer a question about one particular fact that connects to that location. For instance, if asked whether there are any trout or eel in the river next to their community, they will tell you the whole history of the river before they answer the question about the fish. The Elder will tell you about how their grandparents met at this river, then they will tell you what their parents experienced on the river, with all of the good and bad events in their lives. The Elder will then talk about his/her personal experiences on the river and will talk some more about the changes that have happened on the river, to its environment and the people. They will tell you about all of the other species of fish that have come and gone on the river, then finally, they will tell that there are some trout, although not as big as the ones they used to catch, and some eel, though not as many as there was as in the past. The Elders tend to describe a window to the past as they see it relating to the present. The main point is to remember the connectedness and relationships in Aboriginal knowledge perspectives. The Mi'Kmaq Creation Story forms the basis upon which Mi'Kmaq knowledge is founded.

By analyzing the Big Cove case study as an example of a "window of knowledge to the past," I hope to begin to develop a contemporary theory of learning and teaching that will meet Aboriginal knowledge and mainstream education at a place called the middle ground. Research on several community-based projects that took place in Big Cove in 1993 will be analysed to illustrate the results of culturally relevant educational material. My own perspective on "Indian education" will be examined in light of contemporary Aboriginal and academic attitudes.

The negative social conditions in most Aboriginal communities can be attributed to the high drop-out rate at an early stage in life among Aboriginal peoples, combined with the fact that Native communities, to a great extent, have pulled away from their traditional teachings and the knowledge base that were key to life skills and vital for their cultural survival. The impact of residential schools on the attitudes of parents towards education and spirituality for their children will also be examined. Some parents who were forced to attend residential schools have expressed negative attitudes toward the importance of education for their children.

Another point that will be examined is how mainstream education has failed to fulfil its role by its own expectations of Aboriginal students: that is, failing to produce a proportionate number of Aboriginal graduates who can contribute to the general economy of society. The system has failed to include the Aboriginal perspective of “success” in its evaluative assumptions. A telling report by Marie Battiste (AFN, 1988) suggested that educational conditions had not significantly changed for Indians in Canada so that by 1972, only 20% of those who enrolled in school managed to graduate from high school, whereas the statistics for mainstream students were completely the opposite: 80% made it to graduation. Although some progress has been achieved since then, the gap is still very large. A DIAND fact sheet (1-9552) dated March 6, 1998 states that, “Over the past ten years the number of students staying in school to grade 12 has increased from less than 20 per cent in 1980 to 73 per cent in 1994-95...” This is an encouraging statement but it still does not report the percentage of students who actually graduated.

The loss of a sense of belonging within the community, the lack of self-esteem and subsequent self-destructive behaviours usually resulting in the high suicide rates, alcoholism, higher mortality rates and accidental death rates among children, and widespread poverty among Aboriginal peoples are the reasons that led me to focus on this research. There has been a further loss of cultural identity associated with the acceleration of modern communications developments (like television, electronic games, videos and radio). In my 25 years of working with First Peoples, developing programs and delivering services and as a participating member of my community, I have witnessed the need for a fundamental restructuring of the educational process in order that it becomes meaningful to our people. The accommodation of indigenous perspectives in the fields of environmental legislation, justice, museums, cultural development and education is encouraging.

Although indigenous knowledge is still a subject of controversy, another concern I have about mainstream education is its treatment of “indigenous knowledge” as being irrelevant for today. The fact that our people have shared a collective knowledge about our world that allowed them to live for thousands of years is certainly meaningful; as for values, they are always relevant. This collection of knowledge is embedded in our Mi’Kmaq language, among others, and the teachings have been successively transmitted by our ancestors through our Elders’ wisdom. It has been a lived experience in a spiritual and physical relationship with the land. The stories, legends, songs and dances are a means of storing this knowledge. Some scientists have refused to accept “indigenous knowledge” on the same footing as their scientific knowledge, but some now do so.

Recently, there has been an ongoing argument in the Northwest Territories about the reliability of Aboriginal knowledge, culminating in a policy journal’s inflammatory article (Policy Options, Nov.1996, “Traditional Knowledge Threatens Environmental Assessment”) and a national newspaper’s more balanced article (The Globe and Mail, Aug.9, 1997 “Getting into the Spirit of Things”). The issue was centred on the rejection by a government employee of the adoption by the NWT of Traditional Knowledge as official policy in its assessments. The person accused the government of imposing native spirituality on the Canadian public (without the possibility of analyzing these beliefs in a “scientific way”). The lack of acceptance of traditional knowledge as a reliable source resulted in the firing of one civil servant and a heated discussion among the scientists. There are some obvious misunderstandings about indigenous knowledge. If the matter ends up in court, it will be the mainstreams society's judiciary who will decide on the validity of indigenous knowledge, which links it to the present thesis about the importance of that recognition. In a later issue (Policy Options, March 1997), some scientists tended to disagree with Howard and Widdowson, but even so, they weakly supported the validity of Traditional Knowledge in its own terms and failed to recognize it in its full dimension (see more in-depth analysis in Chapter IV). It is in this context that the actual recognition and the validity of Mi’Kmaq culture and knowledge within the mainstream educational system is the question at stake here. When this body of Mi’Kmaq knowledge is not acknowledged or accommodated as an educational tool in the mainstream system of treating knowledge, does it mean that the Mi’Kmaq people do not exist, or are irrelevant? I hope not.

## BIOGRAPHICAL COMMENTS

This search for a middle ground, accommodating indigenous concepts of learning, traditional knowledge and mainstream education, is based upon the personal life experiences of this writer, weaving his life between two societies: achieving academic goals, while having been raised with Mi'Kmaq oral teachings, learning traditional values then spiritual ceremonies. Both sources of knowledge were considered essential by the Mi'Kmaq Grand Council in order to be fully prepared to take over the hereditary role carried by his family. Certain aspects of this personal journey included an historical search which involved the oral and written traditions of two divergent cultures. In this regard, I cannot stress enough the importance of the oral nature of Traditional Knowledge, that enhances memory, oratory skills, a focused attention and the collective preservation of knowledge.

Research on Indigenous knowledge in correlation with mainstream education has been an integral part of my career and academic aspirations. For the last 20 years, I have been seeking to answer the question: Is there a realistic approach to learning which could enhance the “educational process” for Indigenous youth of today? By exploring available literature and relevant statistical data on mainstream education for Aboriginal people and Traditional Knowledge, I hope to provide an explanation for the need to bring forward an Aboriginal point of view.

After working closely with First Nations communities on a local, regional and national level, I have come to the conclusion that **education is the key to our needs as Aboriginal peoples**. Education can help to restore an historical and cultural perspective on our system of values and principles. The culture of our peoples (the language, philosophies, history, medicinal and scientific indigenous knowledge, traditional technologies, etc.) needs to be properly accounted for, preserved and enhanced. It is crucial for our people to understand where they came from and who they are before they can begin to plan where they are going. It is equally necessary that they realize the importance of mainstream education if they are to further their career aspirations and take charge of their own communities. We need a good grasp of our culture in order to provide adequate programs and services that meet the needs of our people. It cannot be stressed enough that only after we raise our general level of education (both indigenous knowledge and mainstream academic achievement) will our people be adequately prepared to take on the social, economic and political issues that are vital to achieving self-determination.

## CHAPTER I

### AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF HOW THE CHURCH AND GOVERNMENT IMPOSED MAINSTREAM EDUCATION ON THE MI'KMAQ PEOPLE

In order to frame the context of this thesis a brief history of the relationship between the First Nations and the early Europeans will be presented. Historically, there have been two divergent concepts of education between First Nations and mainstream society. Within these two concepts are entrenched the philosophies and approaches to learning of two polarized perspectives of viewing the world. The purpose of education and the use of knowledge, epistemology, pedagogy and curriculum are based on different developmental histories that will be addressed in this chapter. The challenge here is determining that point in time when First Nations' own concept of knowledge was supplanted by the mainstream educational system. The question is, did First Nations abandon their knowledge base totally? Did their knowledge base contribute to their lack of interest in mainstream education or, conversely, to their success in some instances? To what degree was the First Nations' loss of their traditional knowledge related to the Christianization process and the mainstream schooling they received and later, to the social conditions imposed on them that deprived them of their relationship to the land? Once these questions can be answered then a search for the middle ground approach to learning can be commenced.

As the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) succinctly stated in its historical background on Aboriginal education:

The introduction of European-style education to Aboriginal people varied by geographical location, by the timing of contact, and by the specific history of relations between various peoples and Europeans. In some regions, schools operated by religious missions were introduced in the mid-1600s. In other locations, formal education came much later. But if there were many variations in the weave of history, a single pattern dominated the education of Aboriginal people, whatever their territorial and cultural origin. Formal education was, without apology, assimilationist. The primary purpose of formal education was to indoctrinate Aboriginal people into Christian, European world view, thereby "civilizing" them. (RCAP, 1996:434, vol.3).

According to some early views and perhaps ones still held today, the Church's involvement in the New World could be viewed as "a fortunate turn in history" for the Aboriginal people. From the beginning, there was a clear intent to educate the Aboriginal peoples for reason of assimilation into a European way of life that was considered to be more "civilized" and superior to that of any other race of people in the world. Indigenous peoples were deemed to be savages and living without morals, values, property and religion. As John Horace Parry stated in his Spanish Theory of Empire in the Sixteenth Century, quoted in Dickason (1984:129):

Those people live like animals ...it is evident that some men are by nature free, and others servile. In the natural order of things the qualities of some men are such that, in their own interests, it is right and just that they should serve, while others, living freely, exercise their natural authority and command. (Parry, 1940:18)

Soon after Columbus' "discovery," Europeans began to debate the savageness and the humanity of the Amerindians. For example, Bartolomeo de Las Casas, who arrived with Columbus in 1492, defended the humanity of Indians in New Spain. Las Casas had been a land owner in Cuba who depended on black slaves for most of the labour. After "suffering a crisis of conscience about the treatment of Indians" in the West Indies, Las Casas became a Dominican Friar and much later, the Bishop of Chiapas. Las Casas was credited as the creator of the Black Legend of Spain for his critical attacks on Spain's misrule (1512) in its Conquest of the New World and the most disputed fact, that "Indians have a spirit and a soul". (Fagan 1987:26; Dickason 1984 and personal communication). Another Dominican, Francisco de Vitoria, a professor of moral theology at the University of Salamanca, did not agree with the papal bulls of demarcation and the fact that the Church had temporal power over Aboriginal peoples. However, de Vitoria added (in Dickason, 1984:130):

They have no proper laws nor magistrates, and are not capable of controlling their family affairs; they are without literature or arts, not only the liberal arts, but the mechanical arts also; they have no careful agriculture and no artisans; and they lack many other conveniences, yea necessities, of human life.

Dickason states, "... it would be difficult to overestimate the effect of de Vitoria's reasoning, which, in spite of his personal humanity, provided an instrument for the rationalization of the Spanish wars of conquests and colonization..." (1984:131).

Around the same period, French and English explorers were navigating to the Northeastern part of North America, from which much of the information for this research is analyzed. Both countries, France and England, were rivalling each other (as well as Spain and Portugal) in their search for new lands to take over and resources to bring back to Europe. Although John Cabot had already sailed to Newfoundland in 1497 for the English Crown, Jacques Cartier “discovered” the East coast on June 24, 1535 and made contact with the Mi’Kmaqs, which would greatly impact the history to unfold in the region. He returned to France by 1540. Dickason quotes Antoine de Montchrestien, dramatist and economist: “If any nation has the right to take over, it is the French, who are particularly qualified because of the glory of their letters and arms, their arts and fine manners, and their true Christianity, despite the claims of others.” She notes that the French missionary, “Lejeune, recently arrived as Superior of the Jesuits in Quebec in 1632, wondered if the French alone of all nations of the earth were to be deprived of expanding in the New World” (Dickason, 1984:129). Again, Dickason states:

Crosses or monuments bearing royal arms were erected by the Portuguese and French; in the case of the French, by Ribault in Florida; Cartier in the Gaspé and later on in the St Lawrence; Poutrincourt and DeMonts along the Atlantic coast; and Champlain in the interior (1984:31).

The French interests in the New World were driven by the desire for access to endless quantities of fish on the Grand Banks, by a vague idea of the immensity of that new continent, its huge forests and its abundance of resources, as demonstrated by the quality of furs which the Amerindians displayed then traded for European goods. All this served as a catalyst to begin relations between the French and the First Nations of the Northeast, particularly the Mi’Kmaq .

The Christianization process began on June 24, 1610, that is 75 years after Cartier had landed, when Henri Membertou, Grand Chief of the Mi’Kmaq nation, was baptized by a secular priest, Jessé Fléché (Wallis and Wallis, 1955: 10 and Prins, 1996: 35, 53). Twenty-one members of his family accepted the Roman Catholic faith. The most influential chief among the Mi’Kmaq nation, Membertou encouraged the rest of his people to follow him in accepting the Roman Catholic religion. Harold McGee observed:

Note too, that Henri Membertou, a prominent political leader among the Micmac, and the first Micmac to be baptized, asked Father Biard to “learn our language quickly, for as soon as thou knowest it and has taught me well I wish to become a preacher like thee” (JR 2:23; my emphasis). ... The French were not yet in a position to impose their language upon the native peoples (McGee, 1974: 43).

Although baptisms took place, the practice was questioned at the time by some priests and even when not openly questioned, the fact that the Mi’Kmaq incorporated their indigenous spiritual words into the new religion could have meant that they were just adapting to use them in a different way, but not really converting. Silas Rand comments on the distinctiveness of the Mi’Kmaq language and he points out the difficulty of finding equivalent words in the English or the French languages. It is quite possible the Mi’Kmaq did not understand the missionaries and priests.

Furthermore,

Because the French had ‘Not yet succeeded in translating into the native language the common creed or symbol, the Lord’s Prayer, the commandments of God, the Sacraments, and other principles quite necessary to the making of a Christian,’ and because Father Fléché had ‘not been able to instruct them as he would have wished, because he did not know the language, and had nothing with which to support them’, the answer is obvious: The Mi’Kmaqs had no clue about the ceremony’s religious significance (JR 1:161-63). Moreover, because they had no concept of sin (in the sense of violating a Christian law or moral principle), the idea of washing sin away was utterly meaningless. (Prins, 1996:81).

Again, Father Pierre Biard noted that despite baptism, the Indians “keep up the same manners and traditions and mode of life, the same dances and rites and songs and sorcery; in fact all their previous customs” JR,3:147,165 (Prins, 1996: 81). It would seem there was skepticism on the part of the French priests concerning the acceptance of the Christian doctrines by the new Mi’Kmaq converts.

Prins points out:

A French priest lamented in the early 1600s: “Some [Mi’Kmaqs]... were occasionally brought to France and baptized there, but... as soon as they returned to those shores, immediately resumed their former habits and traditions” (JR, 2:87). “For all your arguments, and you can bring on one thousand of them if you wish, are annihilated by this single shaft which they always have on hand, *Aoti Chabaya*, (they say) ‘That is the Indian way of doing it. You can have your way and we will have ours...’” (JR, 3:123). Elsewhere, he complained: “...once they had gotten their fill they go off, mocking the French and everybody else at a distance and secretly laughing at everything, even the religion which they have received” (JR, 2:70). Furthermore, bemoaned another priest, “They mock openly at our bowings, at our compliments, and at our embracings. They never remove their hats when they enter our

dwellings; this ceremony seems to them too troublesome” (LeClercq, 252 in Prins, 1996: 101).

Colonization proceeded inconsistently from 1604 to 1613 in the Northeast by the French, due to the conflicts over claims to the Grand Banks fishery (French, English, Basque, and other countries), conflicting French interests in the colony (Christianity versus resource extraction) and the general lack of money to support year-round colonial settlements. Yet Christianity survived through the forceful efforts of Grand Chief Membertou, who had reached the age of 103 when he died in 1613. In order to help his missionary friends in their conversion of the Mi’Kmaq, Membertou chose to be buried in a Catholic cemetery instead of the traditional burial his people usually followed. He set the stage for the wholesale conversion of all of the Mi’Kmaq people. Although we cannot know for certain Membertou’s motivations, Harold McGee suggests that the reason for Membertou’s choice of accepting the Roman Catholic faith was protection and alliance with the French. The Mi’Kmaq Grand chief was getting old and weak and he had made many enemies defending his tribe’s “middle-man” status in the French goods trade.

By 1635, the Jesuits “founded a college for Indian boys at Quebec. Four years later they invited the Ursulines, a religious teaching order of nuns, who opened a school for girls”(Prins, 74, 1996). This kind of education was referred to as “francization” by Cornelius J. Jaenen in Barman et al ( v.1, 45-63, 1986). Jaenen identified four phases of the francization process: education of children in the field; education of selected native elite in France; day schools on reserves; and the establishment of boarding schools. To clarify Jaenen’s statement, education in the field took place wherever the missionaries could find Amerindian children, on the trap lines or in their villages far into the forest. It was difficult for the missionaries to keep track of the movements of families and their children. In the end, it became too arduous and they gave up searching for them. In order to create an Indian “elite,” missionaries chose to send to France individuals who showed some prospect of learning and who seemed more inclined to embrace Christianity. The plan was to apprentice Indian children with French households of nobility so that upon their return to the New World they would teach other Indians to adopt French lifestyles. Since there were always threats of war in Europe, France could not afford to send many citizens to the New World and this may have been one of the reasons the

missionaries chose to increase their population base by trying to turn Indians into French subjects. Jaenen uses the term “reserve” (although the actual reserve system did not yet exist) referring to fortified settlements set aside for “praying Indians” where children could go to day schools. This process was expensive because the missionaries had to supply the students’ families with food, blankets and clothing. In this context, boarding schools were in the missions where the priests lived and children were expected to be educated there, separated from their families. Indian families made regular demands to see their children and this disrupted their education. Eventually the missionaries stopped all efforts to educate Indians (Ibid 45-63, 1986). The failure of this process of education is rationalized in Jaenen’s conclusion:

Little by little, there was a realization on the part of the educators that Amerindian cultures were not easily eradicated, that traditional beliefs were well rooted, and that the colonial environment favoured many of the Amerindian customs and practices. There was some overt resistance to assimilation, but there were many covert factors inhibiting the progress of transformation of Native society into a European-type assimilated and subservient culture. Amerindians were a proud and independent people convinced of the validity of much of their culture. They did not deny the superiority of some aspects of French civility, especially the technological advantages of the French, enjoyed in some fields. On the other hand, they were not impressed by the European concepts of authority, morality, property, and work (Jaenen in Barman, et al., v.1, p.59, 1986).

Chrestien LeClercq, a 45-year-old monk from the Recollet order, arrived in Acadia in 1675. LeClercq was adopted into a Mi’Kmaq family which facilitated his learning of their language. He lived among the Mi’Kmaq in the Gaspé, Nepisiguit, Restigouche and Miramichi areas where he commenced his work of conversion. While he was there, he observed:

The wandering and vagabond life of these [Mi’Kmaq] peoples being unquestionably one of the chief obstacles to their conversion, I solicited Monsieur Denys de Fronsac to grant us [Recollets] a tract of land at Nipisiguit suitable for the cultivation of the soil, in order that we might render the Indians sedentary, settle them down, and civilize them among us (LeClercq, 205 in Prins, 1996:79).

LeClercq, realizing that the Mi’Kmaq were not easily convinced to learn the French system of writing, invented a kind of picture writing which he called the Mi’Kmaq ideograms:

I noticed that some children were making marks with charcoal upon birch-bark, and were counting with the finger very accurately at each word of the prayers which they pronounced. This made me believe that by giving them some formulary, which would aid their memory by

definite characters, I should advance more quickly than by teaching them through the method of making them repeat a number of times that which I said to them. I was charmed to find I was not mistaken (LeClercq, 1968:131).

Certainly the Mi'Kmaq had the mental capabilities to contribute their share to LeClercq's "invention."

Father Biard said in his Relation of 1616:

They have a very good memory for material things, such as having seen you before, of peculiarities of a place where they may have been, of what took place in their presence twenty or thirty years ago, etc.; but to learn anything by heart - there's the rock; there is no way of getting a consecutive arrangement of words into their pates (Jesuit Relations, 38: 261).

William F. Ganong, in the introduction to his translation of LeClercq's Relation, notes that:

Father Biard's statement agrees with other evidence we possess in showing that while the Indians had very good memories for individual matters, including the association of facts, events, or even ideas with visible objects, their memories were very poor for sequences or series of facts, events, or ideas - just such sequences as are essential feature of "committing to memory." An obvious equivalent for committing to memory in their case would be, therefore, the method of associating each idea with a definite symbol and arranging these symbols in the desired order; and this method the Indians obviously had hit upon for themselves. It was the method, indeed, by which they "read" all of their wampum records. (Ganong in LeClercq, 1910:23, 24).

Elsewhere in the Introduction, Ganong had this to say:

In brief, we may say that he [LeClercq] found his Indians capable of remembering tenaciously any association of word, fact, or simple idea with a written arbitrary symbol; found them more or less accustomed to the use of a series of such symbols to aid in recalling a sequence of facts and ideas; and perhaps he found them provided with some generally understood picture-symbols for the commonest objects...(ibid.:24).

Concerning Indians' memory, for more observations please refer to Dickason's, Canada's First Nations (1997), 251.

LeClercq, after inventing the Mi'Kmaq ideograms and going about his work of converting Indians for 12 years, from 1675 to 1687, returned to France. For 50 years, the Mi'Kmaq people were left without missionaries or priests to influence them into Christianity and yet, when Abbé Antoine S. Maillard arrived in Mi'Kmaq territory in 1735, the Indians were reciting their prayers from their hieroglyphic leaflets made of birch-bark. Although Abbé Maillard credited only himself for inventing

the Mi'Kmaq hieroglyphs after studying the language for many years, he more than likely appropriated the system that LeClercq had "invented" (Ganong in LeClercq, 1910:26-30; Wallis and Wallis, 1955:13; Schmidt and Marshall, 1995:11,12; Prins, 1996:140). LeClercq and Maillard, however, designed and used a roman-based orthography but both probably thought it wise not to introduce this system to the Mi'Kmaq people, as Maillard rationalized in the following way:

If they would be able to use our alphabet either to read or write, they would take full advantage of this knowledge, because of their inquiring minds, to learn with ability rather the evil things than the good one...They would be rapidly convinced that they know a lot more than their teachers [i.e., priests]. So, I believe that if they would read and write our language, they would be able to induce a lot of troubles among the nation both at the religious and political levels...and that would be a mistake for them and for us (Maillard, 1863:368).

Abbé Maillard died in Halifax in 1762 after having spent 27 years learning the Mi'Kmaq language, "developing" and improving the hieroglyphic writing system and developing a dictionary, most probably for his own purposes in understanding the Mi'Kmaq language. Maillard was captured by the British during the French and English wars but was allowed to return to mission work among the Mi'Kmaq.

The conversion efforts made by the French missionaries with the support of their successive governments and financial sponsors were somewhat successful. As for the French priests, they were convinced their Christian influence on the Indians was working inasmuch as the Mi'Kmaq were reciting their prayers from the newly "invented" writing system and expressed a desire "to become like the French" so they could literally receive their "daily bread" from the priests. From a Mi'Kmaq perspective, it is questionable whether they embraced the full Roman Catholic doctrines and dogma. It is interesting to note that the indigenous spiritual figures in their concepts of creation – *Gisoolg*, (the Creator), *Nisgam* (the sun), and *tjitjamitj* (our spirit/shadow) – were incorporated into the new "religion" to take on new meaning as "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." This means that the Mi'Kmaq converts were still using spiritual concepts from their language as part of their newly acquired "prayers" and "hymns" as Catholics. The Mi'Kmaqs did not have to give up their language or their spiritual ideologies (yet). The skepticism which was raised by senior missionaries and other

French gentlemen over the “wholesale conversion” of the Indians in North America may have had some basis, especially with concerns that were raised as to whether the Indians understood the nature of the Christian doctrines when they accepted baptism. Keep in mind that many of the Mi’Kmaq who were baptized could not understand the French language and the missionaries who did the baptizing did not speak the Mi’Kmaq language either. Quite possibly, much of the same Mi’Kmaq spiritual ideologies still exist today within the Catholic religious practices in our communities.

In his chapter on “Christianizing the Mi’Kmaq:....,” Prins states:

For the next three centuries the Catholic Church remained a major force in Mi’Kmaq life, and its ceremonies are now enmeshed with Mi’Kmaq culture. Yet the Church’s role has been an ambiguous one - helping to undermine traditional Mi’Kmaq beliefs and customs while providing the Mi’Kmaq with a new religious foundation that enabled them to cope with the changing political-economic order in their world (1996:87).

At this point, based on the research, it is questionable as to who was “undermining” whom in their beliefs and customs. The priests believed they were converting the Indians while the Mi’Kmaq continued their lives as usual (although many deaths were attributed to diseases), exercising and experiencing a spiritual and physical relationship to the land and its resources. The Mi’Kmaq still had their language, their “traditional beliefs were well rooted” and the “wandering and vagabond life of these [Mi’Kmaq] peoples [were] unquestionably [some] of the chief obstacles to their conversion.” This may still be relevant today. It is questionable whether “a new religious foundation... enabled them to cope with the changing political-economic order in their world,” considering the negative social conditions in Aboriginal communities (Prins, 1996:87).

Later on, after the English forces had taken control of the region, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was established by the Anglicans in order to send missionaries to the Indians in the more settled colonies of England. This society's initiatives were funded by private citizens of England. Education of Indians was achieved through schools built far away from any Indian community (more for the benefit of the society to administer their programs). In New Brunswick, the Society’s school for Indians was established in Sussex Vale in 1784. The schools took Indian children from their parents and villages. The children were trained in domestic

chores and agricultural skills. Later they were apprenticed to local Loyalists as indentured servants. By the late 1832, scandals of sexual misconduct and covert slavery hampered the Society's activities. The Society's board of directors in England requested an investigation and decided to suspend financial assistance to the educational initiative for the Indians (Fingard 1972: 29-42).

There was a consistent approach to Indian education by both the French and the English: the Indian was to be "educated" and eventually assimilated into Christianity and mainstream society. By taking the children away from their parents, missionaries thought that they could more easily control and assimilate them. It was rare to hear a humanist voice during this colonial period. Walter Bromley wanted to start a school for Indian children that would be run by a society of concerned colonists. Bromley was an ex-military officer with the Welsh Fusiliers and at the time of his writing, lived in Nova Scotia (Bromley, 1814:55). Bromley praised the Indian educational initiatives taken by the Propagation Society in New Brunswick but he did not support the idea of separating the children from their parents. The following is a lengthy quote, but it sets the ambiance in which concerns for the "education for civilization" of the Indians took place:

A branch of the above society was established at Sussex Vale, on the Kennebecases river in New Brunswick, at the separation of the States, a college was erected for the education of the Indian children, and some of them were taught to read and write, but I was informed by Lieut. General Coffin (who I understand has the superintendence of the children) a few weeks ago, that a proper teacher could not be found to instruct them, and he applied to me for assistance. I have also learned that about 20 Indian children, are indented for the term of three years by that society, to various farmers in the neighbourhood of Sussex Vale, and that an injunction is laid on each master to teach them to read and write. Both plans are objectional for many reasons - I disapprove altogether of the children being taken from their parents, and many instances have occurred of their having been demanded by them to the great annoyance of the agents and masters, and unless we change the habits of the parents in some measure as well as those of the children, the delightful and reciprocal attachments implanted in our nature and imbibed from our earliest infancy towards our relatives (without which man would be slave, and his life not worth preserving,) will forever preclude the possibility of their general civilization, and I am not a little surprised to find, that there are now a few of the most respectable inhabitants of the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia who have adduced facts of children returning to their parents after some progress had been made in their civilization, and have grounded their objections to any plan for the general reformation of the whole from these circumstances - surely such persons can never have

studied human nature! ...Instruct them in reading and writing, and it will not be long before they will exercise the thinking faculty on those great questions which are intimately connected with their temporal and eternal interest, and both the European white and the swarthy savage will wonder at the bondage which they once endured and the absurdities which they once revered (Bromley, 1814:46-48); See also Fingard, 1982:12-42; Prins, 1996:168 and Upton, 1979:160-66.

Catholic priests kept their influence on the Mi'Kmaq people despite the efforts of Protestant groups and societies who, with the help of colonial governments, were making great efforts to educate the Indians. Since the end of the American Revolution in 1783, colonial governments tried to discourage the Mi'Kmaq people from being influenced by the French papists. However, the French Revolution in Europe and the War of 1812 caused the eastern British Colonial governments to fear an "Indian uprising," so as a result, Mi'Kmaqs were not discouraged from practising their Roman Catholic religion. The Colonial governments even went so far as to provide some money for Catholic priests to continue seeing the Indians. After the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Father Vincent de Paul and Quebec Bishop Joseph Octave Plessis, with limited funds and no Mi'Kmaq language ability, did their best to maintain the religious influence that was planted by the French. Bishop Plessis, in a 1815 tour from Quebec City to the Maritimes, was greeted by Mi'Kmaq Indians who told him:

"We live like dogs, and in danger of dying without sacraments. Our children are ignorant of religion. No priest speaks our language. Our old people have not heard a sermon in fifty years" (Upton, 1979:153)

The lack of priests meant that the Mi'Kmaqs were largely responsible for maintaining their own Catholicism. In doing so, they were guided by Father Maillard, even long after his death. The hieroglyphs he had perfected were lost to his missionary successors, but they were retained by the Mi'Kmaqs in birch-bark manuscripts of what they called, simply, "the book." Maillard also prepared his flock to be self-sustaining in some sacramental matters (Upton 1979:153-54). Upton explains that Maillard showed the Mi'Kmaq how to arrange a special form of baptism for the children and trained prayer leaders, keptins of the Mi'Kmaq Grand Council, to do almost a whole mass in Mi'Kmaq with the exception of communion (but Mi'Kmaq oral tradition indicates that communion was also given). For a long time, the Indians were accustomed to waiting for the missionaries to arrive each summer

to perform marriages, funerals and baptisms. Maillard must have anticipated the demise of the French influence and must have seen that no other priest was prepared to continue his work.

This display of Mi'Kmaq devotion to the Catholic religion is revealed in the account of a priest who visited Nova Scotia:

So recently as the month of August, 1823, I was in a parish called Havre-a-Bouchers, when twenty-six canoes filled with Indians arrived there; they came to have their children baptised, and for confession, etc. There were eight singers among them, and during the week that they remained, they sang mass for me each day, and one might say conducted themselves like canons or like Trappists! ... These poor Indians might shame some of our European Catholics by their zeal and their piety (Father Vincent de Paul, 1886:15).

Grant (1984: 72) raises another factor that may have contributed to the Mi'Kmaq peoples adherence to the Catholic faith. This was the practice of observing Saint Anne's Day on July 26 each summer at the Holy Gathering places of the Mi'Kmaq or the "Sante Mawiomi wjit Mi'Kmaq." According to oral tradition, Nogami, who was Glooscap's grandmother, played an important role in teaching wisdom and knowledge to her grandson. In the same context, the missionaries chose Jesus' grandmother, St Anne, as a patron saint for the Mi'Kmaq Catholics. This took place at Chapel Island, Cape Breton, Merigomish Island near Pictou, in Nova Scotia, at Burnt Church in New Brunswick and at Restigouche in Quebec: (and probably elsewhere in Canada):

When the New England Company finally withdrew from the Atlantic region in 1826, the Micmacs were still without exception Roman Catholic. They had to make do and would continue to make do with such services as could be provided by diocesan priests in time spared from regular parochial duties. Until mid-century or later the supply of priests was so limited and the Micmac pattern of life so nomadic that contacts with the Church were sporadic at best. In these circumstances Micmac families depended for the preservation of their traditions of Catholic devotion on Maillard's pictographic books, which were reprinted for them by the Austrian government as late as 1866. Annual summer gatherings during Saint Anne's moon, instituted early in the seventeenth century [1635], became occasions for concentrated religious instruction, the performance of rituals impossible at other times, and the renewal of social ties. The Catholicism of the Micmacs, perhaps more than that of any other Canadian Indians, was primarily a tribal affair (72).

In Prince Edward Island, Thomas Irwin, an Irish immigrant, picked up the cause for the Indians. He petitioned the government praying that land, supplies of food and clothing and education

be provided to the Mi'Kmaq Indians. Not much is said of Irwin's efforts. However, it seems that his cause was not too well known by the Mi'Kmaq people. There is no mention of him in the oral tradition. Upton had this to say about Irwin:

From Charlottetown, a Catholic layman, Thomas Irwin, fought a lonely campaign in the early 1830s for the establishment of "Philo-Indian Societies" with the same virtuous ends in view. A student of the Micmac tongue, he was anxious to promote school books in Micmac of his own devising, but since he planned to incorporate Catholic texts he ran afoul of the Protestants. He received no help from the Catholic clergy (Upton 1979:166).

Another "Champion of the Micmacs" was Silas T. Rand, a Baptist missionary who studied the Mi'Kmaq language from 1846 until his death on October 4, 1890. In his diary, Rand wrote "I took hold of the idea, and determined thenceforth to devote my life to the work of civilizing, educating and Christianizing the semi-savage Indians of the Maritime Provinces" (Clark 1899:5). Rand had translated the Bible, hymns, psalms, prayers and he collected over 300 Mi'Kmaq legends and developed two dictionaries from Mi'Kmaq to English and English to Mi'Kmaq. Most of his works were published. He established the Micmac Mission in 1864 which received financial support from the Baptists of the Maritime Provinces. Even among his own religion there were skeptics:

The language of the Micmacs must decay. If they are brought under the influence of instruction they will desire to learn English, and yet we do not observe much progress made even at that. Among themselves they converse in their own language, and every effort to make ourselves understood among them must be in a simple conversational style. They often cannot understand our generally uttered Saxon words, far less our theological phrases. ... We repeat, the language may be fast disappearing; but it has been by the exertions of your missionary, reduced to a grammar, and a dictionary of it is in course of construction: will men of science fail to acknowledge their obligation to your missionary efforts? (Clark, 1899:6).

Elsewhere, there were more terse comments that Silas Rand had to respond to, so that he could continue to receive pecuniary support from the Baptists and philanthropists:

A few weak-headed visionaries such as the late Dr. Twining, Dr. Forrester, and Dr. Crawley, Dr. PG. McGreggor, and more or less of the other leading ministers, merchants and lawyers of Halifax at the time, actually undertaking to *civilize* the Indians by such a huge *mistake in natural laws* as they made, like trying to make water run up hill, *and by seeking to carry them back to their old worn-out life and language*, now sadly disjointed from the present times.

Surely that *was one* way to try to *civilize* them! And to add to the absurdity, they *aimed to teach them their own language!*-sending poor Rand round among the alders and bramble bushes to teach the Indians their old worn-out and all-forgotten Micmac!! Why they actually printed and taught the Indians to read what *were called, but really were not, Micmac books and gospel* (Christian Messenger, April 25, 1882:3).

While Rand was preoccupied with trying to keep the “MicMac Mission” operating despite huge opposition from Catholic priests, Catholic Mi’Kmaq as well as skeptics in his own Baptist religion added to the generally unstable financial situation he was in. Nonetheless, his study of the Mi’Kmaq language continued. Rand’s efforts were appreciated and praised only after his death (see Clark, 1899). It is interesting to note that Rand’s dictionary has been reprinted at least five times and the Micmac Legends at least twice. These text books have been important tools in the language revitalization that has taken place over the last 25 years in the Mi’Kmaq communities. The schools on Mi’Kmaq reserves have placed those texts in their libraries.

In 1867, the British North American Act was passed in the British Parliament creating the Dominion of Canada. Under section 91, sub-section 24, “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians” became “the exclusive Legislative Authority of the Parliament of Canada.” The Dominion government of Canada passed the Indian Act in 1876. Although the Indians criticized the Indian Act,

... they also recognized that it enshrined some of their charter rights, which had been granted, or promised, them prior to Confederation in 1867. The new policy was an abrupt departure from the traditional practice of dealing with Indians, even though the implicit long range goal of terminating the special treatment of Indians had been part of the government policies since the 1830s (Weaver, 1981:4).

Furthermore,

To hasten the assimilation process, Christianity was actively promoted and whatever remained of native spirituality was repressed. Indian children were forced to attend church-run boarding schools where English was taught and where speaking Mi’Kmaq was forbidden (Prins, 1996:184) .

Prins continues and quotes Dickason:

Status was now defined by federal law, which declared that an Indian is someone “who pursuant of this Act is registered as an Indian, or is entitled to be registered as an Indian.” Federal law defined an Indian band as a “body of Indians for whom the government has set aside lands for their common use and benefit ; or whom the government is holding moneys for their common use and benefit; or which has been declared a band by the governor-in-

council for the purpose of the Act.” The law has defined a reserve: “a tract of land, the legal title of which is vested in the Crown, that has been set aside for the use of the band” (Dickason, 1992:284; 1996:184).

Elsewhere, Prins makes reference to Hamilton’s remarks in his following statement:

In 1867 the Canadian government claimed responsibility for educating Indian children. Federal education policy presumed that indigenous cultures “were unworthy of perpetuation,” representing the denial or negation of basic Canadian values. Primary schools were established on reserves to provide Mi’Kmaq children “with the same intellectual skills possessed by non-Indians, and equip them equally to lead socially responsible and useful lives.” Basic reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught. Most of the teachers were non-Indian Catholic lay instructors, but after 1900 a good number of Mi’Kmaqs were qualified to teach. Because they could speak the language of their pupils, they were quite effective - but many “ran afoul of the suspicions and demands of the Indian agents, school inspectors, or federal officials...” (W.Hamilton, 1986:12-15; 1996:185).

Confederation represented a clean break with the past as far as Indian education was concerned. For the first time, the government assumed specific responsibility for the education of the Indian population in each province of the country. At the same time, the process of establishing schools on the reserves proved to be slow. A school which opened at Tobique in 1869 had to close its doors in 1871 due to lack of attendance. During the 1870s, several federal Indian Day schools were successfully established in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and in the early 1880s, the following schools came into being on Indian reserves in New Brunswick: Burnt Church (1880), Tobique (1881), Eel Ground (1882), Kingsclear (1883), and St. Mary’s (1883). This trend continued until a total of 28 schools had been established in the Maritime Provinces by 1930 – including the Red Bank school (1914).

Religious teachers, most of whom were nuns, began to be introduced into the Indian Day school system on the reserves. Until the 1920s, Catholic lay teachers (including several Native teachers) held the teaching positions that were later assumed by the nuns and priests. The most serious problems faced by the schools were irregular attendance (often below 50% of enrolment prior to the 1930s) and early drop-out – after only three or four years in most instances. The problems were similar to those of the parish schools of the province some three generations earlier except that, for obvious reasons, parish children were much more likely to acquire the desired competencies and

values outside of a formal school setting than were the Indian children (Hamilton, 1986:33-35).

Wilson D. Wallis did an ethnographic field study of Mi'Kmaq life in 1910-11. In 1950 and 1953, he was joined by Ruth Sawtell Wallis to complete a comparative analysis, published as The Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada 1955. This anthropological study focused on the material culture of the Mi'Kmaq people in Eastern Canada, but it also recorded other aspects of Mi'Kmaq culture. Changes in Mi'Kmaq attitudes towards mainstream education shifted from: "An Indian who could read and write [I presume in English because ideograms were in use in the Church] was more likely to be distrusted than to be respected by his fellows" (24) in 1910, to "Each year a few young people enter nursing, commercial courses, and trades schools; and whether or not they use the educational facilities, the Micmac want opportunities equal to those of the whites" (307) in 1953. Elsewhere, Wallis and Wallis state that the "Micmac still remain a separate people: in the native language spoken in the majority of their homes, in conscious pride, and in the eyes of the Indian Affairs Branch of the Canadian government" (271). Despite that, by 1953 "The greatest changes that have come to Canada since 1912 – the two world wars, economic prosperity alternating with depression, the Old Age Pension, the Family Allowance, the spread of compulsory education, of newspapers, comic books, and Eaton's mail-order catalogue – these have made the Micmac story in the main a Canadian story." They went on to say that Indians do not pay taxes or vote in public elections and the language of their schools is English and their religion is uniformly Catholic in all of their reserves. To this end they could not determine "to what extent this last factor ... is dominant in the preservation of Micmac group identity" even after two field seasons (271).

Another anthropologist who studied the Mi'Kmaq Indians was Philip K. Bock. Although most of his work concentrated on the community of Restigouche, he used a wide bibliographic selection about the Mi'Kmaq. Bock notes that in the nineteenth century, some of the men from Restigouche [Listuguj] had learned to read and write in English either by being taught or teaching themselves. Surprisingly enough, when the Sisters of the Holy Rosary came to Listuguj in 1903, it was decided to use the Indian language in the four grade schools which they established. Until 1920, the elements of Mi'Kmaq reading and writing were taught, together with catechism and "Bible history". One of Bock's informants, an old man who attended the school during this period, said: "When I went to

school there was no English taught – just religion taught in Micmac”. Another described the curriculum as “mostly singing and praying” (Bock, 1966:36-41).

Bock also noted that after 1920, the school developed into a seven-grade “Indian Day School”. Attendance there was very irregular, with few Indian children completing the seventh grade. Attendance became a little more regular after the 1951 Indian Act amendment stipulated that attendance at the primary school was mandatory for children between 6 and 16 years of age. The penalty for truancy was to stop Family Allowance benefits to families whose children did not attend school on a regular basis. If children did not go to school, they were taken away from their parents and in most cases taken to a residential school.

Standards were set by the province, which sent inspectors on periodic visits to the Indian Day Schools and provided standardized tests for use at the end of the school year. In the early grades, Indian children got special instruction in English, which most of them learned as a second language. The curriculum was identical for all students. It consisted of standard academic subjects (language, mathematics, history, geography, etc.), manual training for the boys, cooking and sewing for the girls, and religious instruction.

Bock said that the school was one of the major institutions shaping the Listuguj community. It exerted influence in a number of ways, for example, in the scheduling of activities of individuals and families. “In the absence of regular employment for family heads, or of other occupational routines, the school day and year provide a major framework for regular interaction. This is deliberately planned so as not to conflict with another major temporal framework for communal interaction: the Church calendar” (38). He added “the other major effect of the school upon the community is in the preparation of the children for a way of life different from that of their parents. With few exceptions, the adult members of the Band have had at least a fourth- or fifth-grade education” (38). Bock further commented “there are a number of factors that produce negative feelings among older students, which results in their leaving school as soon as they reach the age of 16. These include real or imagined slights from teachers, the authoritarian structure of the school, and the separation of the standardized curriculum from daily life. There is growing feeling that, due to discrimination and

general unemployment, real opportunities may not be increased despite further education” (39). Bock said that although education was certainly a primary channel for socio-economic mobility, and as important as it seemed, it was a fact that there was no cultural tradition of higher education, at least in the sense of academic education, among the Mi’Kmaq; relatively few parents actively encouraged their children's studies.

Bock also reported that the [Indian] Agent and the Sisters at Listuguj viewed the school as an important instrument of integration. He gave several examples of integration plans like the need for more money to pay for higher studies, vocational education, English and French language training and a gymnasium. For his final thought on education, Bock wrote “In summary, the school has two major effects upon the community: the imposition of a temporal framework, which structures the activities of most members of the community, and **the furnishing of the younger generation with skills and attitudes unlike those of their elders**” {emphasis is mine}(39).

It might be appropriate here to comment on the views of the non-Mi’Kmaq anthropologists who have studied Mi’Kmaq people and communities. In the observations they have made, albeit some directly and some retrospectively, they seem to assume “objectivity” but do not manage to leave their own cultural baggage entirely behind. For instance, the phrase “higher education” means post-secondary academic education in an integrative context and not knowledge about collecting and mixing traditional medicines or making snowshoes which, according to Mi’Kmaq standards of that time, were essential for success in community life. Problems of non-accommodation of Mi’Kmaq world views were already being experienced.

Wallis and Wallis who did their studies in 1910 and again in 1953, were obviously quite removed from the day-to-day activities of reserve life. Even if they felt they were part of the community while in the field, it was evident their presence did not go unnoticed by the Mi’Kmaq extended families which usually included several other reserves. The concept of using Indian informants caused suspicion and a sense of disruption. Mi’Kmaq people who were paid money to divulge “tribal secrets” about traditional medicines, beliefs, and practices created more cleavages in the communities. The Indian informants were often called liars and cheats because of their

opportunistic attitudes. Nevertheless, Wallis and Wallis' The MicMacs of Eastern Canada has to be read in light of the times (1910 and 1953), and of the writers' cultural backgrounds and their status in mainstream society. Their views tended to reflect those of the government of the time (assimilation, integration through acculturation), which may be why they got government funding for their research in the first place. They certainly assessed the Mi'Kmaq communities and families according to mainstream value systems.

Philip K. Bock's work, The Micmac Indians of Restigouche: History and Contemporary Description (1966), on the other hand, appears to have been relatively unobtrusive at Listuguj. He was received as a guest by the reserve chief and his family, who at the time was popular. Although Bock used Indian informants, he seems to have taken them on as friends instead of constantly grilling them for information. The views that he reflects in his analysis of the community were not sympathetic to the Church or the Indian Affairs Branch. These views were not too popular in Listuguj either, since most of the members of the Band were devout Catholics and still under the impression that the Department of Indians Affairs had direct influence over their economic well-being. It is this writer's opinion that Bock reflected a truer picture of a Mi'Kmaq community than did Wallis and Wallis.

Harald Prins has lived and studied as a friend and scholar among the Mi'Kmaq people since the mid-1970s. His book, The Mi'Kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival (1996), has been given acclaim and respect by the Mi'Kmaq people. In spite of his cultural heritage, Prins has learned and is still learning the views of the Mi'Kmaq world. His "Mi'Kmaq" perspective is well-grounded and is demonstrated in the topics he has chosen to write about – topics that other non-Mi'Kmaqs have not written about, such as questioning the role of the Church and Grand Council in Mi'Kmaq society.

This outline of Indian education from first contact to the early 1960s suggests that there is truth in what the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples articulates: "Formal education was, without apology, assimilationist. The primary purpose of formal education was, to indoctrinate Aboriginal people into Christian, European world view, thereby 'civilizing' them" (RCAP, 434, vol.3, 1996).

Broader developments in the post-World War II period must be noted. Returning Indian veterans turned their attention to their own government's treatment of Indians. In 1945, the North American Indian Nation was established by Indian war veterans and raised issues of the treatment of veterans, social conditions on reserves, and the right to govern themselves (personal communication with William Commanda, organizing member). Already the federal government was preparing to restructure itself, first by establishing the Special Committee on Indian Affairs in 1947-50 and to conduct a public inquiry across Canada to look into the state of Indian conditions. These efforts resulted in the amendment of the Indian Act in 1951. Aboriginal rights and civil rights court cases began to fill the dockets by the late 1950s. The Conservative government of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker introduced the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1956. This allowed laws pertaining to Indians to be contested in the Supreme Court. The famous Drybones case involved the constitutional rights of "personal possession." An Indian in the Northwest Territories was charged under the Indian Act for illegally being drunk. The Supreme Court of Canada (SCOC) ruled that particular section of the Indian Act (on Indians and alcohol) to be inoperative. By 1961, the Department of Indian Affairs amended the Indian Act to reflect the SCOC's decision. The early 1960s brought about a combination of events that definitely changed the path of Indians' "self-determination" and the government's "Indian Policy." However, as simplistic as this short description seems (after all, this is what was understood in the Indian political scene of the time in the Atlantic region), more serious issues began to surface concerning the "hidden agenda" of government:

In 1947, for example, during the Special Joint Committee hearings on the Indian Act, termination had been explicitly proposed by Diamond Jenness, then Dominion Anthropologist, in his 'Plan for Liquidating Canada's Indian Problem in 25 Years' (Jenness 1947:310-11) (in Weaver, 1981:4).

By 1966, the government had published the two-volume report of Special Representative Harry B. Hawthorn, The Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada. In the report, Alan Cairns suggests that, "The equal treatment in law and services of a people who at the present time do not have equal competitive capacities will not suffice for the attainment of substantive socio-economic equality" (Hawthorn, 1966:392) Elsewhere in the report, Hawthorn says, "The government's policy on the preservation of Indian languages and cultural traditions, for example, is not clear. As a general

rule they are not assigned much importance. This makes it difficult to distinguish between a policy of integration and a policy of assimilation, which allows the loss of the basic cultural values of the integrated ethnic group” (Hawthorn, 1966:41). Sally Weaver had this to say about the Hawthorn Report:

...the government’s disregard of the recommendations in the Hawthorn Report (1966, 1967), itself a government-commissioned national survey on Canadian Indians. Working between 1963 and 1967, Hawthorn and his co-researchers had produced a lengthy report on the current conditions of Indians in Canada. The team had rejected termination as a policy option (1966:8), arguing instead for a ‘citizens plus’ status for Indians, which they did not view as a deterrent to delivering proper provincial services to Indians. They also recommended the role of advocate-ombudsman for the Indian Affairs Branch because many Indian bands lacked the social, economic, and political skills of self-defence. As well, the team refuted the usual constitutional argument that Indians were the exclusive responsibility of the federal government, thereby leaving the way open for the provinces to deliver programs to Indians (see also Lysyk 1967). In their view the thrust of policy should be middle range, with programs emphasizing development on a broad socio-economic scale in order to reverse Indian poverty and dependency on the government (1966:386-403). They urged the government to recognize the increasing social problems among Indians in cities, but the recommendation, too, was disregarded in the new policy (Weaver, 1981:6).

When the report was released to the public and ultimately to the Band Councils (available only upon request from the Department of Indians Affairs), the Indians were happy to see some positive changes in their conditions forthcoming. This writer recalls reading his uncle’s copy (Abraham Simon was a member of the Band Council in Big Cove) and explaining in the Mi’Kmaq language what it was thought to mean.

The excitement over the amelioration of negative socio-economic conditions on Indian reserves was short-lived with the introduction of the White Paper Policy in 1969. This policy paper shocked the Indian communities because there was no warning. As Weaver notes:

Predictably, the policy caused shock and alarm among Indians. Even though they were an unorganized minority, they responded with clear-cut rejection of the White Paper: ‘the MacDonald-Chrétien doctrine’, as Cardinal labelled it after DIAND’s deputy minister and minister, respectively. ...The White Paper argued that ‘equality,’ or ‘non-discrimination’ as it was often phrased, was a key ingredient in a solution to the problems of Indians, and that special rights had been the major cause of their problems (DIAND 1969). The goal

of equality was to be achieved by terminating the special legislation and bureaucracy that had developed over the past century to deal with Indians, and by transferring to the provinces the responsibility for administering services to Indians. Henceforth, Indians would receive the same services from the same sources as other Canadians after a transitional period in which enriched programs of economic development were to be offered. The large Indian Affairs bureaucracy would be dismantled in five years and the federal government was to retain trusteeship functions only for Indian lands which would be administered through an Indian Lands Act. ...Indians responded to the policy with a resounding nationalism unparalleled in Canadian history. Their spokesmen rallied to the moment by preparing their own counter-proposals and by renewing their efforts to build provincial and national organizations through which they could lobby for their own policies. With press and other sectors of the public supporting the Indian indictment of the policy, the government came under pressure to set the White Paper aside. ...Trudeau publicly said the government would not press the implementation of the White Paper. By Spring 1971, the policy was formally withdrawn by Chrétien although some Indian spokesmen today claim, and some civil servants privately concur, that termination remains the unofficial policy of the government and is still being implemented (Weaver, 1981:4-5).

Graham, Dittburner and Abele identify this period as signalling the end of a long soliloquy and some indication of the beginning of a true dialogue between the federal government and the Indian people:

The policy discourse on education began in the midst of the activism and openness to change that marked the 1960s. Aboriginal issues gained prominence internationally with the rise of Aboriginal political organizations in many parts of the world, and similar changes were occurring in Canada. Indian political organizations were forming, the Hawthorn Report raised public awareness of the situation of Aboriginal people, and the 1969 *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (the White Paper) initiated a controversy concerning the relationship between the federal government and Indian peoples (Graham et al., 1996:272).

By tracing the evolution of policy discussions and debates in areas which included lands and resources, governance, criminal justice and education, Graham et al. have built upon an analysis of public policy discourse based on the following: “**who** was involved in policy discussions; **how** did policy discussions occur; and **what** was said about key issues in the domain of Aboriginal affairs?”

They concluded that the period studied (1967 to 1992) “shows examples of three types of situations: instances in which dialogue was realized; instances in which discourse showed some promise of dialogue but ultimately failed; and instances of soliloquy, which held little promise of

dialogue (xii). They offered a solution to the misunderstanding: "In government documents ... the meanings associated with this evolving language remain obscure. Corresponding paradigms emerging from the Aboriginal discourse of rights-based or sovereign relationships between Canada and Aboriginal peoples lack a direct government response, also contributing to an absence of explicit foundations and a sense of common ground for policy discussion." And, finally:

There appear to be three essential characteristics of effective dialogue: commensurate participation by all those affected by decisions; a process for sustained discussion, recognizing different starting points and preferences in style of communication among those involved; and evolution toward a common vision of what is to be discussed, based on frank exchanges. More frequent achievement of these conditions speaks to the fundamental nature of the power relationships between Aboriginal peoples and their representatives and Canadian governments, the importance of getting the arrangements and institutions of Aboriginal/Canada policy discussions right, and the need to confront and explore different meanings for concepts used in policy discussions and to realize the paradigms that underlie policy proposals (xii-xiii).

Graham, Dittburner and Abele also noted that it was important to bring issues to the public's attention, and sometimes through the courts but also through other channels, to achieve dialogue on Aboriginal issues and the resulting promotion of a civil society in Canada (xiii). I might add that it is through meaningful dialogue that this thesis will generate more discussion on the issue of Aboriginal perspectives in mainstream education and result in positive learning experiences for Aboriginal students.

While the embers of Indian activism were still hot and with the demise of the White Paper policy, the National Indian Brotherhood moved quickly to come up with alternative solutions to the "Indian Problem." Indian leaders like George Manuel from British Columbia, Harold Cardinal from Alberta and Andrew Delisle from Quebec took advantage of their DIAND-sponsored community development training and took on the government's plans to "wipe out the Indians with a stroke of a pen," as Elder Anthony Francis put it when he referred to the White Paper proposal at the time.

Peter McFarlane in his 1993 biography of George Manuel said this about the White Paper: "It contained echoes of D.C. Scott's objective of working for the day when 'there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no

Indian Department' (107).” And in the same context, another point expressed by George Manuel in The Fourth World (1974: 192) that relates to the present thesis: “It is not only politicians and bureaucrats who perpetuate a colonial education system. One reason for the lack of new materials – in addition to the lack of funds and the refusal to allow knowledgeable Indian people who lack a degree to play a significant role – is the thinking of those whose training should prepare them to provide those materials.”

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood produced its first historic paper, Indian Control of Indian Education. Published in 1973, it opposed the White Paper relegation of Indian education to provincial control and proposed the establishment of a National Indian Education Authority that would give Indian people the right to negotiate their children’s entry into public schools or even establish schools of their own. McFarlane describes how, on being presented with this paper, Chrétien “accepted it in principle, but refused to discuss the mechanics of its implementation. This was a tactic [he] would use again and again” during his three remaining years at Indian Affairs (143). Soliloquy and Dialogue treats Indian Control of Indian Education as one of the instruments which brought Indians and government together in a meaningful discussion resulting in a change in the federal government’s policy on Indian education. The document states:

The time has come for a radical change in Indian education. Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of the Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We believe in education as a preparation for total living, as a means of free choice of where to live and work, as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and educational process as an “either-or” operation. We must have the freedom to choose among many options and alternatives. Decisions on specific issues can only be made in the context of local control of education. (Indian Control of Indian Education, 1973:3-4 in Graham, Dittburner and Abele 1996:278-279)

As a sub-theme and title of an Assembly of First Nation (formerly, the National Indian Brotherhood) document on Indian education in Soliloquy and Dialogue, Graham et al. use Tradition and Education:[ Towards a Vision for the Future] and Its Aftermath. This was the culmination of a four-year study and the most comprehensive report on Aboriginal education to date. Advancing on

the foundation of Indian Control of Indian Education, Education and Tradition focused on the political interests of government and Indians by couching education in the context of self-government.

The details of Indian education after 1985 are analysed in greater detail in Chapter II and thus, this ends the historical account of how the Church and government imposed mainstream education on the Indians and how this process has affected the Mi'Kmaq people in eastern Canada.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SHORTCOMINGS OF MAINSTREAM EDUCATION FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

In this chapter, the main question that will be addressed is: What is the problem with mainstream education for Aboriginal peoples? I addressed this question in the historical context outlined in Chapter I, but in this chapter, I do so personally rather than objectively, and from the perspective of a hereditary chief of the Mi'Kmaq Nation. In this context, mainstream education is understood to be that officially recognized by Canadian governments and delivered by the public and religious school boards in general. This mainstream education does not include indigenous values, knowledge or principles of learning and teaching as part of its core curriculum.

Even though today it is acknowledged that many more Aboriginal students are graduating than before, the question remains: For whom is it a “success story”? In the long range, who does it really benefit? Granted, these Aboriginal achievers will have a better chance to find a place in the economy – and might even realize their dreams of becoming recognized experts in their fields (which in itself is positive) – but at what cost? Do they have to forego their culture and values in the process? The goal is still assimilation in a society which considers itself superior in its ways of living in this world (even if this view is more subtly expressed now than in the past). First, as Aboriginal peoples, we should start asking what is the relevance of mainstream schooling – as a sole process of education – the outcomes being a loss of identity, a further erosion of traditional philosophies, and a depletion of indigenous knowledge. Secondly, people are so keen to see the “success story” of academically achieving Aboriginal students that too often they overlook the fact that many Aboriginal youth today still feel alienated from mainstream society – resulting in well-above-average drop-out rates (53.6% graduation rate of on-reserve students; DIAND, 1995 as reported in RCAP, 1996) and resultant social consequences (RCAP, 1996, v 2: 968 and v 3: 434). At the same time, these dislocated youth have no consistent means of learning about indigenous knowledge because it is not being addressed by the community in a systematic way, many of its members having themselves lost faith in the validity of their own culture. Hence there is a decrease of confidence among these youth: they have poor formal schooling, no sense of identity arising from their own culture, and they begin a path

towards social dysfunction. The extreme examples are in cases like the Big Cove Reserve (Augustine, et al. in RCAP, 1994:48-51), Davis Inlet (The Davis Inlet People's Inquiry, 1995:8-23), and Alkali Lake (York, 1989:175-200). Granted, the responsibility of maintaining cultural identity lies with the community and its leadership as is illustrated in the Big Cove case study in Chapter IV. However, for communities that do not have leaders knowledgeable enough to realize the consequences of not having relevant education for their young people, the federal government and the mainstream educational system should make it easier for them to make the necessary changes to their educational programs to accommodate local values and traditions.

#### A) MI'KMAQ PERSPECTIVES OF KNOWLEDGE

Language is the foundation of a culture, a way of rationalizing and seeing the world. The Mi'Kmaq oral tradition stores knowledge in the same way that computers store information, by multi-layered branches of files and menus. This knowledge concerns every aspect of the Mi'Kmaq world, from the beginning to the present, and it also speaks of the future world for the next seven generations. The Mi'Kmaq Creation Story forms the basis or mainframe of our language and knowledge. Everything emanates from the beginning of our world. Everything is connected and related in the same way as a spider's web is constructed – from the centre to its perimeters. In this same way, our language develops with basic root words indicating first whether an object or action is animate or inanimate, then if it is an animal, bird, plant, fish or human; next, whether you are talking to one person, two persons or a group of people, to determine your words accordingly.

In Silas T. Rand's Dictionary of MicMac Language, knowledge is referred to as *kejedemkawa* (which means “a fact known by everybody and it is obvious”); *ukchijedakun* (which means “it is a final drawn conclusion, a climactic fact”); and *nsutoo-agn* (meaning “it is a fact understood in the same way as we would understand words in a language”). *Ketjido* means “I know” and *Ketjidegetjit* means “the person who knows.” It is as if knowledge was not an item, but an event taking place constantly so that one must place oneself in an appropriate place in the path of learning in order to increase awareness. The idea of knowing stems from the experience of life in the path that we travel from birth to death. In Mi'Kmaq language, *ooskijinu* means “surface being” or “world dweller.”

We Mi'Kmaq say kinu when we refer to ourselves. Kigemanag refers to our relatives. Nigemak means "my relatives." There was no such word as "Mi'Kmaq" at one time. There were "our relatives," "my relatives," "your relatives" and "their relatives." There is no word that signifies "a relative" because rationally, in our language a relative must belong to someone's family and so the word would not make sense alone.

My perspective on knowing stems from my own life experiences, which provided me with the perspective for this paper. The approach to this thesis is such that it will not take away the oral context of our traditions, but rather it will provide a means to enhance and validate these traditions in the eyes of the academic world by providing another way of understanding the concept of knowledge. My task is very difficult in that I have to translate my perspective of knowledge into the written English language. In the spirit of my culture, I intend to give back to my people an aspect of this thesis that at least they can understand from an oral perspective. This will include a video tape recording of the Mi'Kmaq Creation Story told in our language (and also in the English language for the benefit of the academic community).

I have been interacting with aspects of Mi'Kmaq knowledge all of my life and in my language without difficulty. I can continue in my life without translating my experiences. But as an adult with values instilled by my culture and seeing the dire situation of First Nations peoples in Canada, I cannot turn a blind eye and let the status quo continue. In my 30-some years of observation through many coloured glasses – as a civil servant, public servant and a simple servant to my people – I have witnessed the profound impact of mainstream education and the effects of many centuries of attempted acculturation on First Nations people in North America.

According to Mi'Kmaq world view, accommodating other living entities around us seems to be our main preoccupation. Oral tradition tells us that we accommodated the Europeans when they arrived to our world because of our obliging mentality. They were entitled to the resources of Mother Earth as much as we were. We understood that people simply belonged to the land. We did not understand the concept of land ownership until it was too late. Mainstream society could learn a lesson from the Mi'Kmaq way of accommodating others.

It is astonishing to see how the mainstream society could “educate” a people away from their culture, their language and their spirit by ignoring or banning everything about their existence in the process. When a mainstream society does not accommodate another culture as a legitimate entity with the same rights, liberty and justice as it enjoys, it leads to the obvious consequences that Aboriginal peoples have suffered ever since their land and their ability to provide for themselves were taken away from them. Whatever was salvaged of our cultures has been remembered in the shadows of the fading memories of our traditional Elders, who have been doing their best to preserve and pass on the knowledge. (To avoid any misunderstanding or controversy, it is important to note here that the degree of traditional indigenous knowledge varies greatly among our senior people, according to where and how they have been raised. Therefore, in our communities, every older person is respected for their age and experience, but not necessarily recognized as a traditional “Elder”.) The Elders who have not been totally engulfed in mainstream systems have kept our oral traditions alive by performing sacred ceremonies, singing and dancing sacred songs, teaching about our values and philosophies of life, collecting our sacred medicines, and sharing their knowledge of the land, our history and our technologies. Their collective memory, through oral traditions, have maintained our ability to rationalize our ways of knowing. Oral tradition is gaining acceptance, but admittedly the process is slow. However, it has received a big boost with the overturning last year of the Delgamuukw vs British Columbia decision (1991). Our ability to remain connected to “Mother Earth” has gone a long way to keep our collective memory somewhat intact, despite the numerous efforts at disconnection put in place by governments over the years, or what we call with irony, the “self-deterioration process,” in reference with to self-determination policy put forward by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1995.

Although early chroniclers recorded many aspects of our cultures, our people could not read these early observations of our cultures and therefore could not offer their views on the inaccuracies or misrepresentations recorded at the time. All of the early recordings were made in perspectives alien to our culture. On top of that, we should take into account that, from an occidental point of view, everything recorded in writing has a tendency to be considered “the truth,” whereas the oral tradition is systematically associated with “legends” and “myths.” This is another reason why our histories and indigenous knowledge have been dismissed and considered irrelevant to our educational process.

This leads me to the final aspect of my research which is to describe Mi'Kmaq indigenous knowledge, explain the treatment and use of this body of knowledge, and finally , to develop an analysis of a Mi'Kmaq world view which is based on categories that are relevant to our First Nations society. Can this process that I, and perhaps many others, have experienced be applicable to the learning experiences of Mi'Kmaq students already attending mainstream schools? Perhaps by understanding why mainstream education has not been meaningful enough for Aboriginal students to encourage them to stay in school longer can shed light on the causes of the social problems experienced in our communities. The statistics are basically the same, whether Aboriginal students attended Residential institutes, Indian Day Schools or off-reserve public schools.

I am not suggesting that all Aboriginal children/students should be taken out of the mainstream educational system. Rather, I propose that the mainstream educational system should enlarge its context to accept and accommodate the diverse world views, knowledge and philosophies that our society could include in their curricula. We must look for ways to make learning a meaningful experience for all our children so that they can be better prepared to grow and become healthy individuals, develop their skills and fulfil their roles in society, whatever those roles, according to their abilities and the needs of the peoples.

In the spirit of Gregory Cajete's search for a new Aboriginal educational paradigm, this is an attempt to put Mi'Kmaq traditional knowledge on a level that will validate it as an added dimension to education for Aboriginal peoples. In his own words, Cajete wishes "to plant seeds of thought and deep reflection regarding the nature of Indigenous education ... to draw attention to a way of looking at and understanding a primal process of education grounded in the basics of human nature."

## **B) ASSIMILATION AND ACCULTURATION IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATIONAL POLICIES**

Assimilationist policies on Indian education have persisted to the present day and to some degree, these same policies affect the more recent immigrant societies that have come to settle in Canada. By forcing people to integrate, assimilationist policies are based on two premises: a desire for a better control of the population (by controlling what they learn, their view of the world) and a

fear of differences, due to a lack of understanding and openness to the “other” way of thinking and doing.

Mainstream education is built upon the premise of a top-down learning process. The system proceeds by elimination: not all of the students in a classroom are able to achieve “excellent” status. There are, for instance, “below average,” “average,” and “above average” students. The “above average” students get the scholarships and entrance to the good universities; the “average” manage to get by and to follow a career with less expectations; as for the “below average” students, they are rejected and end up living in the margins of society. For most Canadians, there is nothing wrong with this type of education; competition is considered to be good. But from an Aboriginal perspective, this shows a lack of respect for the person, and many times does not take into account their particular circumstances which can lead to their “elimination” from the system. In an inclusive model, there should be a place for everyone’s abilities, with equal consideration for what each individual has to contribute, without fear of failure by arbitrary judgment that is built into the mainstream educational system. To the average Aboriginal student who is a little confused about his/her own cultural identity, values and principles, they find everything wrong with this system of rejection, and they prefer to opt out before being chased out.

In this way, education allows for a small elite group, well prepared by their social conditions and environment, to have more chances to succeed within this competitive and standardized system. Education is conceptualized as a means by which individuals are transformed in accordance with wider social standards and expectations. Many of the established structures of education were forged to meet a set of social and economic demands that arose during the Industrial Revolution (Keating 1996:169; Wotherspoon and Satzewich, 1993:113).

Obviously, the Indian educational processes by the English were as disastrous as the French attempts, according to Fingard (1972). While Indian educational activities were ongoing in the New World, no significant attempts were made at renewing major efforts until Confederation. The French, the English and their missionaries all developed different approaches to education for the Indians. Although all of these approaches failed miserably to produce citizens who could move about freely

in European-based and indigenous societies, governments continually chose to use these same policies. Education built on Eurocentric pedagogy provided no meaningful learning experiences for Indians. The educational curriculum was established according to mainstream societal values and standards of living. During the colonial period and leading up to Confederation, educational development for the Indians was minimal.

Whatever purposes and goals the colonial and early federal governments had, the Indians were in no position to express their opposition. By the 1960s when the Indians were finally allowed to vote in the federal elections in Canada, the damage had already been done. Certainly, if the Indians had not been considered helpless “wards of the crown,” a different attitude would have prevailed with the right to vote in a civil society. Residential schools and Indian Day schools took away the integrity and dignity of many young Indian people. The resultant social, economic and political inequities experienced by Aboriginal peoples today is the legacy of these old assimilationist policies.

In order for First Nations youth to regain a sense of identity and self-esteem, and therefore a place in modern society, Canadian governments and society at large must acknowledge First Nations history and their traditional ways of teaching knowledge. The federal government has the power to provide the authority, jurisdiction and the finances to alleviate educational problems that so badly affect First Nations peoples and their communities. The educational problems are more of a priority to the First Nations than is Aboriginal self-government, as Marie Battiste reiterates in her conclusion.

First Nations peoples are experiencing transformations in their daily lives at a rapid pace. Issues like self-government, land claims, constitutional amendments, economic self-determination, Aboriginal rights, and the justice system, require First Nations citizens to increase their levels of education in order to be adequately prepared to represent themselves on these issues in the modern world. However, that doesn't mean that Aboriginal practices and traditional ways of learning become obsolete in the process. Indeed, education – both formal and traditional – is an essential component to enable Aboriginal communities to implement and administer self-determination processes, according to their particular culture.

All assimilationist approaches have failed to “get rid of the Indian” within the Aboriginal person as well as get rid of the so-called “Indian problem.” After centuries of trying to impose a foreign system of education, researchers and educators are starting to realize the inadequacies of this intent and the heavy legacy of social and economic breakdown that has resulted from these old assimilationist policies. Although, in principle, First Nations have been accorded administrative control over teaching in their communities, and to a certain degree, some Native Programs have been developed over the years for colleges and universities, the educational system is still not meeting the cultural needs of First Nations. For instance, some Aboriginal students experience a direct relationship with the land, through activities like hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering and even just living on the land, as opposed to living in cities. Depending on whether the local school authorities are accepting and accommodating of these traditional activities of the Aboriginal people (annual caribou, moose, geese and duck hunts or seasonal harvesting practices), the success or failure of their students will be in their hands.

The low retention levels of Indian students in mainstream education might be caused by three factors of a different nature:

- 1) The often-stated socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal students: multiple studies findings show that poverty alienates the desire to participate in society and also prevents families from adequately preparing their children for learning (lack of adequate food, clothing, cramped living environments, negative behaviour, lack of early stimulation and creative toys...). Moreover, the sense of discrimination within the mainstream society further pressures the Aboriginal student to drop out (feelings of isolation due to prejudice, different languages and customs, appearance).
- 2) The now well-recognized lack of Aboriginal content in most curricula (particularly in regard to history and science). This is being revisited, but in limited areas, such as language and cultural courses, nursing and social work, and to some extent, law programs concerning Aboriginal issues (Wotherspoon, Satzewich, 1993). There is still a lack of flexibility and accommodation for Aboriginal standards and ways of delivery.

- 3) And finally, a much less well documented factor: a diametrically different philosophy of life. This may, even at an unconscious level, drive away Aboriginal students from learning in a system of education designed to assimilate them into a society whose principles and objectives do not fit with Aboriginal values. The concepts of perpetrating an “elite” class that rules over the larger group (see the Bell Curve concept) and of being “educated” to better exploit/control the “uneducated” and the environment are definitely at odds with the traditional Aboriginal values of respect for all creatures, of sharing with the community and the disadvantaged and of providing a teaching capacity for the Elders. Equally, the idea of “specialization” in learning as opposed to a wider, more encompassing concept of holistic learning is foreign to the traditional Aboriginal world view.

There is an urgency for First Nations youth to regain a sense of identity and self-esteem in order to contribute to society in a meaningful way. Therefore, a combination of First Nations concerns for relevant delivery and purpose of education (Battiste, Hampton, Barman: *ibid*), as well as mainstream society's thinkers questioning the adequacy of their own system of education (Keating, Chomsky) has opened a path for exploring the development of a new approach to Aboriginal learning.

### **C) CRITICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION**

First Nations are dealing with two diverging concepts of education in their process of learning. On the one hand, there is the basic premise of a model of education that has been developed with concepts that are not indigenous to the developmental experiences of First Nations peoples. The European model of education relies on theories of knowledge that date back to the time of the ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates and Aristotle. The theory of knowledge led to a science of teaching, a pedagogy. Education and knowledge were considered to be the source of power and control (by an elite and diverse religions). The science of learning and teaching included curriculum development, lesson planning and administration of education.

Governments legislate educational policies to set standards and establish responsibilities and jurisdictions. School boards are usually involved in the local administration of educational policies. Principals and teachers are hired to provide education to students in a standardized and uniform fashion. Education is categorized into elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. In the modern context, a student must successfully pass all levels of elementary and secondary schooling which normally takes 12 to 13 years to complete, before being considered for post-secondary studies. This model of education, which is now used by the First Nations, is one that has gone through minor transformations. Aboriginal peoples have taken over as administrators and teachers, but they are still following the rules of the mainstream educational system (compartmentalized learning, testing, competing). To some degree, they have integrated bits of curriculum content representing Aboriginal cultural material (mostly language, crafts and art) in the schools on reserves and some colleges. The problem with that system of education when it is applied to Aboriginal peoples is that most of the time, it does not involve the community or the families and does not reflect local standards or values. Moreover, concerns over the inadequacies of mainstream education are now also being raised by mainstream sociologists and educators:

Historically less powerful groups are systematically shown to be less competent, or even incompetent, relative to most arbitrary performance standards. According to this perspective, the standards are themselves biased; therefore, this socially induced sense of failure is largely illusory and serves mainly to reproduce existing power relations in society. It is from the failure of the schools to respect the diversity of students that major problems arise. In this view, the core problem is too much emphasis on standards, not too little; too much emphasis on excellence and elites, and too little concern with equity and diversity (Keating, 1996:158).

In the First Nations communities, this system of education becomes meaningless for the Aboriginal students, considering that their socio-economic structures are not reflective of those of the mainstream communities. There is a higher incidence of economically disadvantaged families on reserves and living conditions are below mainstream standards. Historically, on most reserves, preschool-aged children usually grew up speaking their Indian languages first and in unconventional child-rearing arrangements. These experiences would be taxing on the young pupils, especially in light of what Keating says:

It is important to note how much more difficult the school's task is when children arrive at the beginning of school with low levels of preparation for numeracy and literacy and with ineffective habits of learning, attention difficulties and poor interpersonal skills. Successful participation in school learning depends on adequate advance preparation as well as effective study habits and social skills (Keating, 1996:159).

There is another concept of education that was used by First Nations people in their practices of instruction: that is, the First Nations traditional knowledge or teachings from Elders and the involvement of the whole community – children were not “set aside” in day cares or schools and Elders were not “set aside” because they were too old. From the beginning of what is known as the contact period, the Indians were considered to be “savage” because they lived in the forests instead of in cities and because they had no written language, they were labelled “untutored.” The Indians’ languages could not be understood by any European.

Evidently unknown to the early settlers was the traditional way that the Indian had been passing on vital wisdom and knowledge about survival and co-existence in their vast and diverse environment. There had been a method of acquiring knowledge that was built on years of observation and interrelationships with all living entities in the Indian's world. It was a life-long process based on the formulation of empirical knowledge and of technological skills intermingled with spiritual foundations. One thing that is historically known is that there were no modern concepts of the administration of education, no pedagogic methods, no curriculum and no classrooms. But there were experienced men and women who taught a philosophy of life, lessons to be drawn from historical accounts of events and their profound knowledge of the land accumulated and passed on by many generations since the beginning of time. They were roles models and education was a lived experience.

To touch on the aspect of communication, our people did very little speaking during the day. Conversations were kept to a minimum so there was a need to be very clear in what we talked about. The Mi'Kmaq language is very rational in its construction: when you say something, you have to be direct, precise and logical; when involved in a serious talk, your words cannot have a double meaning or be deceptive. Language skills develop and become more elaborate with age. Even today, Elders

have a very succinct way of expressing themselves that younger generations have not yet mastered. Elders take pride to use less words to convey more meaning. (We like to say that they are our living library.) However, I need to use many adjectives/qualifiers in the English language to be precise in what I want to express. The reason why our people engaged in such small amounts of conversation was the nature of our lifestyles. When you live in a forest, along a river, near a lake or near the sea, your survival depends on your ability to listen, to observe, to smell. Talking occurred early in the morning in the wigwams or late at night around the fires, recounting the events of the day or stories of the past, or passing knowledge. Talking on a grand scale with great oratory skills occurred when the people in the community decided to hold council for our political/ceremonial gatherings or when the settlement was being relocated. But while moving about on the land, there was an elaborate communication system in the form of body language and hand signals. That sign system was also widely used among different tribes with different languages. Most Aboriginal peoples tend to point with their hands. In our societies, it was not considered to be impolite to point with our fingers, so when our people were taught that it was impolite, they started to point with their elbows, tilting their heads and finally pointing with their lips.

The biggest problem in all attempts to “educate the Indian” was the failure to recognize that indeed, they had their own world views and values, their own communication systems, and their own methods of transferring traditional knowledge. One enduring element is that the First Nations peoples belonged to the land and their relationship and interconnectedness is evident in the physical, spiritual and ceremonial ways in which they lived their lives. The best terminology to apply to an Indian educational system would be “lifelong learning for survival.” All elements for survival are rolled up into one holistic process of learning. The old men and women were teaching by storytelling, especially during large gatherings in the spring and fall of the year. They were usually aided by decorated talking sticks, wampum belts, condolence canes or sacred feathers as reminders of the many lessons in life.

Indian ways of knowing and modern concepts of mainstream education are different in that the survival of traditional Aboriginal peoples would be difficult if they did not heed the lessons of life in their Elders' teachings. They would not know how to hunt or gather foods and medicines or prepare all the other necessities of life. They would not know how to get along with one another; they

would not know how to share or rely on each other. If an Indian did not listen attentively to the teachings of survival, then she/he would not learn how to live properly. Rather than being given a failing grade on paper, they would literally fail to survive. The difference in the two methods of learning is life and death. The difference between the two methods of teaching is the difference between participatory observation in life's lessons versus a magistral method far removed from actual life skills.

Governments had to establish programs (now being cut) to support people in need through what is called a "social safety net": a top-down, regulated approach to assist people in crisis situation, or in a more systemic way, to assist people who had not received the necessary skills to survive in today's society. In the old Aboriginal process of education, the social safety net was provided through the lessons of lifelong learning (a concept that incidentally is now being considered in government programs like training and upgrading!) and the principles of sharing. There was no need for "programs," as everyone was being taught the necessary skills that would allow them to be self-sufficient and the sharing circle of the community would ensure help and protection for anyone in a crisis situation. The Indian traditional process of learning provided equal access to all the necessities of life and a collective social structure supported by large extended families, contrary to the class systems of European societies. Old people were not considered to be useless nor made to retire, as they had a very essential role as teachers, wisdom keepers and healers. These principles need to be explored to see how education and learning can enhance improved socio-economic circumstances for First Nations.

The basic elements of some Elders' teachings emphasize the values and principles of sharing, respect, and honesty. In the world of modern technology, holding on to basic human/traditional values could make a big difference in the way mainstream society treats other living entities and other people "outside" their world. A perfect example is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on Biological Diversity that seek ways to correct the imbalances that modern technology and capitalism have brought about in the world. Mainstream education should be set up in such a way that it accommodates local cultures and traditional knowledge. In this way, feelings of exclusion from the educational process could be reduced.

#### D) ABORIGINAL PEOPLES STRUGGLE TO GAIN CONTROL OVER INDIAN EDUCATION

In a survey of literature on the development of culturally relevant Indian educational programs, Harold Cardinal (1969) and Waubageshig (1970) published books in the late 1960s and early 1970s that influenced the start of the movement by Indians to assume responsibility for programs which affected their lives directly. The whole movement of Indian nationalism created the atmosphere for new developments to unfold in Indian circles. There was an Indian cultural explosion in the field of fine arts and Indian artists were being recognized in mainstream art galleries.

Indian Control of Indian Education (NIB, 1973) was presented to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development as a proposal, and almost immediately, the Department published a document titled Indian Education in Canada 1973 under the authority of the Hon. Jean Chretien. In that publication, the objective of the Indian and Eskimo Affairs Program stated:

In consultation with the Indian and Eskimo people, to support, maintain and/or develop activities whereby Indians and Eskimos through their initiatives may achieve their cultural, economic and social aspirations within Canadian society (DIAND, 1973:2).

For a 10-year period, the Department of Indian Affairs went about transferring control of the educational programs to various band administrations. The focus, by the bands and the Department, on transferring management and control of the educational program ignored the problems that the Aboriginal students were experiencing, that is, the lack of culturally appropriate education. It was during this period that the Indian educational system began to undergo a series of new problems. There were not enough fiscal resources available to the First Nations bands to formulate culturally relevant educational curricula. The problem of infrastructure management of the Indian school buildings and "professional academic leadership" (Hamilton and Leavitt, 1985) was a cause for concern among the evaluators who were called upon to investigate "A study of the Indian student -- the problem of equalizing the acquisition of knowledge to ensure equivalent student achievement"(Hamilton and Leavitt, 1985: Appendix 1). As an example, the educational program taken over by the bands in the Maritimes was plagued by a lack of professional skills needed to manage the program properly. There is a difference between having control over programs and having management over them. In 1972, when this writer was a band councillor, a Department of Indian

Affairs official arrived on the Reserve ready to hand over the Housing and the Welfare programs to the chief and 12 councillors. Only one councillor had graduated from high school, this writer had dropped out at Grade 10, and the rest of the councillors had less than a Grade 8 education. To the majority of the Band Council, the idea of managing or having control over so much money (approximately \$600,000 annually) was definitely appealing. Some of the councillors who had a little more education than the others were cautious and were not as anxious to take over these programs. It was observed that the Department of Indian Affairs, with all their infrastructure and availability of human resources, was already experiencing difficulties completing the Reserve houses and there were also many problems in the Department's handling of the Welfare program. The chief and council's desire to control these programs and money was fuelled more by the desire to influence band voters to support them in the elections, rather than by the desire to manage properly.

In 1984, a subsequent study on Indian education in Canada was done by the same NIB organization which was now called the Assembly of First Nations (AFN, 1988). Recommendations focused on First Nations involvement in the development of culturally relevant Indian educational programs to be administered by locally run education boards or authorities that would be accountable to the people in Indian communities.

Celia Haig-Brown summarized two NIB/AFN education documents, Indian Control of Indian Education 1972 and Tradition and Education 1988, in her chapter on power, culture and control (1995, 15-26). She relied on Foucault's analysis of power and revived the word "control" for the initial NIB document, rather than using the term "jurisdiction". Haig-Brown argued that since the Native Education Centre, the topic of her book, was not situated on an Indian reserve, she was not concerned with the jurisdiction issue. In fact, Indians educators today want to be involved in the processes of Indian educational development in a way that is aligned with their local traditional Indian philosophies, and not to simply assume "control" of mainstream education, as was argued in Haig-Brown's book. Michel Foucault's notion of power as understood by Haig-Brown (17), and I might add Frantz Fanon's (1963: 60-61) treatise on the colonized's response to assume the colonizer's values once in control, do not support the intent of First Nations in assuming "control" of their own educational programs. For Aboriginal educators to continue the process of "teaching" mainstream

values and standards of living to the Indian children would be contrary to the principles of the Aboriginal pedagogy, which is, to produce meaningful and culturally relevant educational programs. The idea of simply changing the content of educational curriculum will not be sufficient either. First Nations need to exercise the freedom to re-examine the whole system of "education," (content, delivery and objectives) and develop a new concept based on traditional values and, as needed, include some aspects of mainstream pedagogy. This restructuring has to be assumed by First Nations communities, educators and Elders who are knowledgeable and who espouse a holistic understanding of traditional knowledge.

During the 1980s, First Nations organizations were involved in discussions on the Canadian Constitution and especially in the areas that affected the already recognized treaty and Aboriginal rights of First Nations. The intent of Aboriginal leaders was to protect their rights recognitions by constitutional entrenchment. Native Friendship Centres and Native Cultural Education Centres had been established across Canada with financial help from Secretary of State and Indian Affairs and Northern Development. These centres developed programs that dealt with cultural education, language development and traditional knowledge through some literacy and adult education programs. Some provinces were involved in these initiatives through community colleges and vocational training centres (B.C. Ministry, 1983 and Ontario Ministry, 1976).

Educational programs for Indians in residential schools and in Indian Day schools were initially developed by the Churches under the guidance of Indian Affairs staff. Incidentally, the federal government at the time of Confederation gave all of the statutory responsibility to the provinces to provide educational programs and services to the public. The Department of Indian Affairs and, to some extent, the Department of National Defence are the only federal departments that have education as a statutory responsibility. The quality and degree of educational services were wholly dependent on the public servants of the time, who did not consult with provincial educational authorities for matters of standards and practices. Nor did they consult with Indian leaders to address concerns of traditional Indian values or teaching and learning practices. The goal of Indian education remains the same: to teach the Indian mainstream values and skills with programs built upon mainstream society's language and standards. The Indian's educational success was always gauged

with mainstream society's measuring stick. This could very well be the reason for the high drop-out and poor success rates (Mackay and Myles, 1995:158-178).

Some Indians have adapted and survived the mainstream society's system of education, however the majority have failed to measure up to the standards. In the early 1970s, the success rate of Indians reaching Grade 12 and beyond was approximately 5%. In the 1990s, 20 out of every 100 Indian students who began school reached Grade 12, compared to 80 out of every 100 Canadian students finishing Grade 12 (Statistics Canada, 1990). By 1993-94, fully 78% of on-reserve aboriginal children were still in school to Grade 12, according to a 1995 DIAND report (Barman, 272, in Long and Dickason, 1996). But numbers can be misleading: such a fast increase may mean that students are merely "registered" in school longer, not necessarily graduating or attending regularly.

Another problem is that often many Aboriginal students have been pushed through the system by a process of social promotions (Hamilton and Leavitt, 1985:18). As in the case of the Big Cove Mi'Kmaq students who were involved in the Kent County Project (ibid:12-13), many were processed as high school completions but not as high school graduates. Although the following statements from the Kent County Project Report were written in 1985, nothing much has changed:

At this present time, Indians student failure in this regard is simply being compounded year after year, as students are handed out "social" promotions, which propel them farther and farther beyond the levels at which they can function effectively academically. This situation illustrates clearly the failure of both the reserve and provincial schools to cope with the real educational needs of Indian students (18).

And

The Big Cove Report presents extensive commentary on the academic condition of the Big Cove School during the 1984-1985 school year. In the report, the school is described as having serious problems, including the following: a) little coordination of curriculum from class to class or grade to grade, b) unacceptable standards in such areas as classroom discipline and written work requirements, c) inadequate timetables in terms of the overall length of the school day and the allotment of time to the different grades and subjects, d) questionable teacher employment and deployment practices, and e) defective organization for instruction – with particular reference to the "modified" programs at the grade 7 and 8 level. The main cause of this malaise is described in the report as a lack of academic leadership in the school and throughout the system (18).

Even though the Reserve had taken control of its own educational program, it still did not have the necessary human resources to adequately and effectively run the program. The answer to this problem lies in the same report, where the parents indicated the need to preserve the native language and culture, while the teachers identified this as an “obstacle to educational achievement”(22). It seems that the involvement of parents in the educational process of their children was not taken seriously by the educators and community leaders or perhaps it was assumed that the parents were not capable of contributing anything. This reflects the mainstream attitude that its educational system is the only legitimate one and no one but educators can contribute to it. This is definitely one of the biggest barriers that Aboriginal peoples have to face in their efforts to change the context of education for Aboriginal students.

#### **E) THE WORK BEGINS: TO BUILD A NEW INDIAN EDUCATION**

In recent publications on Indian education in Canada, Jean Barman (1986 and 1987) and Marie Battiste (1995) treat critical issues in First Nations education. Barman and Battiste agreed that the lack of culturally relevant material had contributed to a gradual loss of an indigenous world view, as well as to the loss of countless Aboriginal languages. They argued that educational rights for Indians were based on their inherent right to self-government and treaty recognition. Their work in research and development on cultural education and studies provided fodder for teachers' training in the use of sensitive pedagogy tools. The contributors helped to redefine Indian education and traditions in their proper place and time, within Aboriginal historical context, to ensure that the Indian was no longer represented as artifact relics of the past in some dusty museum or by cardboard wigwams and paper tomahawks in the classrooms.

Barman and Battiste analysed the federal position and its policy on Indian education. Since the 1984 AFN report on Indian education, the federal government has been transferring the administrative responsibility to the First Nations bands. In 1975-76, there were 53 band-operated schools in Canada while by 1991-92, there were 329 band-operated schools. Battiste argued that the increase in the number of band-operated schools did not adequately represent the policy trend of the federal government for “Indian control of Indian education.” She said that the problem lies with the

government's transfer of only the administrative responsibility and not the transfer of jurisdiction and authority to financially develop culturally relevant Indian educational curriculum and certification. The main struggle is still for language and cultural integrity. Canadian governments and society need to acknowledge First Nations history and traditional ways of imparting wisdom and knowledge.

At this point, the work on developing an Aboriginal model of education within a modern context is still in its seminal stages. While the validity of traditional knowledge is increasingly being recognized by certain segments of society, including the scientific community, an Aboriginal approach to learning is barely resurfacing through the studies of a theory of Aboriginal education (Hampton, 1978, 1987, 1996; and Cajete, 1978, 1995) and has yet to be implemented in the school system. From the early educational programs of preschool all the way to the university level, it is crucial to have cultural relevance and continuity in methods, content and philosophy, because these principles are deemed essential for a healthy education.

There are academic initiatives (conferences, Royal Commission research, publications, pilot projects and others) where First Nations authorities on education have gained recognition among their own communities as well as in mainstream society. Leading authorities on Native education are demonstrating that imposing a Eurocentric system of learning upon Aboriginal children has not been an effective solution for producing an educated Aboriginal society, knowledgeable of its culture, identity and values, which are key elements to be able to contribute in a meaningful way to the larger society. They have persisted in expressing much concern over the relevance of educational materials and over the ways in which education is delivered to the Aboriginal students. In the process, Native education and Native Studies journals have increasingly been published, a fact that is indicative of the fast growing interest in this field. That interest has opened a whole new horizon of possibilities for a different concept of education.

## CHAPTER III

### INDIGENOUS SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHIES: HOLISTIC VISIONS

Holistic views by Aboriginal peoples are mainly embodied in the original languages and were transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation through storytelling, songs, and ceremonies (Petronne, 1990:9; Battiste in Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, 1986:25). From the “dawn of civilization,” chroniclers have noticed that the early Indians spoke very little to one another during the course of the day. This observation is supported by my grandmother, Agnes (Thomas) Augustine, who recalls that as a child, when travelling with her family and her grandparents, they would walk in a single file and carry their belongings through fields and forests. She remembers her father and grandfather gesturing with their hands whenever they heard or saw an animal or bird. She said that they were taught to be quiet when they were on the move so they would not scare away their potential source of food. Silas Rand (1888:iv) noted in his introduction to a Mi’Kmaq dictionary, that when they spoke, their language was often copious, metaphoric, artistic and eloquent in style. Our language is soft and almost sing-song like. It is philosophically rational yet there are no words indicating a hierarchy of authority nor any sense of conflicting territoriality. Our language is obligingly accommodating and reflects our general attitudes about life. The Indians would speak in such a way they reduced any ambiguity or possibility of mistake. The Indian says what he intends, nothing more and nothing less, he seeks the truth. Joseph E. Couture, in two articles about the roles of Elders and native ways of knowing, came to the same conclusion of holistic views in language and ceremonies (Friesen, 1991:53-73 and 201-217).

David Suzuki said that the Aboriginal holistic concept of land or Mother Earth goes far beyond ecological concerns – it incorporates a sacredness not encompassed in the European concepts of land (Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992:xxi-xxxv and Henley 1989:11-14). Suzuki is right about the holistic concepts and sacredness, but the contemporary ecological concerns of “sustainability” (to take and exploit as much as can be renewable) was not an Aboriginal concept: Aboriginal peoples just took what was needed for their survival each day. They did not take more than they could consume or carry. Ecological concerns were not part of the fur trade (see Calvin Martin, 1978). The

“Letters Patent” supports Suzuki’s claim about European concepts, where instructions read to “take the land, convert to Christianity the Indians,” and to turn the resources into “profitable possessions suitable for traffick (sic) and commerce” (Murdoch, 1865:22). Whereas the sheer idea of exploiting the land for profit was totally alien to the Mi’Kmaq Indians, it certainly was not so for the Europeans. Any use of the land or taking from Mother Earth by the Indians was done for their survival needs and within a spiritual context. Although Aboriginal peoples are involved in diverse exploitative activities today, they are not the major proponents, nor do they own the companies that are causing immense damage to the eco-systems. Actually, in many provinces they face strong opposition to getting access to their traditional resources, as recent cases concerning the fishery, forestry and hunting demonstrate.

#### **A) AN APPROACH TO MI’KMAQ KNOWLEDGE**

I have a holistic view of the world, based on the teachings of my Mi’Kmaq Elders and as it may have existed before the arrival of Europeans to Migmagi (which encompassed today’s Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland). This view does not advance the cause of self-determination as far as governments are concerned: policies developed on their terms are the only way to negotiate self-government, if we want it. Since there are not yet any counter-proposals to the existing Aboriginal Self-Government Policy (DIAND, 1995: August 11), we have been given a choice of negotiating these limited conditions, or to do without self-government.

When the Europeans arrived in the “New World” and planted their flags as a symbol of their claim of sovereignty over the land, the Mi’Kmaq people did not take this gesture as an affront to their own existence. The Mi’Kmaq people knew that they owed their existence to the land. Their creation was of the land and they were a part of it in the same way as the animals, plants, birds and fish. In other words, we belong to the land. How can anyone take land away from you when you have no concept of owning the land in the first place? In fact the Mi’Kmaqs welcomed the newcomers, telling them there was food, clothing, medicine, shelter and enough of everything to go around for all “who belonged to the earth.” My great grandmother, Isabel (Augustine) Simon would say, “The world contains the spirits of our ancestors; we are only experiencing a temporary passage of life; the world belongs to the future generations. The children are not ours to keep, they were simply brought to us to look after for a short time.”

In the Mi'Kmaq Creation story, everything is connected spiritually and physically in a common relationship between the Creator, Grandfather Sun, Mother Earth, people, animals, fish, plants and birds. This relationship is explained in an ethical context, beginning with the creation of the first seven entities of the Mi'Kmaq world. The Mi'Kmaq spiritual ceremonies were derived from the Creation story. For instance, the fire ceremony gives reverence to Gisoolg, Nisgam, Otsitgamoo and Glooscap (the first person created from the Earth); the sweatlodge ceremony gives thanks for Noogami's arrival (his grandmother, representing the wisdom of the Elder); the sweetgrass ceremony gives thanks for Netaoansom's arrival (his nephew, representing the strength and vision of the youth); the tobacco ceremony gives thanks for Neganagoningoosisgo's arrival (his mother, representing the caring, teachings and understanding); and the pipe ceremony celebrates and encompasses all of creation in its life and so-called death. The Maoiomis (gatherings) serve to bring together into a circle, as one, all of creation.

It is a coming together in a cyclic pattern, every year, to ensure the survival of our existence in everything we do. It is like the acorn that falls to the ground, our Elders would say. Our people would be signalled first by the melting snow, then by the fireflies and bullfrogs that tell us the bark of the medicine tree is ready for making canoes and wigwams. From all the tributaries, brooks and streams, families and clans would slowly move to the mouth of the river to form one huge community for the summer (time of the sun). It is there, at the mouth of the river, that Elders would tell the Creation story to remind us of our connection and our relationships. It is there that our people would pair themselves to form new families. Migmagi would be repopulated according to clans, and the gatherings ensured that everybody would have enough food, clothing, shelter, tools and the ability to travel on the snow, rivers and land. Self-determination for us was the ability to travel and live on the land through forests, rivers and seas, to collect, fish and hunt for food, to prepare clothes, shelter, medicine and tools, and to gather for teachings and ceremonies, according to our philosophy of life – to exist in harmony with the land and in respect for the dignity of all forms of life. The choice was inherent; that is, the basic necessities of life involved access, use and distribution. There lies the main difference: everyone had free access to the resources and the distribution was according to need, not for profit. The spiritual/physical element of our lives was (and perhaps still is) in our language and

our ceremonies. This is holistic, according to my interpretation – the ability to bring all aspects of life into a meaningful whole.

Mi'Kmaq knowledge is passed on in many forms and is always linked to spirituality. The holistic concept of the teaching/learning exchange is expressed in the medicine wheel and the sacred circle:

- *To the Spirit: Seven sacred directions of the Medicine Wheel*

Medicine wheels commonly have four directions in their orientation. Among the Mi'Kmaq, there are seven sacred directions represented in a sphere-like dream catcher that has a center and a three-dimensional cross. **Above** represents the Great Spirit Creator who gives life to all that exists in our world. **Within** ourselves, Grandfather Sun gives us our shadow, our spirit in our hearts. **Below** represents Mother Earth who provides us with all the necessities of life or sustenance. Glooscap represents the **East** and creation, as with each new day that brings with it the sun. The Eagle, which is a symbol of strength among our people, also comes from the East. Gitpo is the messenger to the Great Spirit. Glooscap represents harmony. The relationship between the mind, the heart and the spirit is achieved by first learning to listen, then to see with the eyes, then learning to sense and breathe the sacred breath with the nose, and finally learning to share the food and medicine with the mouth, then last, by speaking. Noogami represents the direction **South**. Glooscap's grandmother taught him all of the wisdom and knowledge he needed to survive on Mother Earth. Noogami brought Elder's teachings, storytelling, songs and ceremonies to our people. The **West** represents the vision of the future by the young people and by Netaoansom, Glooscap's nephew. The West is also known as the “land of the spirits” or tjitja'amtjoagati, “the land of the shadows”(of our ancestors). The West further represents the future as well as the past by the youth and the ancestors – Visions and teachings. The **North** is represented by Glooscap's mother, Neganagonimgoosisgo. Mother and the white medicine bear look after our physical and mental well-being with love, understanding, compassion and medicine. So, when we offer our prayers, our words, our smoke to the seven sacred directions, we are asking forgiveness for anything we have done wrong, we ask for strength to continue in life, we ask for understanding for the things that unfold with every new day, we ask for the good spirits to come from the seven directions and listen to and guide us in our deliberations, then

finally we give our thanks for all that we have been given the privilege to experience and share in our lives. Our people shared their spiritual and physical connectedness in all of their daily activities.

The ceremonial practices that were attached to the spirituality of the Mi'Kmaq people have their origin in the Creation Story. The foundation of Mi'Kmaq knowledge and science is attached or connected to the creation of the Mi'Kmaq world. In the beginning, the Creator, Gisoolg, made Grandfather Sun, Nisgam and Otsitgamoo Mother Earth. The first family placed on Earth was Glooscap, his grandmother Noogami, his nephew Netaoansom and his mother Neganagonimgoosisgo. Each element or entity of creation represented a spiritual and physical balance in the everyday life of the Mi'Kmaq people. The fire, which symbolizes the first four levels of creation, is used in our spiritual ceremonies as well as for survival purposes such as cooking, heating and lighting. The sweatlodge ceremony has its dual functions too, one spiritual by praying and singing and the other, a physical cleansing. The sweetgrass ceremony involves the burning of a braid of three strands of "Mother Earth's Hair." We cleanse in this sequence, our ears, eyes, nose, mouth and our whole body, so that from the goodness of our hearts we can listen, see, sense our place, then share our words, and if we respect that order, we can offer dignity and respect to all living entities. The sweetgrass is also boiled to wash our hair to treat split-ends and we drink the sweetgrass tea for medicinal purposes. The braid of sweetgrass is used for decorating our baskets and our homes and making the place smell good and fresh. The leaves and bark of plants are boiled to make our medicine. The tobacco is used in the sacred pipe ceremony to show that we entrust through the smoke our agreements/words/prayers to the Creator and to all spiritual entities of the seven sacred directions. No Mi'Kmaq person will break their words on what is considered sacred: that is why they had pipe ceremonies at the signing of treaties, which then became entrusted to the Creator. The pipe could be smoked at other times, however inhaling the fumes was not permitted. In the Creation Story, the animal, fish, bird and plant spirits offered themselves to be used by the Mi'Kmaq for food, clothing, shelter, medicine, tools and objects for travel. There was a spiritual and physical balance and harmony in all aspects of Mi'Kmaq life. As part of our tools to communicate with the spiritual entities we made drums, rattles and other instruments. The sweatlodges, sharing circles and our give-aways served spiritual and physical functions. Socially and psychologically, the sharing circles ensured physical, emotional and mental balance. The give-aways served as our social safety net. Nobody went

away from our Maoiomi's, gatherings, without the necessities of life. Everything was provided for in these gatherings. Fasting, which required total abstinence from food and water for seven to ten days was practised to spiritually seek visions and to physically cleanse the body of any sickness.

Other First Peoples across this continent also used their ceremonies to find balance in a physical and spiritual harmony. The plant, bird, fish and animal entities that were used in their ceremonies were specific to their geographic location. The peyote cactus was used in sacred medicine ceremonies by the Huichols in the South; the buffalo is a sacred animal to the plains First Peoples; the caribou to the Inuit, Innu and Dene peoples. The sweatlodge ceremonies or the Sundance, which required the piercing of human flesh among the Lakota peoples, are not common to all Aboriginal groups. The Kachina dolls of the Hopi, the use of Kivas and the corn dance among the Tewa Pueblo's provide a balance between the spiritual and physical worlds. Drypainting, masks, "sings," and running is common among the Navajo Dine peoples of the Monument Valley and Canyon de Chelly in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Colorado. The flute is used among many Southwest peoples as part of their spiritual ceremonies. Feasting, drumming, dancing are part of the celebrations and help create harmony between the spirit and the real world. The point I am making here is that spirituality was not separated from other aspects of everyday living. In the same way, the treatment of knowledge, whether spiritual or physical, in the oral tradition was holistic. It was not separated between "the sacred and the profane."

- *To the mind: Oral teachings, cultural knowledge*

Cultural knowledge in oral teachings was passed on for generations through the language. It was used to teach history, geography, philosophy, science, medicine and environmental knowledge (although they were not categorized by topics). The knowledge of our Mi'Kmaq past through oral tradition is done by storytelling. Again, the Mi'Kmaq Creation Story is the beginning point of most stories. Elders' wisdom is given respect and dignity because their knowledge is important for our survival and for sustaining our language, culture and traditions. There are stories which explain the geography, the physical make-up of the land, rivers and oceans. The Glooscap legends collected by Silas T. Rand and Charles Leland depict the changing face of the Maritimes, or Mi'Kmagi. (The Creation story goes back *at least* to the time that PEI was still connected to the land.) The origin of the seven districts

of the Mi'Kmaq Grand Council are explained through our oral tradition. The history of Mi'Kmaq people also takes into consideration their relationships with other tribes in the area. Oral traditions explain the contact period, the relationship with the new arrivals, the onset of wars, treaty making and trading. Each year, the Mi'Kmaq Creation story would be told. As young children heard the story they would ask for explanations from their parents or family members. Every year, new insights would appear for the youth and when they became adults, the story would take on new meaning. The Creation Story was kept alive in the collective memories of the members of the whole Mi'Kmaq tribe. Each year, depending on the major events (natural catastrophes, changes in animals patterns, droughts, deaths or sicknesses), the Story would emphasize different aspects or elements. There were reasons for everything happening, there was always an explanation. The Elders would talk with the spirits, the people who were given spiritual gifts and they would talk to each other in the ceremonies, in their prayers. The Creation story was alive; it moved and grew with the people who were responsible for carrying on the knowledge, relating the story and passing it on to the next generation. Everybody knew the Creation story but only one person was responsible for relating it in the gatherings. This person was also responsible for keeping the knowledge of the wampum belts and strings. This person was aided by talking sticks and other mnemonic devices. Historical events were recorded on trees, birch-bark, sticks and carved into stone (petroglyphs).

The teachings of Mi'Kmaq values and morals (philosophies) were done by oral tradition and by example. The Creation Story outlines a way of treating people with respect: how to listen, observe, sense and share, in that order, before speaking. It is in this way, we are taught, that we give respect and dignity to people and all other living things. It is not only through the stories that the young people learn, but also in the interactions with their families and community that they learn how to handle knowledge. The ceremonies teach young people how to behave in relation to the land, Mother Earth and all of her abundances. The ceremonies also show the young people the spiritual connectedness of our people to all aspects of life. We are always grateful for what we get everyday and we do not take for granted everything we receive. There is a reciprocal relationship between us and Mother Earth. The very foundation of our world view is that we belong to Mother Earth, She does not belong to us. We do not exercise power over everything for spiritual, economic or political purposes. We have as many rights as a blade of grass or the Canada Geese and nothing more.

- *To the body: Manual technologies*

Learning through observation, listening, smelling and touching – activities such as building shelter, making clothing, preparing fur, skinning animals, tanning hides and sewing – were learned by experimenting, observing, and listening to older and more knowledgeable people. The men specialized in making tools, arrows and spears from bones, flint, stone and wood for hunting and fishing. Transportation was possible by making canoes, toboggans, travois, snowshoes and cradle boards. Basket weaving was done through complex techniques and the vessels were used to store and transport goods. Wood and clay were used to make sacred vessels or sacred objects. Adornments were fashioned from bones, quills, fur and shells. Wampum was made from the “quahog” shells and was used in “Wampum belts” to confirm an agreement, to send a message for a gathering, to signify that someone had passed away, and for many other purposes.

One can argue, as policy analysts often do, that this is a much too simplistic interpretation of an idyllic past. In some sense, the Aboriginal people appeared to have displayed an obliging attitude, as if they did not care if the Europeans were here to stay. Yet it is this obliging attitude that made it easy for the Europeans to settle here and to impose their religion and education as tools of assimilation. Some may question how a simplistic interpretation might serve today in modern Aboriginal policy making. It is not the simple life but the enduring principles and values of Aboriginal societies that have kept these same people from the brink of extinction. Aboriginal policies created by the British imperial government were immersed in theoretical concepts of state democracy and judicial and statutory administration – concepts that precisely don't fit in the Aboriginal views of the world. We consider that our values and our ethical sense of belonging to the Earth are not a thing of the past: why should a philosophy of life and a spirituality be related to a time frame?

According to Menno Boldt, there are two prominent discourses going on with respect to the future of Indians in Canada (Boldt 1993:xiii). He stated that “...one is conducted from an Indian perspective and the other is from a Canadian perspective. Each is conducted in isolation and is insulated from the other, and the participants in each seem to be imprisoned in the concepts and logic of their particular discourse.” In another article by Boldt and Long, they concluded that Indians in Canada have adopted the “European-Western” concepts in order to advance their cause in self-

determination and land claims. The adoption of these concepts and perspectives by Indians is a reaction to the colonialism they have experienced for the last several hundred years, the time varying from coast to coast to coast (Miller, Beal, Dempsey and Heber, 1992:276-84).

The dualism and opposition referred to above are often used in theoretical arguments as a means of bringing dynamics and process into theory. I believe that theory disconnects phenomena from reality and it is solely for pure abstract reasoning that we argue, it serves no practical purpose but to divide. To illustrate this point, I would cite two texts: one by Wotherspoon and Satzewich who argue that the contradictions between the State and Indian administration are a result of personal and institutional racism; and the other by Coates and Morrison who argue that benevolent ethnocentric intentions toward Indians by government have had long-term negative consequences.

Whatever the intent or attitude of government, arguing about whose interpretation is worse does not advance the cause of Aboriginal policy development. There is much concern about the means rather than the end. Albert Camus, a French philosopher and writer, explored the idea of truth of life and death (the choice in suicide) in his "Theory of the absurd". He proposed that theories were oppositional facts negating reason and thus cancelling out each other along the plane of knowledge. Theory was more preoccupied with arguments – Camus refers to these as lies – than with searching for truth (Camus, 1991:10-31). The forces of push/pull, negative/positive and majority/minority have certainly mired Aboriginal policy in a pool of dualistic analysis leaving no hope for resolution.

In the context of scholarly work, with requirements for such things as like "theoretical foundations" and "clear lines of argument," Aboriginal holistic views have, until recently, received little support. Taking this point to the extreme, one can look at the courts in cases involving Aboriginal rights and land claims. The oral histories of Indians have been treated as hearsay evidence rather than as knowledge and they have been subjected to a legal ruling by a judge who is usually a non-Aboriginal person (Monet and Wilson, 1992: 36). Only recently has a court case in British Columbia (the *Delgamuukw Case*) reversed that trend in a landmark ruling that accepted oral traditional knowledge as evidence of historic land occupation by the band involved in the land claim. So there may be hope for a negotiated compromise and consensus-building from both sides to close

the gap of mistrust and misunderstanding.

Another measure which supports the recognition of indigenous knowledge on an international level is the Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8j, which specifies that the Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge be given equal recognition as scientific knowledge in the fields of environmental impact studies or intellectual property rights. Over 150 countries around the world are signatories to the Convention and it has been unanimously accepted at the 4th Conference of the Parties in Bratislava, Slovakia in June 1998. The following section presents a comparative analysis of mainstream scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge as seen from an Aboriginal perspective.

## B) TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENCE: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT MEANS

The intent of this section is to present a definition as well as the mechanisms and purpose of traditional knowledge (referred to as TK below). Due mainly to the persistent negative attitudes about Aboriginal knowledge – the most recent case being the controversy sparked by Howard and Widdowson in Policy Options, (1996: 17(9):34-36) and the diverse ensuing responses, it seems appropriate and necessary to provide both a clearer understanding of TK from an Aboriginal perspective and a more objective view of modern science. It might serve to reduce the prejudice and stimulate a healthy discussion.

In the above-mentioned article, there is a systemic lack of trust (akin to contempt and racism) towards traditional knowledge as a reliable, time-proven, and solid base for modern day use: it must first be validated and verified by “practical means,” that is, by scientific methods. But what makes scientific methods so much more reliable? How can you possibly “verify” the accumulation of centuries of recorded experience? Is it ethical to rape the collective memory of a people to “verify” if what they hold as true, is “true?” On the other hand, Aboriginal peoples (and everyone else) are expected to take for granted the scientific methods, “theories” and discoveries, most of which are relatively recent and not time-tested. A theoretical physicist, F. David Peat, described this reality using a simple observation of Innu trapping methodology:

Our Western concept of nature is based on an evolutionary model. Left to the natural forces around them, things will “progress,” getting better and better. Going along with this world view is the need, when faced with alternatives, to decide which one is “better” than the others. It goes without saying that when it comes to other people’s cultures we are generally the ones who are doing the measuring, and are supplying the yardstick as well! If two systems exist, both of which claim to be sciences, our natural tendency is to compare them, like the latest model autos, and see which one comes on top.

This desire to compare, to measure, and to categorize in terms of better and worse does not seem to be the natural way of doing things in the Indigenous world. As my friend Clem Ford has observed, in Labrador there was a traditional Indigenous way to hunt beaver and one that the European trappers used. Today both methods are used by Native people, and there is no sense that one method is “better” than the other, or that one should replace the other. Rather, both methods are used, side by side. (1994:xiv)

Even when some responses to the abrasive article tried to be sympathetic, they still failed to recognize what TK really is, in its full span. TK is stereotypically associated with nature and the environment, as if Indigenous peoples didn't have any other thinking capabilities than to "observe" and record nature. What about their historical knowledge, orally recorded both pre-contact and after contact, their philosophy of life and values emanating from spiritual teachings, their recording of genealogy, the development of intricate storytelling to teach events, stimulate creativity and emphasize values? Moreover, Aboriginal peoples didn't solely "use" natural resources: they had learned the processes to "transform" natural elements by means of diverse and elaborate scientific techniques (chemistry, medicine, etc...). This has been systematically overlooked (giving credence to the widespread idea that North American Indians were a "stone-age" people at time of contact, underdeveloped and uncivilized).

Even with traditional knowledge about the environment, there is still a lot of doubt about the reliability of that knowledge, judging by the fact it has to be confirmed first by the scientific community.

This presentation of TK, I hope, can help create a renewed approach to the environment – and possibly combine the best of both sources of knowledge – by helping to forge a new sensitivity to Native American world views. **It is an exploration of the middle ground.**

In comparing TK and occidental science, it is important to take the following basic premises into consideration:

- In the same way that occidental science does not define itself in relation to TK, TK need not authenticate itself according to the criteria of occidental science. **TK exists in its own right**, and its intrinsic validity stems directly from the survival techniques used by generations of Native Americans. These techniques were carried out in harmony with the land and with other living entities, and they have avoided creating serious ecological damage.
- There is considerable confusion in mainstream society over the link between spirituality and TK, which are often viewed as one and the same thing. Although spirituality is a part of every activity of daily life for Aboriginal peoples, it does *not*, in itself, constitute TK. Aboriginal

**beliefs** arise from Creation stories, dreams and visions that give insights for Aboriginal **knowledge**. This knowledge is based on observation, direct experience, testing, teaching and recording in the collective memory through oral tradition, storytelling, ceremonies, and songs. This knowledge is exercised within the context of the social values and philosophies of the tribe – that the Earth and every animal, plant and rock upon it is sacred and should be treated with respect. The fact that Native science is **not fragmented** into specialized compartments does not mean that it is not based on rational thinking, but rather that it is based on the belief that all things are connected and must be considered within the context of those interrelationships. In order to maintain harmony and balance, this holistic approach accords the same importance to rational thinking as it does to spiritual beliefs and social values.

- Although the term “science” is most often taken to mean mainstream society's scientific community, it is important to recognize that traditional knowledge also comprises Indigenous science. For the purposes of this paper, mainstream science will be referred to as **occidental science**, and Native American science as **Indigenous or Native science**. Environmental knowledge is an element of TK and follows these same principles.

Each of the definitions of science taken from the Oxford English dictionary can be applied, to a greater or lesser extent, to Indigenous science. It is a disciplined approach to knowing and understanding the nature of reality, systems of relationships, and the energies and processes of the universe. On the other hand, because it is not possible to separate Indigenous science from other aspects of daily existence – such as ethics, spirituality, metaphysics, social order and ceremony – it can never be a “branch” or “department” of knowledge, but remains inseparable from the cohesive whole, a way of being and of coming-to-learning (Peat, 1994).

### *1) A Philosophy of Native Science*

Native science is holistic and uses spiritual processes to synthesize information from the mental, physical, social and cultural realms. “Like a tree, the roots of Native science go deep into the history, body and blood of the land. So the roots and their functions form the basis of Native scientific methodology. Seeking truth and coming to knowledge necessitates studying the cycles, relationships and connections between things. Laws and standards govern Native science just as they do Western science. Indeed a law of Native science requires that we look ahead seven generations when making

decisions” (Colorado 1988).

Because it is so interwoven with nature, Aboriginal philosophy has the capacity to rejuvenate and restore the natural order. In his book, Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education, Gregory Cajete traces the Aboriginal approach to learning and teaching, and attempts to apply this philosophy within a practical contemporary framework. He stresses the urgent need for all people to adopt an Aboriginal world view in order to address the impending ecological disaster that confronts humanity. In his own words, Cajete wishes “to plant seeds of thought and deep reflection regarding the nature of Indigenous education... to draw attention to a way of looking at and understanding a primal process of education grounded in the basics of human nature” (Cajete, 1994). These seeds characterize the importance of individual relationships with the environment.

The metaphysical component of TK explains the nature of the relationship that Native Americans have with each other and with their environment, and it defines their identity as peoples. Native American philosophy is also an example of human creativity, with traditional stories and legends explored for their poetic and artistic content. “There are deeply held notions about humans in the world embedded in stories and legends that have survived. ... these notions have so persisted that they have become the means through which a very unique identity has been maintained despite 500 years of intended destruction and/or assimilation” (Cordova, 1996).

## ***2) Scientific Concepts in Traditional Environmental Knowledge***

Traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) is accumulated through precise observations over a long period of time. Because most life forms have a natural sense of survival – and even their own natural forms of medicine – much can be learned by watching them. Moose, for example, eat calamus root, beech leaves and cedar buds when they are sick, and they lie on dry leaves or roll in mud to stop bleeding when they are wounded. When safe water and healthy food are not available, or if the roots and shoots of certain plants no longer grow, the moose moves to another habitat. This impacts the balance of the food chain, creates overpopulation, aggressive competition for mating, and sets off a ripple of other changes in the ecosystem (Augustine, 1998).

It is surprising, given the fact that Aboriginal empirical knowledge has been extensively documented over a long period of time, that some people still argue that it is vague and imprecise. This knowledge has been recorded in the collective memory of the community and passed down through oral teachings.

- **Medicine**

Some examples of how Native Americans use TEK in a scientific context can be found in the field of medicine. There are more than 100 Native American medicines used in modern North American pharmacopoeia, including aspirin, which was originally applied in plant form (Alcoze, 1992).

Medicinal knowledge requires precise knowledge of the environment, the seasonal patterns of medicinal plants, where they grow, when to collect them (at their most potent stage), how to prepare them, and how and in what dosages to administer them. Native Americans used this knowledge to cure illnesses, alleviate pain, heal burns and bone fractures, and fight infections. There was even a method of oral contraception that required two different plants to be taken in a specific sequence: "One plant inhibits the enzymes of the stomach so that the active ingredient of the other passes through the stomach and reaches the reproductive organs. This demonstrates that Native medicines were not random. They were not found by people who were basically savages. Scientific concepts *exist* in Native tradition. Just because Native people do not use scientific jargon is no reason to suggest that the knowledge is lacking" (Alcoze, 1992).

- **Farming**

Farming techniques developed by Native Americans are another example of how traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) was used. When Europeans first arrived in the New World, they sent a wide variety of crops back to their homelands overseas, so a large proportion of the world's current food supply originated in the Americas. Today, scientists are taking a closer look at remarkable Indigenous farming methods to find techniques that could be transferred to the Third World and used by ecologically minded Western farmers (Peat 1994). According to Baird Straughan, farmers in Bolivia are reviving potato-growing methods developed by their pre-Columbian ancestors at Tiwanacu, and they are getting 20 times their previous yields. The Tiwanacans dug canals, diverted rivers and raised fields to prevent

drought and frost damage, control floods and provide natural fertilizers (Straughan, 1991: 38-49).

- **Biology**

Aboriginal hunters have accumulated a vast reservoir of ecological knowledge over generations. For instance, the Arctic ecosystem is characterized by annual variations in the abundance and distribution of wildlife – variations that can not be accurately noted from just a few seasons of observation. This knowledge is a valuable guide to long-term changes in wildlife distribution and behaviour, particularly since hunters travel extensively in remote areas during winter months – a time of year when biologists' observations of arctic wildlife are often lacking (Dene Cultural Institute, 1994).

In 1990 and 1995, Daniel Clément recorded more than 137 different plant names and 338 different animal names in a single Innu community.

“Innu people observe, classify and compare biological entities with which they have interacted and still interact in their daily lives; they also have specific concepts to account for these interactions. Those three methodological aspects—observation, classification and comparison—plus the presence of specific concepts correspond, in fact, to the modern definition of either botany or zoology in Western academic circles. For those reasons, Innu ecological knowledge can also be qualified as a science. Even if their culture is unwritten, Innu have a specific system of taxonomy. Moreover, they have a specific way of categorizing reproduction based on the product of the reproduction (*umaanishiishat* foetus, *uaaua* round eggs, *uaakuna* coiled eggs), a profound knowledge of animal locomotion as reflected in more than 90 different words to refer to specific movements of animals, a comparative knowledge of animal anatomy with a vocabulary of more than 200 words for animal parts alone, an interpretation of relations between animals from an ecological point of view, taking into account habitat, feeding habits, calls etc., not without mentioning detailed knowledge of ectoparasites and endoparasites and diseases of animals and a broad vision of the relations between animals and their respective territories. This is not a vague and imprecise knowledge. Innu people even distinguish species and subspecies that are unknown to Western academic science.” (Clément, 1997).

### ***3) Differences between Native and Occidental Science***

One of the basic differences between Native science and occidental science is that the technological, industrial society of which occidental science is an expression **lacks a connection to the Earth**. “In the West, technology is tied to notions of progress and the belief that more is better. ... the need for constant progress and change, along with the accumulation of wealth and material resources, generally absent from Indigenous societies” (Peat, 1994). This lack of connection to the Earth explains the lack of respect towards other living entities. For example, while biology classes

require a student to dissect a frog, such experimentation would be contrary to Native American values about life and living creatures. “A frog in Native American cultures is a sacred creature, and you just don’t do that to your relatives” (Alcoze, 1992). Aboriginal peoples learned the same lessons about anatomy and chemistry by dissecting animals that had been killed with proper ceremony and whose every component was used for food, clothing, shelter, tools and other purposes. Too often, the research goals of the occidental scientific community go beyond moral values and overshadow the question of **ethics**. Examples include the appalling treatment of primates and other animals in laboratories, the recent use of tainted blood for transfusions without proper screening, the ongoing excavation of the Spanish flu virus in Denmark, and the indiscriminate use of antibiotics that has led to the evolution of drug-resistant bacterial strains. Not only in this context, the goals justify the means, but too often the goals are market-based, placing the best interests of humanity in the background.

Another major difference in approach between occidental science and Native science is **compartmentalization**. Western scientists study systems by taking them apart in the laboratory, then separating and studying their various components. The result of this fragmentation is that knowledge is divided into a number of specialized compartments that exist apart from one another (Peat, 1994). The Native American perspective, on the other hand, is that the world operates as a whole, and that the meaning of knowledge depends on its context. Everything – from every action, plant and animal, even the cosmos – has to be analysed as a whole, according to its surrounding environment, spiritual context and relationships. “Native traditions teach the whole of nature in a practical, functional macro approach to the environment. You don’t have to know all the nuances of population dynamics to know that if you overkill a deer population, you could starve” (Alcoze, 1992). Wisdom, spirituality and ethical values provide Aboriginal peoples with a profound understanding of the environment and their relationship with the land. “Indigenous knowledge, when it becomes separated from its source and then altered piecemeal to fit another world view, violates the holistic nature of this knowledge and destroys the relationship of interdependence between [the] different components that make up its primary characteristic” (Lambrou, 1997).

It is useful, in further assessing the differences between TK and occidental science, to look at the latter in terms of its **principles**. While it is generally accepted that occidental science is based on reason, objective observation and well-designed experimentation, it is important to keep in mind that experiments and interpretations always take place within a context of assumptions, ideas and beliefs, and that there are strong personal and social motivations that influence what a person does and sees. When new phenomena fall within the current scientific paradigm, it is relatively easy for them to be considered objectively. When they fall outside this paradigm, they are much less likely to be taken seriously. As a result, the validity of a particular observation often becomes less important than how well it meets with the beliefs, values, aspirations and world view of the influential majority of scientists (Peat, 1994; see Kuhn also).

This view is mirrored by Vine Deloria, a Lakota scholar and author of many books and essays. He is well-known for his challenging perspective on occidental science, which is that “Scientific theories are often built on the most tenuous of evidential foundations and survive only because of the gentleman’s agreement within scientific peer groups not to embarrass colleagues... Many subjects, no matter how interesting, are simply prohibited because they call into question long-standing beliefs. Journals do not reflect science or human knowledge; they represent the subjects that are not prohibited in polite discussion by a few established personalities in the larger intellectual world” (Deloria, 1995).

These appraisals of occidental science, one by a recognized occidental scientist and the other by an equally recognized Native American scientist, show that some of the fundamental principles of Western science, such as objectivity, fairness, integrity and systematic reasoning, are actually influenced by peer pressure, technological/industrial pressure, political pressure, human error, personal beliefs and the preconceived ideas of the time.

#### ***4) Barriers to Traditional Knowledge***

Many of today’s Elders have been victimized by residential schools, imposed Christianization and the lawful prohibition of their culture, language, traditional knowledge, and sacred ceremonies. The intent to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream society, particularly over the past three

or four generations, has led to self-defeating and destructive behaviours and the breakdown of family structures. Today, a vast number of Aboriginal people no longer rely on TK because they have been educated away from their own culture and traditions. Another barrier to TK is the fact that many Western scientists still regard it as unreliable and rooted in myth because of its link with spirituality and its qualitative, holistic nature. However some scientists are starting to use TK in their research.

Despite these difficulties, TK still exists and continues to be practised by a number of Elders and traditional peoples who are knowledgeable about their culture, traditions, and history. Aboriginal people are reasserting their culture and expressing their willingness to share it with others. New school curricula, based on TK and prepared by Native American academics, are providing hope that many young Native people who have been assimilated into mainstream society will be taught about their culture and will learn the traditional protocols that must be followed in approaching an Elder for such knowledge.

### *5) Bridging Traditional Knowledge and Occidental Science*

We have seen that TK is more than a simplistic lore about the environment. It deals with information on a wide range of subjects, information that has been learned and transmitted over a long period of time. It includes knowledge of:

- **Metaphysics:** value systems and relationships with the land, the land of the spirits, and all living entities whose philosophies are derived from their own Creation stories.
- **History:** transmitted orally through generations, with an emphasis on the lessons to be drawn from certain events rather than a mere chronology of events.
- **Environmental Science:** including the geography of the land, rivers and sea; biology; animal behaviour; plant life; and weather cycles. TEK has been relied upon for survival (i.e., obtaining food, shelter, clothing, medicines, tools and means of travel) for generations.
- **Chemistry:** including the use of plants for dyes, brains for tanning processes, firing methods for creating pottery, and the boiling of certain saps to make glue.
- **Medicine:** based on a precise and intense connection to the plant world, and a link with the spiritual world needed to make the medicine work (akin to the psychological approach to healing that conventional medicine is starting to use).

- **Technology:** making hunting and fishing tools and transportation equipment (i.e., canoes, toboggans, snowshoes, sleds). Some of these technologies are still an essential component of arctic military activities.
- **Astronomy:** used for calendar, travel and migration patterns, ceremonies, etc.

These examples provide only a small insight into TK. The process of learning is ongoing as new issues arise (i.e., the impact of new technologies and population growth on the environment). Therefore, TK not only relies upon the past acquisition of knowledge, it is also updated according to its own methodologies. What remains stable is its holistic approach to learning and the use of knowledge (in which all things in the circle of life are linked) and the context of spirituality that gives TK its human face through a deep connection with the Earth and cosmos, and an all-encompassing respect and care for other entities.

The time has come to find ways to reduce the gap between these two sources of knowledge, to apply them to a middle ground for the benefit of all. Perhaps, in order to encourage full participation in research and assessments, the occidental scientific community should consider opening itself up to the concepts of harmony, balance, qualitative knowledge, and the interrelationship of all nature. Respect for other ways of viewing and knowing the world is key to embarking on this path and to tapping into a repository of wisdom and special knowledge that has been passed down over thousands of years.

A closing thought about this section: “The newest concept of Western scientists is ‘biodiversity’ – a recognition that a diversity of vegetation and animal life is necessary to the well-being of the environment. It escapes the notice of the scientist that it might also be healthy for the planet to exhibit a diversity of lifestyles. Most Indigenous peoples have existed in their locales for thousands of years without decimating their surroundings” (Cordova, 1997: 31-44). Although Cordova states that biodiversity is new to the Western scientists, this may not be the case, only that it is a new buzz word for today. However, we cannot ignore the fact that scientists have been involved over the years in developing methods to “get rid of pests” (for example, the elimination of insects with pesticides) that were later found to be toxic to humans and caused a great imbalance in

the ecosystem's food chain. Although some scientists have been attuned to these issues for a while, it has only recently been understood by the scientific community in general that maintaining a balanced environment, and therefore preserving every life form, contributes to a healthy biodiversity.

The notion of environmental consciousness is new to Aboriginal society, yet today the environmental movements look to the indigenous peoples around the world for answers to the environmental catastrophies that are unfolding. The difference between environmental consciousness – as recycling, replanting, restoring – and Traditional Environmental Knowledge of indigenous peoples, is human intervention. Mi'Kmaq peoples' understanding of belonging to the land, living in harmony with other species and taking only whatever is necessary for survival, is quite different from the notion that “God crowned us with glory and honour, made us rulers over the works of his hands and put everything under our feet” (Psalm, 8:5-7) and thus made us stewards of the land. Here, I use as an example the problem of garbage on Indian Reserves. This stems from the lack of education about the non bio-degradability of metals, plastics, glass and fiberglass products. In the past, whenever an object was no longer useful, it was left aside by indigenous people; it was understood that Mother Earth would eventually reclaim it. Yet these same indigenous principles and values of “Mother Earth reclaiming” are the ones that cause the damage today; it is not a lack of environmental consciousness, it is a lack of education about “recycled” (chemically altered) natural resources and their impact on Earth where they will accumulate and not break down or disintegrate.

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the difference of attitude towards a part of knowledge that has been identified as a “science” and another part of knowledge that has been identified as Traditional Knowledge. The important point to remember is that each concept has existed for a long time and neither needed to be authorized by the other to prove it was valid. The challenge for society is to recognize that we will need to accommodate both systems of knowledge if we are to make a better place for future generations to live.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **A CASE STUDY:**

#### **USING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

#### **AS A MEANS OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION FOR HEALING**

Mainstream education has contributed to the present negative public attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples and their systems of knowledge. Consequently, the incidence of high drop-out rates among Aboriginal students may be partly attributable to an eroded self-esteem because of attitudes they face in the school systems and in the larger society, and this is combined with curricula that are indifferent to their history, when not overtly biased. Furthermore, many Aboriginal parents do not consider schools to be very important for their children, whether because of their traumatic experiences in residential schools, their own lack of formal education, or a disconnection from their cultural values and knowledge base. These factors in turn lead to a social upheaval in which children and youth do not get the necessary healthy environment and preparedness to attend school effectively. The resulting poor socio-economic consequences pave the way for the cycle to continue.

A case study of the First Nations community of Big Cove, New Brunswick is examined here in order to confirm the importance of culturally relevant educational material that may have contributed to the high retention rate obtained in a youth retraining project in that community. Examples of other related activities in Big Cove – “River of Fire Festival” and the “Seven Day Healing Ceremony”, which utilized traditional Mi’Kmaq knowledge as a means of communal expression to break a suicide epidemic – will also be analysed to demonstrate how Aboriginal solutions to Aboriginal problems can bring about positive change to a community in crisis.

The River of Fire Festival, which took place on an Indian Reserve in 1993, involved the revitalization of some aspects of Mi'Kmaq cultural heritage through oral tradition, enhanced by a cultural activity that involved the community and its school children. The Festival was a giant parade through the community during a heritage week at the local elementary school. The whole process took two weeks to prepare for the planning and the making of costumes for the parade. The larger-than-life figures which were used as part of the parade were images taken from traditional Mi'Kmaq legends. A carnival production company, *Shadowland*, which annually participates in the "Carabana Festival" in Toronto, worked in conjunction with the community coordinators to facilitate the project. A grant from Heritage Canada was secured to offset part of the costs for this cultural event. The Department of the Secretary of State provided funding from its cultural component branch, which encourages language retention for minority cultures in Canada. This cultural project was one of four that were initiated as a response to a suicide epidemic occurring at the time in the reserve.

This essay looks at the practical and real cultural activities that took place in the local community, then at Canadian cultural policies juxtaposed with some cultural theories. These are then analysed in relation to the cultural project in an Indian Reserve. The goal of this essay is not to see whether the cultural theories apply to the Big Cove River of Fire Festival, but rather to emphasize the involvement of a community in building its own cultural agenda and seeing whether cultural policies can facilitate this agenda. The concept of the "marginalization" theory is taken into consideration in this analysis and will be addressed to a certain extent.

#### **A) A COMMUNITY IN DIRE NEED OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION**

The community of Big Cove was devastated by a suicide epidemic in which more than 14 people, most of them young, took their lives in less than 12 months. From 1992 to 1993, there were many activities taking place in the community to help in the healing and recovery. There were adult education programs designed with cultural curriculum to help the unusually high number of school drop-outs to cope with their social conditions. There was a consultant group, called the Four Worlds Ambassadors from the Lethbridge University in Alberta, that used Native Spiritual Healing practices while they were working with the youth in the community. There were people in the community who

were involved in an exchange program with children from France who were diagnosed with cancer. A powwow was organized and taken to Lyon, France, to help children there to cope with their illnesses. It was observed that the children in France had dreams of becoming adults and had plans to have careers and families of their own, yet their lives were abruptly ended.

The situation in Big Cove was different in the sense that the youth there were arbitrarily ending their lives through suicide because they felt shut off from opportunities in their future. The River of Fire Festival was one of the last activities and it seemed to provide the community of Big Cove with the kind of expression needed to release stored-up energy. The production of a video by Pinegrove Productions, a company based in Lanark, Ontario, recruited members from the Big Cove community as part of the production team. The video is entitled River of Fire Festival: A Celebration of Life.

The cultural products – the festival and the video – were a result of a regional activity from the extreme margins in Canada. First, it took place in the Maritimes and furthermore on an Indian Reserve. This was truly a geographic margin as well as an economic one. Attitudes needed to be overcome concerning the policy barriers within the cultural program. The entire event took place during the preparations for the “Congrès Mondial”, a worldwide celebration for the Acadian people, and we were informed that the funds available in the Heritage program had already been earmarked for that purpose. Yet it was the spirit of the people that prevailed and made the event a reality. That in itself proved to be the necessary push the community needed to get out of the social depression it was facing. Representatives from the government realized that there was something meaningful happening. The whole community and its leadership had been in a state of shock. After 26 years in power, the Chief had resigned in frustration, having no answers to the problem and immediate solutions were next to impossible. Although the struggle for political power still continues in Big Cove, the River of Fire Festival served as a fine example that the community and its grassroots (people and children) had the ability to set a direction for a new path of understanding through human interaction and they had the ability to express this understanding.

## B) PROFILE OF A FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY

Big Cove was established in 1802 as the Richibucto Reserve, named after the river, Egtjipogteo, a Mi'Kmaq word which means the Great Fire. For thousands of years prior to 1800, the Mi'Kmaqs lived harmoniously with their environment, often referring to it as their Mother. The Mi'Kmaq took on the personality of their Mother Earth in her cyclical pattern of regenerating herself as each year passed by adjusting their lives to their surroundings. The accumulated knowledge of generations of people served to guide the Mi'Kmaq on their path of survival. Following their migratory patterns, the Richibucto tribe moved freely with the natural flow of their environment and its ecological movements. Their main goal was to sustain life, always in search of food, medicine and shelter, and in this process, to make tools, clothes, canoes and snowshoes. A high level of spiritual consciousness, present in everyday life, enabled the Mi'Kmaqs to be guided by strong principled values inherent in the personality of the Mi'Kmaq people.

Social and moral conduct was the responsibility of each individual and was never assumed as "group conscience." The concept of justice as we know it today was alien. There were no police, no courts and no jails. As one community Elder put it, "We moved up and down a river system like leaves on a branch of a tree. Every year the leaves and the seeds fall to the ground only to generate more life and every year we would move to the mouth of the river to generate more life. We followed the animals, the fish, the birds and the plants. We were guided by the wisdom of the Elders, the teachings of our mothers and the strength and vision of the young. This is how we survived."

The establishment of the reserve system was one of the first steps in disabling the Mi'Kmaqs of the Richibucto River. Disabling them was done by taking away their ability to live as they had for thousands of years. French seigneuries and Loyalist land grants gradually encircled the reserves. Treaties of Amity and Friendship were made with them, first as "friends of the French," later as "neutrals" in the French/English wars, and much later as "friendly Indians" during the American Revolution. The Mi'Kmaqs were told that they did not have to worry about the necessities of life because the British Crown would make certain that these were supplied "for as long as the sun shines and the rivers flow," in other words, forever. When Canada came into existence in 1867, the treaty

promises were inserted in a special section in the British North America Act. Nine years later, the Indian Act was legislated. The Mi'Kmaq of Big Cove were now a fiduciary responsibility of the federal government of Canada.

For over 100 years, the Richibucto tribe of the Mi'Kmaq have relied on the federal government for the basics of life, that is, their food, clothing, shelter, medicine etc. They no longer had to hunt, fish or trap for their living. They no longer moved with the natural flow of Mother Earth; their personalities no longer resembled their Mother's. Traditional Elders' voices and spiritual practices were outlawed, their sacred pipes, their drums, their clothes, canoes and even burial objects and bones of their ancestors were confiscated and placed in museums. Mi'Kmaq had to pay to have access to their sacred history, their source of life. Mi'Kmaq traditional life was no more.

In the 1940s, many Mi'Kmaq men and women enlisted in the Second World War and many did not return home. Home was a place where the Mi'Kmaq could hunt and fish, or they could work in the woods or the lumber mills on the Miramichi River, the Restigouche River or as far away as Squaw Mountain in the Northern Maine woods. They could work on local lobster and herring boats with their French neighbours in Richibucto and Point Esquiminac near Baie Ste. Anne on the North Shore of New Brunswick. The Mi'Kmaq of the Richibucto River were accustomed to travelling long distances with their families. Many pilgrimages had been made to Ste. Anne de Beaupre in Quebec since the 1700s.

Since the 1900s, Mi'Kmaq families had travelled to Maine to pick blueberries during July and August of each year. In September and early October, they would stay to pick potatoes for the Maine farmers. The children were kept out of school during this period in order to help their families. The bigger the family at work, the more supplies and school clothing they could buy. During the winter, the men would stay to "put up" the potatoes in the potato houses. "Putting up" means packaging potatoes into five, 10, 20, 50 and 100 pound bags and then loading these bags into boxcar trains or transport trucks. In the Spring, the men would go on river drives where they worked to move pulpwood and logs from the woods to the mills, or they would stay home to fish lobster and herring. There was no form of welfare for the Mi'Kmaq, everybody looked after everybody, nobody starved.

After the Second World War, however, the Mi'Kmaq were told to stay on the Reserves and to send their children to school. If they did not send their children to school, Family Allowance payments, controlled by Indian Agents, would not be given to them. Furthermore, if they refused to send their children, they would be forcibly taken away from their families by Indian Affairs Agents and sent to Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia.

Reserve life in Big Cove remained unchanged for about 20 years after the War. The lobster and herring fishery was beginning to get more competitive as more local French and English fishermen came into the market. Indian labour was no longer needed. The lumber business declined as forests, began to disappear. Complicated machinery was being introduced on the farms, fields and forests which did away with the need for human labour. The Mi'Kmaq did not complain about their hard work but local people were feeling the economic crunch. New ways with advanced technologies were being used in the forestry, the fishery, on the farms and the blueberry fields.

Indian children had to go to school or face being taken away from their families. This meant that mothers and their children had to stay on the reserve. Welfare was introduced by the federal government in such a way that, if the men went off to work, the welfare payments for their wives and children would be cut off. This was seen as a form of punishment to the men, so many did not bother to work any more. Later, licenses and training to run the machines would be required and as a consequence, more education was needed to meet these new requirements. The Indians did not have the necessary level of training, so they could not meet the requirements.

The Mi'Kmaqs of Richibucto were now forced to stay at home on the reserve by the societal and technological changes and the requirements for higher education. The family allowance payments and the welfare system induced them to stay on the reserve and do nothing. It was the welfare money combined with the idleness that contributed to the state of alcoholism that was experienced by the families in Big Cove from the late 1960s and through to the 90s. (It was in the early 1960s that the Indians were first allowed to vote in the federal and provincial elections. Incidentally, they were now also legally allowed to be in possession of alcohol.)

In the 1970s the federal government decided to give some administrative responsibilities to the Big Cove Band Council by handing over the Housing and Welfare programs that had been previously administered by the Department of Indian Affairs. Without the proper training or qualifications, and having lost their traditional wisdom of sharing and relying on each other, the band was left to administer close to half a million dollars (1970 dollars) in public money. The initial failures provided “proof” to government officials that Indians were not ready to look after themselves, and that the responsibility for their programs would have to remain within the federal realm and not in the hands of “unqualified Indians.” Since then, Big Cove has been struggling to regain control over its life by gaining access to the services necessary to rebuild a healthy community.

The suicides that reached epidemic proportions in 1992-93 were a result of the lack of development in four major aspects of community life: education, cultural development, economic and community social development, the major tenets for a healthy community in mainstream society and, I would presume, for any community in the world.

In Big Cove, the responsibility for education has rested with the federal government since the early 1900s. The administrative control over education was given to the Band Council only recently. The biggest problem with this arrangement was that the educational program developed by the Department of Indian Affairs did not take into account historical, cultural, linguistic and spiritual relevance for the children of Big Cove. There were no contingencies for the development of culturally relevant curricula. This situation resulted in a massive disruption and displacement of the Indian children of Big Cove. Children who grew up speaking the Mi'Kmaq language entered the main school system to be instructed only in the English language. Because of the structure of band politics and the reserve school board, the children were promoted according to their parents' status in the community. Teachers were not truthful in grading their students for fear of dismissal from their jobs. Hence, children arriving at schools in the non-Indian towns outside the reserve were evaluated as having two to three grades lower in reading and comprehension skills. These students were kept in special classes until they were ready to go on to the next grade, which ultimately took two to three years because of the language and cultural barriers and sometimes discrimination. Eventually, after too many students had dropped out, special classes called “The Indian Project” were established for

Big Cove students only. They were called the "DUMMY" class by the rest of the student body: not too encouraging for the kids to stay in school. Typically, only 20% of the students from Big Cove made it beyond Grade 12, while 80-85% of mainstream students graduated.

Although the responsibility for spiritual activities rests with individuals, it has been difficult to maintain this part of our cultural integrity in the wake of the measures that were drastically enforced by the federal government in the 1920s. All cultural practices and spiritual ceremonies were outlawed, practitioners were arrested, sacred objects were confiscated and given to museums. In the residential schools, our Indian languages were not to be spoken or punishment would be meted out.

Our community development has come in the form of models developed in mainstream society, then transplanted onto the reserve. The Church, administrative buildings, the community hall and schools had to be in the centre of the community. This model took no consideration of traditional land use and occupancy. When people could not read or write, they were told to move from their houses, only to see them be torn down. Extended families were broken up and dispersed. Grandparents could no longer watch over their families and eventually they themselves were taken away to old-age homes off the reserve because federal government officials deemed them incapable of looking after themselves. The values and traditional knowledge that these Elders carried died with them in their lonely rooms.

The federal statute laws governing life on the reserve also controlled its economic development. Indian reserves are collectively owned as the right of the Crown, therefore no individual Indian could use part of the reserve as their property nor subject it as collateral for a financial loan. A loan could only be approved by the Minister of Indian Affairs. This process takes up to one year if the Chief is not defeated in a band election, if the Minister is not changed and the interpretation of the relevant policies does not change. Then, if still willing, the Minister of Indian Affairs has to guarantee the loan at the bank. The Chief and Council elected by the people in the community every two years are financially and administratively accountable only to the Department of Indian Affairs and not to their community. Every single Band Council Resolution passed by Chief and Council must be approved before it can be acted upon. All of this led to a total paralysis.

The side effects of this paralysis, which incapacitated individuals from expressing themselves orally, culturally and spiritually, were seen in alcohol use and in illegal and prescription drugs abuse which precipitated situations of sexual/physical violence, health problems, family break-ups, child neglect, more school drop-outs, debts and other behaviours unacceptable in the community. All of the suicides in Big Cove had similar developments involving the above conditions and situations. The Chief had resigned out of frustration and the community was left on its own to seek a solution. An inquest was held after six deaths, but the recommendations were not binding and still solutions were elusive. Outside psychologists and community workers were hired on a contract basis. Spiritual consultants from Alberta were hired to work with the local youth while local Elders idly watched. Another suicide rocked the community during the final phase of the workshop with the youth.

### **C) THE COMMUNITY TAKES CHARGE**

Realizing that solutions to these problems which seemed to stem from the community were not going to be solved by outside intervention, a group of community members decided to do something, although it was not defined initially. But the desire for a community solution was a common concern and provided a direction.

The director of Pinegrove Productions of Lanark, Ontario, along with friends from Shadowland of Toronto Island, was visiting an Elder in Big Cove for a video production on Indian storytelling. The friends from Toronto had videos of their work that dealt with the production of carnival objects used at the annual Carabana Festival, a parade which winds through downtown Toronto celebrating the many diverse cultures in that city. The visitors got in touch with the group in Big Cove who were searching for a community solution, videos were viewed and after several meetings, arrangements were agreed upon. The Chief, who had decided not to enter in the now-impending band election, agreed to provide the group with a letter of support for the activity.

Representatives from the provincial and federal governments were later invited and presented with a proposal for a festival in Big Cove. As mentioned earlier, most of the funds allocated for the year had already been set aside for the "Congrès Mondial", a celebration of Acadian cultural survival

which draws Acadians from around the world. Despite this overshadowing cultural event, the plan to have a festival in Big Cove remained the ultimate goal. In a matter of months, our prayers were answered when letters promising financial support arrived in the mail.

#### **D) THE RIVER OF FIRE: A CELEBRATION OF LIFE**

Sufficient funding was received to cover travel costs for the Shadowland crew and the Pinegrove Productions team, and for the production and development of a video, thus enabling the community to proceed with their planned festival. In the two weeks that it took to prepare and produce the larger-than-life objects taken from legends and stories, the community experienced a change that had never before occurred. Something positive was arising in the coming together of children first and then the curious adults who wondered what was drawing their children to stay in school for activities. It was almost like a “pied piper” effect and curiosity drew more people.

One of the more prevalent observations that had emerged from an adult education program, that had been offered in the community earlier in the year was the need for people to express themselves through their own creativity. Indian students in the adult education program had limited ability to express themselves in writing. Most of the students had dropped out of the non-Indian schools in town. They expressed an inability to rationalize events, especially the suicides, that had been happening in their lives. A new approach to life skills coaching, which was developed in Big Cove by Indians, proved to be a surprising success. In this program, the students were taught about their cultural and spiritual history through storytelling by community Elders. Rather than being tested, they were given bristol boards, acrylic paints and brushes. They were asked to draw or paint images in the stories which had meaning and significance for them. Then, in front of a video camera, which they operated themselves, they explained why they were able to produce their works of artistic expression: it had meaning for them! All of the students participated in this exercise freely. The next step involved an exercise in expository writing where they were asked to write about their paintings and to explain their images and their use of colour (simply to write what they had expressed orally on video). Then there was a review of their written work individually – in the privacy of a room alone

with a teacher rather than in front of the classroom as is typically done – and corrections were suggested, along with recommended texts on grammar and spelling for further learning.

It was a phenomenal success! *None* of the adult students in that particular program dropped-out and *all of them* graduated that year. Previous adult education courses that had been offered in the reserve had high drop-out rates and some even had to be cancelled as a result. The lesson in this instance is that a means of creative expression was provided that suited the students' artistic capacities while at the same time, cultural and spiritually relevant subject material was utilized as content. The result was a group of Indian students who were able to rationalize their lives and the meaning of their place in this world. They could now continue to live.

#### **E) THE OUTCOMES: LESSONS TO BE DRAWN**

The lessons learned from the adult education program were ever more relevant and meaningful for our project: the object was to have the same stories and legends retold to the participants of the River of Fire. The Shadowland crew and the Pinegrove production team sat with community members and school children listening to the old legends. The next step was to create the larger-than-life figures taken from the ageless stories within a two week time schedule. Recycled materials from fabric factories in the cities were brought to Big Cove. Cardboard boxes, string, papier maché, sticks and wire were gathered and assembled. Stilt-walking was taught to the school children. Paint and plastic were applied.

At the outset, there was a lot of scepticism about the festival, not to mention the presence of more non-Indian people on the reserve at this time of distress, but the old Chief had approved and prominent community members were involved; it was their idea that all this was needed. As soon as the school children got out of their classes, they were invited to check out the stilt-walkers and noisemakers in the new part of the school. Things got underway immediately and production started. The only thing left unplanned was the prospects for good weather on the day of the parade and festival. The parade was a success.

One of the most noticeable changes that took place was the way Big Cove residents were drawn into the production activities by the involvement of the children in this event. People who had literally disconnected themselves from each other for many years because of family differences or politics came together. Neighbours whose children played together but who refused to speak to one another were being drawn in at the insistence of their children. People who had been labelled as militants came and offered to carry the heavier parade objects, as well as provide security and traffic control. On the day of the parade, most of the 2,000-member community of Big Cove turned out and people from nearby non-Indian communities participated. At the end of the parade, traditional chanting, drumming and dancing was done. Newspapers, radio stations and television carried the story of the day, *The River of Fire Festival 1993*.

The lessons to be learned from this cultural project are many, but the biggest benefit was to the community in terms of its social and educational development. In an article by Daniel P. Keating, Families, Schools and Communities: Social Resources for a Learning Society, he stated that:

Schools and teachers have often assumed that by the time children start to attend school, they will have acquired the cognitive and social interactive styles found most often in the mainstream group (in North America, white and middle class). When curriculum and instruction operate on this assumption, children from outside the mainstream may encounter significant learning difficulties – even though they may be quite capable of building the equivalent knowledge if developmentally and culturally appropriate learning experiences were available to them. (Keating, 1996:160).

Keating suggests that mainstream attitudes must change and must be prepared to do more than simply tolerate diversity. From our experiences described above and the “meaningless community” that we had thought we had, we have learned to forge ahead and that change is possible.

This project showed us that we must discover how to learn from each other in pursuing common goals. We share many aspirations, especially for children and youth. In the case of Big Cove, this cultural project certainly was a giant step in moving toward that direction. We have to acknowledge, to the full extent, the need to change our attitudes in order to change our ways of living, and to adopt a more meaningful approach to social interaction, inner development and a safer environment. The imposition of policies on the people will not achieve the desired result. It will

require the necessary pedagogy to instill these values in our children and their future if we are to achieve a learning society.

The roots of the current situation lie deeper, in a philosophical view of the world in which self-interest prevails and spirituality has disappeared. Since the beginning of time, spirituality has played an essential role in human development as a way to anchor one's identity in connection to "Creation." It also conveys a sense of respect and elicits a system of values designed to protect the future of life. If we are to redirect our goals as a society, it seems logical and necessary to reintroduce that lost spirituality in our daily life. As long as the values transmitted to the children are centred on money, it will be difficult to change the goals, the means and therefore the outcomes and impacts described above. It will be difficult to instill the sense that time, caring and sharing are more important than working, getting and keeping.

I would like to close this chapter with a quote from Stuart Hall, which incidentally helped me reduce my anxiety about this thesis:

My main problem with a great deal of work in cultural studies is that it didn't tell us anything new. It was a circular exercise and the wonderful thing was that you could arrive back at the beginning by a very long and intellectually rewarding route; the bourgeoisie produced bourgeois culture which exercised bourgeois hegemony. Hooray! That is the last thing that anybody out there needs: to be told what they already know. *They need the production of new knowledge...*(Hall, 1992:289)

I might add that they need the means to further express this new knowledge in a new perspective. The Aboriginal voices need to be heard.

## CHAPTER V

### EXPLORING NEW IDEOLOGIES IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION: THE IMPACT OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATORS

In the late 1960s Indians in Canada were faced with the extremely dismal prospect of becoming legally extinct. The White Paper of 1969 proposed to do away with the concept of reserves and Indians, and as a consequence, the Aboriginal and Treaty rights would be legislated out of existence in the process. In response to this assault, the Indians in Canada organized themselves on a national level and mounted a lobbying effort aimed at the general population, politicians and finally, at the House of Commons. Following this effort and the Calder decision, the White Paper was abandoned and federal policy reversed. As a further consequence to the federal government and a political gain for the Indians, a formidable political force was created as a recognized national voice of the Indians through the National Indian Brotherhood (McFarlane, 108-137). The political capabilities of Indian leaders was unquestionably valuable but its development into a more Aboriginal institutional enterprise remained untapped. The concern for the education of Indians in Canada became an immediate issue for the new Indian force, having just embarrassed the federal government of the time by rescinding their policy proposition on Indians. Indian Control of Indian Education was a bold statement to the government and the Canadians. The statement was, "Indians are on the rise and they are now going to take over their own education". The government, in trying to recover from its blundered approach in getting rid of their "Indian problem," recognized the Indians' proposition as a policy recommendation and accepted it.

#### A) VERNA KIRKNESS

One of the first Indian education visionaries in Canada in the drive to take over Indian education was Verna Kirkness, a tireless and experienced educator of Cree descent from the Fisher River Reserve in Manitoba. Kirkness' own experiences with the federally run education system gave her an insight into the seriousness of the problems faced by her people. Although she was

instrumental in making the transition, she was only concerned with having Indian educators take over the reins of education for their communities but still within the confines of mainstream structures and curricula. Early in her own educational process, Kirkness found the need for compassion and understanding for her people's well-being. Although she offered a familiar face of hope for her own students in Indian communities, she was accused by fellow teachers and administrators of patronizing Indian students. As a result of her determination, in the end she was recognized as a vital source in the effort to make education more "Indian." In 1970, Kirkness worked on a pilot project in which a group of students from kindergarten to Grade 3 were taught in Cree and Ojibway languages before English was introduced as a second language. It was a successful program, however the results of these efforts were not fully documented. Verna Kirkness focused on consulting with the Indian communities and involving the parents in their children's education. She developed parent/teacher organizations wherever she worked. Verna recently retired as director of the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia in Victoria, where she has been instrumental in developing the Native Studies programs.

#### **B) MARIE BATTISTE**

Another proponent in the take-over of Indian educational programs was Dr. Marie Battiste, a Mi'Kmaq Indian from Chapel Island, Nova Scotia. Marie received her PhD from Stanford University, where she wrote a dissertation on "An Historical Investigation of the Social and Cultural Consequences of Mi'cmaq Literacy." Her research identified that the linguistic problems the Mi'Kmaq students were experiencing had direct consequences on their mainstream learning process. She introduced the idea of revitalizing the Mi'Kmaq language in the schools on the reserves in Nova Scotia. In a case study commissioned by the Assembly of First Nations, Marie noted that the development of the language program in Chapel Island elementary school contributed significantly towards a better comprehension of learning and better self-esteem in the students. Battiste also identified that the present educational process was contributing to the high failure rates among the Mi'Kmaq students generally. She pointed out that the initial intent of government to educate the Indian had colonial and imperialistic goals. Battiste said that the educational process was initially designated "to educate the Indian away from the Indians" of Canada.

Marie Battiste's other notable concerns about Indian education refer to the Indian Control of Indian Education dilemma. In her analysis of the situation of education in Canada, The Circle Unfolds, she lashed out at the government for failing to provide sufficient funding for the First Nations to adjust the educational systems to reflect Aboriginal realities and perspectives. Battiste noted that most band-operated school programs were merely a transfer of administrative responsibility for Indian education and that the actual control was still in the hands of the Indian Affairs department.

Celia Haig-Brown, in her book, comments on the issue of control and questions whether First Nations world views or philosophies of control conflicts with the mainstream concepts of control. Haig-Brown uses Michel Foucault's theory on governmentality as a negative element for First Nations and not a positive prospect for Indian education (Haig-Brown, 1995).

### **C) EBER HAMPTON**

Eber Hampton worked as a teacher, guidance counsellor, principal and administrator throughout his career and he has some perspectives to offer. He received his PhD at Harvard University's Native American Education Program in graduate studies. Hampton researched the issue of a theory of Indian education as an alternative to the status quo. His biggest question was, "What is Indian about Indian education?" He arrived at a methodological approach for researching Indian education.

Hampton looked at five types of education to which the American Indians had been subjected: i) traditional Indian education which included oral history, teaching stories, and ceremonies; ii) schooling for self-determination, i.e., the goals and methods used by the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Cherokee; iii) schooling for assimilation used by non-Indians with their own structures to assimilate Indians; iv) education by Indians using assimilationist structures following non-Indian methods and goals; and v) Indian education *sui generis* structured with Indian perspectives and methods. According to him, the lack of a theory of Indian education not only hampered research, it also impeded the practice of Indian education. Currently, each Indian-controlled school, project, parent committee, or program adopts, adapts or invents a model of education as best it can. The strength of these individual efforts has been their reliance on local communities (Hampton, 1994).

In outlining steps towards achieving a theory of Indian education, Hampton included: i) the spiritual elements of Native American societies; ii) Indian styles of thought and reflection (iterative); iii) dual-purpose approach for the benefit of Indian and non-Indians; iv) historical analysis needed to develop a sense of cultural identity; v) group bonds and individual freedom, acceptance of an Indian process of learning and teaching; and vi) service oriented so that the educational process would benefit the student and the community. In order to achieve a sense of balance with oneself and one's community as well as with their education from an Indian perspective and a non-Indian one, Hampton cited the importance of using traditional Indian metaphors to enhance memory. By using these metaphors – things like place, identity, spiritual, cultural, affiliation, education, freedom and service – the process of learning will be helped.

Other criticisms Hampton had of the mainstream educational structure included the standardized tests that are used to evaluate schools and students but which are the products of a white establishment that hires no Indian writers, that uses test norms far removed from the reserve, and that assumes its own knowledge of both relevant questions and correct answers. Elsewhere, Hampton opined that the Indian's sense of time, space, energy and humanity were all different. Truth, beauty, and justice are all marked and evaluated differently. Epistemology, ontology, and cosmology are all different. Not only must Aboriginal students contend with personal differences in viewpoint, language and experiences they must also contend with cultural differences in values, understandings of human relationships, and modes of communication, and with the world-shattering difference between the conquered and the conqueror, the exploited and the exploiter, the racist and the victim of racism.

#### **D) RAY BARNHARDT**

In 1991, Ray Barnhardt wrote an article about Indigenous peoples in the Fourth World taking control of higher education. He analysed 100 universities and institutions that were all controlled or simply guided by indigenous peoples, from locally sponsored teacher education initiatives to full-scale national and international institutions. He evaluated each according to its attachment, affiliation, integration or independence from mainstream universities and he identified three categories:

i) independent; ii) affiliated; and iii) integrated. Barnhardt's main objective in analysing the indigenous institutions of learning was to set out guidelines and principles that helped address the social, cultural, political and economic interests of indigenous organizational autonomy and that also shaped their cultural dynamics.

In the same article, Barnhardt focused on a framework for independent educational institutions by looking at the Native American experience. He said that the Tribal College movement which began in 1960, chiefly among the Navajo, the Sioux and Indians in Northern California, had grown to include 24 tribally run institutions in 10 states. Other major Native American educational organizations which grew out of this initiative, and subsequently enhanced further growth in the development of higher learning among Indians, are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, Tribal College Institute, American Indian College Fund, and the Tribal College: Journal of American Indian Higher Education.

The cultural links between college and community are a central ingredient in everything from the goals and philosophy of the tribal colleges to their curricula. At the Navajo Community College in Arizona, this included creating physical facilities that adapted Navajo forms, practices and architectural styles to the functions of the college. Tribal Elders play a prominent role as instructors and cultural and spiritual guides for the institution. The difficult task of reconciling, balancing and integrating an educational mandate that spans traditional to contemporary knowledge, addresses individual as well as community needs, and encompasses Indian and non-Indian worlds, presents a continual challenge to college personnel. Barnhardt quoted a mission statement taken from the Fort Berthold Community College in North Dakota to illustrate his point, "...emphasizes the interweaving of tribally distinctive cultural elements... utilizes a pragmatic and holistic approach to higher education ... relevant to the individual and to the community... address tribal needs and concerns, ... perpetuate tribal heritage, history and culture" (Barnhardt, 1991).

Barnhardt said it was the emphasis on empowerment that had been most critical in moving the tribal colleges to seek status as independently accredited institutions of higher education. Although most had started out in some kind of affiliated arrangement with a nearby established post-

secondary institution, over half were now fully accredited in their own right. To help foster this growth, the American government established Public Law 95-471: Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act in 1978, and in 1990, the Tribal College Act from which grew the American Indian Higher Education Commission.

#### **E) GREGORY CAJETE**

Gregory Cajete's seminal work on indigenous education and science has been a major influence in exploring new and dynamic approaches to learning for Aboriginal education programs. For the past seven years, Cajete has been a driving force behind the search for new and innovative ways to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems into meaningful learning environments for today's Aboriginal students. He has been invited by Aboriginal peoples involved in developing educational programs to speak about his perspectives in British Columbia, Alberta and Nova Scotia and he has been invited to speak throughout the United States, in Europe and the former Soviet Union.

In the foreword to Cajete's book, Look to the Mountain, which was based on advanced work for his doctoral dissertation, Vine Deloria praised his bold endeavours. Deloria – whose convictions and philosophies are powerful reminders of centuries-old ways of being – said the philosophical perspective received in modern non-Indian school courses – that the world is an inanimate mass of matter arranged by chance into a set of shapes and energy patterns – is a matter of belief, not experience, and is the polar opposite of the traditional Indian belief. Indian educators thus face the question of whether they will move the substance of education away from this essentially meaningless proposition towards the more realistic Indian model that sees the world as an intimate relationship of living things. Furthermore, he said that moving from one perspective to the other is no simple matter, and consequently, Indian education and educators urgently need a generation of original thinkers who can scan both points of view and can build models and interpretations of the world that serve as transitions to enable Indians to communicate with non-Indians to convey a body of knowledge and demonstrate the validity of the Indian understanding.

Deloria further said Cajete has developed an educational theory of context, something that has been missing, indeed, not even conceived, in American education from the very beginning. Here we have not the narrow focus of pitting one set of cultural values against another, as some “politically correct” theoreticians do today, but a recognition that any propositions or doctrines must find a comfortable home in the existing community and the age-group context in order to be effective. From the Lakota religion, Cajete includes the idea that we are all related – originally a religious truth but also a methodology for examining the natural world and understanding how things function symbiotically. From other tribal traditions, he brings stories that illustrate the necessity of making education a function of the community historical consciousness.

The work of Cajete explores a culturally informed alternative for thinking about and enabling the contemporary education of Indian people. It is a translation of fundamental tribal education principles into a contemporary framework of thought and description. It advocates developing a contemporary, culturally based, educational process founded upon traditional Tribal values, orientations and principles, while simultaneously using the most appropriate concepts, technologies, and content of modern education.

Cajete says that access to this vast sea of Aboriginal cultural and historical content, facilitated by Indian educators and scholars, is an essential step in creating a contemporary epistemology of Indian education. This access to, and revitalization of, the indigenous bases of education must occur, not only in the contemporary classroom, but in the Indian communities as well. Indian peoples themselves must introduce contemporary expressions of tribal education to their people. Every community must integrate the learning that occurs through modern education with the cultural bases of knowledge and value orientations that are essential to perpetuate its way of life. A balanced integration must be created. *Over time, the emphasis on Western-oriented curricula will erode Indigenous ways of life. Indian educators and tribal leaders must understand that the unexamined application of Western education can condition a people away from their own cultural roots* (Cajete, 1994:18).

Cajete points out that a fundamental obstacle to cross-cultural communication revolves around significant differences in cultural orientations and the fact that Indian people have been forced to adapt to an educational process not of their making. Traditionally, Indians view life through different cultural metaphors than mainstream America. It is these different cultural metaphors that frame the exploration of the Indigenous educational philosophy presented in his book. American educational theory is generally devoid of substantial ethical or moral content regarding the means used to achieve its ends. Moreover, the basis of contemporary American education is the transfer of academic skills and content to prepare students to compete in the infrastructure of American society as it has been defined by prevailing political, social and economic order.

On Indian education, Cajete says it is the affective elements – the subjective experiences and observations, the communal relationships, the artistic and mythical dimensions, the ritual and ceremony, the sacred ecology, the psychological and spiritual orientations – that have characterized and formed Indigenous education since time immemorial. It is these aspects of indigenous orientation that provide a profound context for learning through exploration of the multidimensional relationships between humans and their inner and outer worlds.

Cajete's own motivation for his seminal work on developing a truly Indigenous educational theory and philosophy came from the obvious needs he cites in the following:

- 1) The need for a contemporary perspective of American Indian education that is principally derived from, and informed by, the thoughts, orientations, and cultural philosophies of Indian people themselves.

- 2) The need to explore alternative approaches to education that directly and successfully address the requirements of Indian populations during this time of educational and ecological crisis.

- 3) The need to integrate, synthesize, organize, and focus the accumulated materials from a wide range of disciplines about Indian cultures and Indian education towards the evolution of a contemporary philosophy for American Indian education that is Indigenously inspired and ecologically sound.

## CONCLUSION

### IS THERE ROOM FOR A MIDDLE GROUND?

At the end of the day, this is the fundamental question. Is there room for a middle ground? Can Mi'Kmaq and other indigenous knowledge systems, along with their ways of handling learning and teaching in a holistic manner, provide an alter-Native source of education? Is the mainstream educational body willing to accommodate, accept and acknowledge the relevance of other ways of knowing?

In the context of this thesis, I have tried to identify traditional Mi'Kmaq knowledge that can be attributed to the cultural survival of a people as well as to legitimize and validate this knowledge base as a foundation for our education. We have a duty as educators and as a society of the twenty first century to develop curricula and accommodate ways of knowing and teaching that will fully recognize the relevance of indigenous knowledge. In the same way that the concept of biodiversity has been accepted as vital to our planet's survival, we must also consider cultural diversity as vital to our survival as human beings. This diversity of knowledge sources might some day prove to be crucial. The traditional and cultural elements stored since time immemorial in our collective memory bank have to be released and redistributed through every means available today, including new technologies, videos and the Internet, which can reach remote places, while at the same time keep an element of *orality* and be shared by the community in a *circle* concept.

The time has come to reverse the misguided educational policies of assimilation of the past few decades when we were taught in school that, we as Indians did not have pleasant role models, we didn't have a past before contact because we didn't have a writing system, we did not have a history before contact, because we were scalpers and savages. We were taught that brown skins were nothing but dirty, drunks and welfare bums. Our people filled the jails and hospitals as criminals and patients, far exceeding our proportional representation in the mainstream population. The fact is that the core of our values and our ways of living had already been to a great extent extirpated from us, but the educational system tried to convince our people that mainstream values were better than ours

and that we “had to” adapt. Our values were outdated and had no place in the modern world of science and technology, the “space age.” We were told that if we held onto our old values and traditions we would never fit into mainstream society. We had to assimilate in the civilized world if we wanted to survive. When one of us succeeded in imitating members of the mainstream middle-class (language, urban setting, consumerism, dress code, etc.), that person was told “You are a credit to your race.”

The basic foundation of Mi'Kmaq knowledge can be equated to a science as in many evolving forms of indigenous knowledge (see Clement, Cajete and Deloria). In order to stem the tide of alienation among Mi'Kmaq youth in the mainstream educational system, I am attempting to find a common ground where students can feel comfortable learning about their culture as well as mainstream educational material, and this applies to all age groups, not only to the small group reaching higher education, a place where they can learn to understand who they are according to a Mi'Kmaq philosophy of life, and hopefully, involve their families and communities in the process. In the Mi'Kmaq traditions, everything is connected and related. All sources of knowledge stem from our creation, ourselves, family and community. There is a belief that all things are created equal and we are but one element of that creation. People were not put on Otsitgamoo (Mother Earth) to “master, tame, control or discover” other peoples and their lands.

As a positive initiative, some institutions of higher learning, like the University College of Cape Breton, have already organized workshops and seminars to explore the middle ground approach to learning. These meetings have brought about a lively exchange between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators on learning strategies in mainstream education and in Mi'Kmaq cultural knowledge. Notions like teaching truth in history were explored, where the Aboriginal perspective has been noticeably absent. Subjects like science, biology and chemistry could also involve activities utilizing everyday Aboriginal life, while reflecting traditional values and principles. This is the kind of curricula that would entice or excite the imagination and creative spirit of Aboriginal youth to stay in school longer.

But in our endeavour to “institutionalize” indigenous ways of knowing, we must exercise caution so that we do not inadvertently defeat the purpose of preserving a certain approach to learning that is holistic and interactive by nature. We must exercise caution for many reasons. The delicate balance between spiritual practices and traditional ways of doing and knowing must always be observed. In order to advance our positions in the field of academia, we cannot move blindly or hastily. To give respect to the forms of oral tradition that still exist out there, indigenous to our world, is to believe in the spirit of the “Old Ways.” We cannot question the sources or offer alternative ideologies. Discourse and paradigm dialogues will only serve to destroy what little is left of the genuine indigenous world. If we can record indigenous knowledge and build discussions into these records, it would be possible to create a concept of indigenous knowledge rather than destroy it by questioning it to death.

The field of academic studies needs to support the historical and philosophical base of indigenous societies by more clearly understanding the collective oral traditional knowledge and its wisdom. The ways of treating this knowledge without taking away the long-standing integrity and dignity of a people requires more serious and careful scrutiny. In that domain, Trent University is scheduled to launch its first full-scale Aboriginal philosophies program in 1999. Oral tradition deserves a place of recognition in both societies, Western and Aboriginal.

In conclusion, there is a middle ground for Mi’Kmaq knowledge and it seems that the mainstream educational system is ready to open up and accommodate new horizons, for the benefit of all. Hopefully, it will not remain at the experimental phase. Some of us are already standing in the middle ground. In terms of defining that middle ground, it is the place in between cultures, peoples, the past and the future, a place in between our understanding of our world and of other people’s understanding of their world. *“I believe you understand what you think I said, but I’m not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant”*. (Ross, 1992: 5). Rupert Ross used this quote that was found written on a school blackboard while he was travelling as part of an itinerant court system to a fly-in community in northern Ontario. It was written by an anonymous person, but to him it conveyed the message that the Indians of the area were sending to mainstream society.

In a modern society that seems at a loss to address the problems faced by youth – as we can see in the rising crime rates at a very early age and the general lack of direction experienced by the younger members of our society – perhaps it is time to give them a positive system of values to live by. Aboriginal children should be taught from an early age and all through their schooling to be proud of their heritage. They should be encouraged to learn about indigenous knowledge and to practice their traditional system of values: respect for others and all things on “Mother Earth.” They should be encouraged to share, be honest and be true to themselves. Once they have that solid ground to stand on, they will be ready to become fully contributing members of society, achieve higher education if that is their goal, and at the same time, keep their integrity as First Nations.

## **ALL MY RELATIONS**

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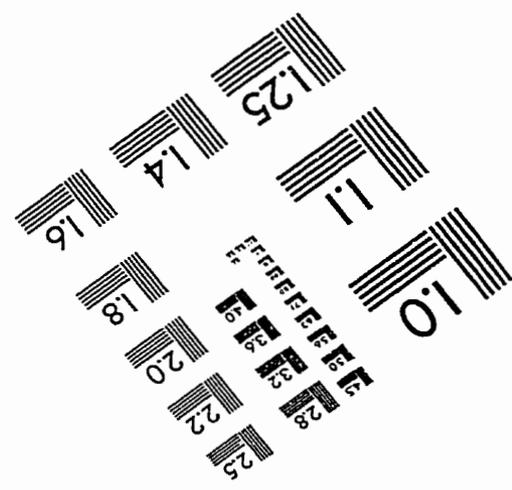
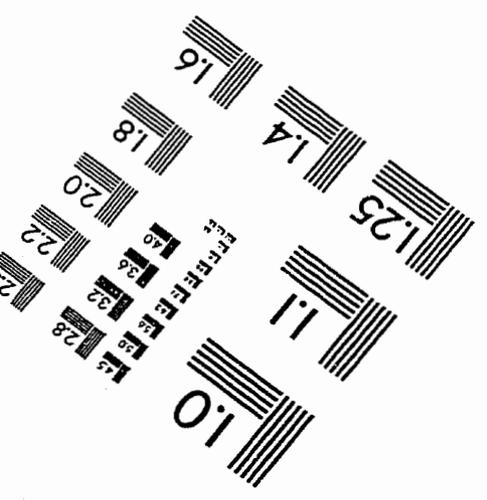
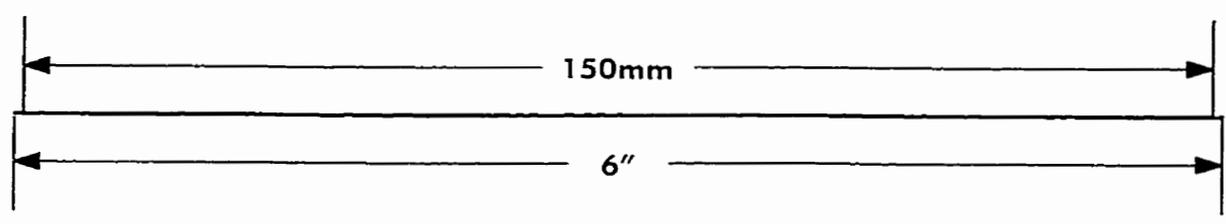
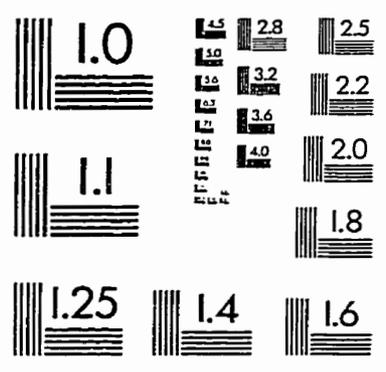
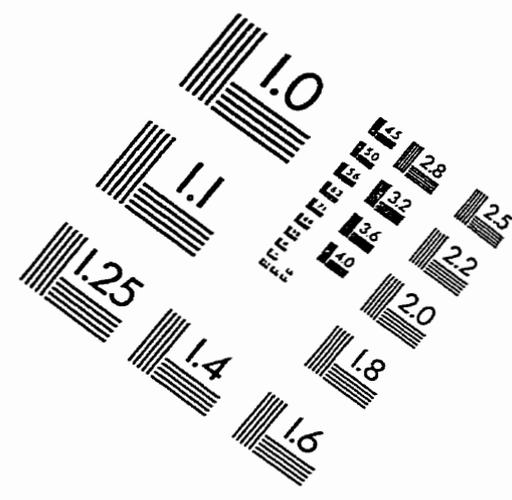
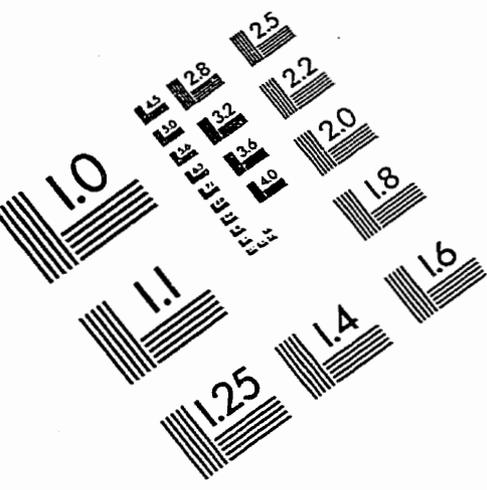
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