

**Ketmite'timnej
Remember Who You Are
The Educational Histories of Three Generations of Mi'kmaq Women**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Education

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We accept the thesis as conforming

to the required standard

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Mt. Stewart, PE

January, 2001

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Abstract

Motivating Aboriginal youth to complete their education is of great importance, not only to the future of Aboriginal communities, but to the whole of Canadian society. When we come to understand present-day Mi'kmaq customs, beliefs, values, and attitudes as they may relate to education, we will be able to proceed with increased awareness for all involved in the education of Mi'kmaq youth. Focusing on one of Prince Edward Island's First Nation Reserves where all students attend public schools, this site specific research investigates the presence of Mi'kmaq cultural traditions and how they may impact on the academic achievement of Mi'kmaq youth. Ethnographic style interviewing to explore the educational histories of four Mi'kmaq women in one family, through three different generations, yields insights about Mi'kmaq culture, spirituality, and traditions. The voices of all four Mi'kmaq women are woven around the thoughts of other researchers in an attempt to promote cross-cultural communication and understanding. Themes emerging from the research include the internal and external forces which challenge the identity of Aboriginal people, the characteristics of a school environment which supports learning for Aboriginal students, and an examination of the cultural/spiritual reasons underlying academic success for Aboriginal learners.

Dedication

To

Misiksk, Payton,

&

All Mi'kmaq Youth

May You

Live & Learn

Surrounded

In

Equality

&

Justice

Preface

For the purposes of this report, the terms Native, Indian, First Nations, Native American, Indigenous people, and Aboriginal are used synonymously and interchangeably with equal respect and dignity. The same is true for the terms Micmac and Mi'kmaq. According to Paul (2000, p. 10) the term Mi'kmaq, rather than Micmac, is now the preferred choice of First Nation people, but the word Micmac has been around for at least 350 years and is cherished by many.

This story is intentionally woven into a framework I believe effectively shares many aspects of Mi'kmaq culture. I have tried to blend, weave, and integrate the voices of four Mi'kmaq women, the voices of other researchers, and the voice of my own conscience around themes so that each voice can be heard. If you are willing to listen, the voices of these Mi'kmaq women may speak to you, personally.

Acknowledgements

Giving Thanks

I would like to begin by giving thanks to Mary Jane, Judy, Barbara, and Amelia for sharing their educational histories with me. It is an honor to have their teachings to share with you. I admire the courage, determination, and passion these Mi'kmaq women demonstrate daily for the survival of their culture. I would also like to give thanks to the Abegweit Band Council for accepting my research proposal and allowing my research to be conducted on the Scotchfort Reserve. My sincere thanks is also given to my thesis supervisor Dr. Fiona O'Donoghue, my family, and friends for their encouragement and support during the development of this thesis. My deep appreciation also goes out to Dr. Basil Favaro (Advisory Committee Member), Dr. Anne Louise Brookes (Internal Examiner) and Dr. Jeff Orr (External Examiner) for their guidance.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Personal Background

As a novice researcher, with over twenty years of teaching experience in the Prince Edward Island public school system, it is important to state that my decision to conduct research into Aboriginal educational concerns is a matter of personal conscience. Realizing my own ignorance of Native culture and traditions, I wondered how much other educators or administrators knew about Mi'kmaq life. After all, "if the educated and the educators of Canadian society do not know about our first peoples, how are we to work towards their inclusion in our society, consciousness and institutions (Collier, 1998, p. 56)?" I was worried about the negative stereotypes I heard and wanted to understand the educational concerns in a deeper way. I felt that "if public awareness of Aboriginal issues is to be enhanced, we need to move beyond stereotypes to the complexity of Aboriginal life (Warry, 1998, p. 23)." This research was undertaken in an effort to begin understanding Mi'kmaq cultural traditions and consider how they may impact on the academic achievement of Native students. I feel increased awareness of Mi'kmaq culture and traditions may help educators understand the situation Native students often face.

In retrospect, growing up only a few miles from two Mi'kmaq reservations on Prince Edward Island didn't have any significant influence, positive nor negative, upon

my knowledge of or respect of their Native culture. My schooling, both at the elementary and secondary level, never included any interaction with Native students; they attended different public schools. Other than having a few Mi'kmaq acquaintances during the teenage years, Mi'kmaq culture was just what I read about in my textbooks. Entering the P.E.I. teaching profession in the 70's, I knew little about the Island's First Nations. It was a fact that, in those days, my Social Studies lessons on how, over several centuries, Canadian governments have willingly stripped Aboriginals of their land, their culture, their spiritual beliefs and their way of life, were merely a series of textbook lessons to be taught. Personal sympathy for that part of our history was conveyed to my students, but it seemed to end there.

It has only been in the last decade that my teaching of such material has taken on a high degree of empathy for, and greater understanding of, the painful realities of their lives. Thanks to a one year teacher transfer to a school which my Mi'kmaq neighbors attended, new relationships were forged with several Mi'kmaq students and their families. As these friendships have broadened to encompass more of the Native community, my eyes and my heart have been opened to the injustices they suffer. During the past five years, by means of direct conversation with Native youth and personal observation during volunteer tutoring, I have been learning about the struggles some Mi'kmaq students experience within the public school system. I now understand the privileges associated with being a white middle class worker in a new light. In my heart I knew Aboriginal concerns should be researched here on Prince Edward Island, but first I needed to find and study previous research.

Venturing into Research

As I began searching for pertinent literature, I happened across a letter to a British Columbia teacher from an Indian child's mother. Since that particular letter continues to impact upon my thinking as a teacher, I would like to share excerpts from it now, so that you may get an introduction to the complex situation Aboriginal students, parents, and their teachers may face.

Before you take charge of the classroom that contains my child...Write down and examine all the information and opinions you possess about Indians. What are the stereotypes and untested assumptions that you bring with you into the classroom?...What values, class prejudices and moral principles do you take for granted as universal? Please remember that "different from" is not the same as "worse than" or "better than" and the yardstick you use to measure your own life satisfactorily may not be appropriate for their lives. The term "culturally deprived" was invented by well-meaning middle class white[s] to describe something they could not understand.

Too many teachers, unfortunately, seem to see their role as rescuer. My child does not need to be rescued; he does not consider being an Indian a misfortune. He has culture, probably older than yours; he has meaningful values and a rich and varied experiential background...Our children's experiences have been different from those of the "typical" white middle class for whom most

school curricula seems to have been designed....Nonetheless, my child's experiences have been as intense and meaningful to him as any child's....He is not accustomed to having to ask permission to do the ordinary things that are part of normal living. He is seldom forbidden to do anything; more usually the consequences of an action are explained to him and he is allowed to decide for himself whether or not to act. His entire existence since he has been old enough to see and hear has been an experiential learning situation, arranged to provide him with the opportunities to develop his skills and confidence in his own capacities. Didactic teaching will be an alien experience for him....Can you help him acquire the intellectual skills he needs without at the same time imposing your values on top of those he already has? Respect my child. He is a person. He has a right to be himself.

(Northian Newsletter, a letter to a B.C. teacher from an Indian child's mother, 1993)

Finding research involving First Nations education in the Maritime region of Canada proved to be a difficult task. Leavitt's research (1991, 1994) done in conjunction with the Micmac-Maliseet Institute, first convinced me that Aboriginal life histories could be beneficial as educational research. A visit with Professor Leavitt at the University of New Brunswick, proved to be invaluable as a source of references for my work. Until recently, very little has been published in this region of Canada. At present, very important work is underway in Nova Scotia, where Orr (personal communication, November, 2000) and his colleague, Jerome-Paul, are combining their efforts to research

what it means to be involved in First Nations education from the perspective of Aboriginal teachers. Using a life history methodology, their research focuses on Aboriginal teachers' stories of self-determination.

I was surprised during my preliminary literature search to find so many researchers identifying certain Native values as almost universal, regardless of location. Numerous research articles dealing with Aboriginal education, from places as far away as Hawaii and Australia, revealed similarities I had been noticing during my limited experiences with Mi'kmaq culture. Lazurus (1982, p. 84) reports a list, which was originally prepared by Bryde (1972), clarifying what he believes to be the basic values of Native Americans. These values, summarized below, include:

- **Children are accorded the same degree of respect as an adult. Children are considered important units of the family. They are considered more important than material possessions.**
- **An importance is placed on the values of cooperation and harmony with the environment. One accepts the natural world and does not try to change it.**
- **The individual is judged by his or her relative contribution to the group. Generosity and sharing are important attributes; the Native American gives in order to get.**
- **Competition is encouraged, but in an intra-individual sense. Competition can be acceptable as long as one does not try to hurt anyone. The Native American learns to get along with others and cooperation is highly prized.**
- **There is a desire to live an unhurried and present-time oriented life-style. The**

Native American lives in the present and is concerned about the now rather than planning for the future.

- **Children are not generally accustomed to the structure imposed by adults, especially as found in the school setting. Talking loudly and reprimanding children is considered ill-mannered.**
- **There is a respect for age. The older Native Americans who have lived a long time are well respected for their wisdom and knowledge.**
- **There is a value placed on the traditional life-style. Children are taught the ancient legends and cultural traditions.**
- **Peace and politeness are considered essential, and confrontation is a violation of cultural norms.**

Other researchers (Burgess, 1980; Foerster & Little Soldier, 1974; Hynd & Garcia, 1979; Zintz, 1962) had reached similar conclusions. When I read Joann Sebastian Morris' *Native Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors, Together with Educational Considerations* (Appendix F) in a 1997 New Brunswick Department of Education publication, *Teachers' Handbook: An Introduction to Maliseet and Mi'kmaq Societies and Aboriginal Education Issues*, I began to wonder even more about the Mi'kmaq population on Prince Edward Island. I began to raise questions about the cultural values and traditions that may continue to impact on their educational experiences.

General Problem Statement

In considering the range of issues which impact on Mi'kmaq education I found myself raising the following question. Do such cultural traditions exist today in Prince Edward Island's Aboriginal communities? If so, how do they impact on the academic achievement of Native youth? To date, no such research has been completed on Prince Edward Island; our understanding of Mi'kmaq culture remains, therefore, very limited. In an effort to improve this situation, in this study I chose to investigate the presence of such cultural traditions in one family on a Prince Edward Island Mi'kmaq Reserve. The educational implications of such traditions were also explored.

Through the Provincial Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee, the Prince Edward Island government has recently begun to work with educators and Aboriginal community representatives in order to help Native students achieve their full potential. This particular investigation was undertaken in an effort to go one step further, to begin understanding Mi'kmaq cultural traditions and to consider how they may impact on the academic achievement of Native students. In other words, I am interested in understanding the issues related to education as much as possible from a Mi'kmaq perspective. I felt this could be accomplished by speaking with several generations of Mi'kmaq so historical and traditional aspects of cultural influence could be explored. I further narrowed my range by choosing to interview only women. I remain hopeful this project will have some impact on the Prince Edward Island school system with regard to

increased awareness of Native culture. It is also my hope that some Aboriginal people across the province will feel empowered by my attempt to investigate and document Mi'kmaq cultural traditions.

Purpose

The main goal of this research is to explore the customs, values, beliefs, and attitudes toward education and schooling, of three generations of Mi'kmaq women, as well as to investigate how Mi'kmaq cultural traditions may impact on the public education of Aboriginal youth on Prince Edward Island. As Marshall & Rossman (1999, p. 121) point out, one understands a culture through the history of one person's development or life within it, told in ways that capture the person's own feelings, views and perspectives. Choosing women as participants was an intentional delimitation in order to focus on the cultural traditions of the participants, as young children themselves, as mothers, as grandmothers, and as a great-grandmother. As a mother myself, I hoped to find common ground with these women and thereby increase the possibility of success through trusting relationships. I agree with Ochs & Schieffelin (1985) that "Culture is what organizes and gives meaning to the care giver-child interaction. How care givers and children speak and act toward one another is linked to cultural patterns that extend and have consequences beyond the specific interactions observed (p. 284)." Viewing mothers as the primary care givers in many families, it was my personal choice to interview only women.

Being an Indian woman is not easy. I believe we have to look at ourselves and see what we portray to the rest of the Indian world in order to make education more meaningful to our children. I raised my child as a miniature adult. I raised him the way I was raised....Native values are often transferred very early in the socialization process. We tend to forget that WE socialize, WE train our children. We socialize them or teach them to live as human beings; WE teach them a language and along with that language, WE teach them a world view or a way of looking at the world. That process must be examined when we teach children. The essence of education is that it occurs in the home, the community and the school.

Medicine (1987, pp. 21-22)

Significance

Motivating Native youth to complete their education is of great importance to the future of aboriginal communities.

The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated. It shapes the language and pathways of thinking, the contours of character and values, the social skills and creative potential of the individual. It determines the productive skills of a people. Repeated assaults on the culture and collective identity of Aboriginal people have weakened the foundations of Aboriginal

society and contributed to the alienation that drives some to self-destruction and anti-social behavior. Social problems among Aboriginal people are, in large measure, a legacy of history.

(RCAP, 1996, Volume 3, Chapter 5, p.1)

Sark (1992, n.p.) reports, “One major problem experienced by Prince Edward Island Natives is extremely high unemployment due to a limited reservoir of skills and experience compared with those required by industry, private enterprise, and government.” In the last two years, many new jobs have been created for the Abegweit Band members. Building and maintaining properties on reserve land has always been a source of employment for able-bodied residents, but now Abegweit Band members are also learning to become commercial fishermen, handling many accounting and secretarial duties, operating a Headstart Kindergarten program, and conducting a wide range of other essential Band services. Along with the task of learning so many new skills needed for these new career opportunities, Mi’kmaq people also have the added pressure of taking on more and more responsibility for self-government. In order to meet these challenges, Mi’kmaq people require skills which only a quality education can provide. Improving academic achievement for Mi’kmaq students is imperative to the future well being of the entire Abegweit Band.

The new Abegweit Band Chief and Council know firsthand, through their own life experiences, that “Lack of education results in high unemployment rates, low earnings, a perpetuation of the state of dependency currently being experienced by Native

peoples, as well as social consequences such as increased welfare burdens and a wealth of untapped human potential (Giles, 1985). As Warry reminds us, "The absence of meaningful work, poor educational experiences, and a reliance on welfare creates an overall economic burden that is critically linked to patterns of poor physical and mental health (1998, p. 68)." Those now in control seem committed to changing all of that and education must play a major role in that process.

The social consequences of improved academic achievement of Native people are far reaching, but Native students must search for a personal balance between achieving economic and political independence and maintaining Native traditions. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples heard from Aboriginal people that they want education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society, but this is only part of their vision. "Education must develop children and youth as aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. Youth that emerge from school must be grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity. Consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically (RCAP, Volume 3, Chapter 5, p. 2)." It is important to investigate how Prince Edward Island's public school system might assist First Nations students and their families achieve these goals. I believe that positive change here on Prince Edward Island will require a concerted effort on all parties involved in the education system, both on and off reserve.

This study may encourage policy changes in teacher training and preparation for

working with Native students in the school setting. Lipka reminds us that, “few schools of education require their students to demonstrate multicultural knowledge, knowledge of language diversity, or skill in interacting effectively with non-mainstream children (1998, p. 92).” Enabling teachers to recognize embedded cultural aspects of Native upbringing may lead to a better understanding of the reasons behind some of their actions. In my opinion, educational counsellors, too, need to become familiar with Native culture, traditions, and value system in an effort to work more effectively with Native students. Malcolm (1987, p. 118) states that many researchers have noted that indigenous students from various parts of the world experience common difficulties with the formal education model.

As educators, I believe we must take a close look at how we are interacting with individual students. The observers in Leavitt’s study of New Brunswick Native school children “noted that some Native students seemed to lack study skills, listening skills, and self-discipline (1994a, p. 16).” Leavitt concluded more research is needed to determine “Do Native students in fact, lack these skills or do they have them in ways that would become apparent if the educational setting were appropriate to their particular styles of studying, listening, and maintaining self discipline (1994a, p. 16)?” A better understanding of the critical and complex issues of cultural diversity here on Prince Edward Island will benefit all of society. I agree with Lipka & Mohatt that we must come to realize “cultural knowledge is an asset (1998, p. 93).”

Medicine (1987, p. 25) reports that due to past schooling experiences, many Natives have not prepared their children to interact effectively in Native society or in the

white world in a way that will help them bridge the two styles of learning and living.

Reflecting on such a statement makes one wonder to what degree residential schooling is still a factor in the everyday lives of Prince Edward Island Mi'kmaq people. The participants in my study did not attend residential school, so further research is necessary to determine the impact of that form of government imposed education.

My investigation of literature has also pointed to the need for further study on self-concept or self-esteem issues as related to language, culture, and the academic achievement of Native students. The task of teaching the individual in a culturally diverse society is a challenging one, but school should never be an alienating experience for anyone. Rather than turning a blind eye to differences of race, color, and culture, more research could be conducted in the areas of promoting diversity and teaching respectfully about differences. As the letter from the B.C. Mother points out, Aboriginal children do not need to be rescued, they need to be respected. I hope this study will significantly increase understanding of and respect for Mi'kmaq culture here on Prince Edward Island.

Chapter Two

Design and Methodology

Choice of Methodology

Qualitative research offers the opportunity to explore Native cultural traditions in their natural Island setting. The method of ethnographic-style interviewing is the primary tool for this investigation; I believe it offers the best method for discovering the cultural knowledge of the informants. Culture needs to be understood within the framework of Mi'kmaq people's world view, belief systems, and changing way of life, rather than focussing on the artistic and material aspects of Native culture. The value of the ethnographic interview lies in its focus on culture through each individual's perspective. Considering Spradley's (1979) definition of ethnography, certain aspects of this research method are helping me understand another way of life from the Native point of view, as much as possible since I am not Aboriginal. Rich narrative descriptions provide the primary source of data for this research.

Site Selection

By focusing on one of the Island's First Nations Reserves, with all students attending public school, this qualitative research was site specific. Marshall & Rossman

(1999, p. 69) identify a realistic site as one where entry is possible, there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present, the researcher is likely able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study, and data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured. Given my previous history with this particular Reserve, I felt reasonably well positioned to conduct autobiographical style interviews.

Purposeful Sampling Strategies

Following the advice of Marshall & Rossman (1999), I selected information rich cases for in-depth study. The criteria used to select participants required they be female Mi'kmaq representing different generations of one family who have lived on reserve while participating in P.E.I.'s educational system. Elders were welcomed as participants. By exploring the educational histories of one family through different generations, and quite possibly different acculturation experiences with the dominant society, a major portion of their life stories is examined. This purposeful sampling yields many insights about Mi'kmaq culture and tradition. Leavitt (1994b, p. 183) describes one good source of information about traditional education in Aboriginal communities to be the expanding collection of life histories in Aboriginal voices since they give rich new insights into the learning of individual men and women and the learning that takes place within their communities. Leavitt reminds us it is unfortunate that Micmac or Maliseet authors have published little in the way of life history, particularly since First Nations

people in the Maritimes have experienced the effects of European contact for longer than any other part of Canada.

Given the length and depth of this bicultural history, their life histories, especially those of the present generations are often quite unlike those living farther west or north. Their stories offer invaluable guidance to the conscientious teacher of Micmac or Maliseet children. Life history, whether spoken or written, is helpful because it contains not only reflections on education but also indications of the cultural context in which learning and teaching take place.

Leavitt (1994b, p. 183)

By sending a letter of request to the Chief and Band Council for approval of this study and by interviewing residents from a nearby reservation, my entry into the field was less threatening. My knowledge of the local community helped facilitate dialogue. I believe my purpose is respected as a sincere effort to improve the life of Native people.

Data Collection Strategies

Believing we need to listen to Native voices, I was fortunate in being able to collect my data from a family living on a Prince Edward Island Reserve. Members of the family of the late Frank Jadis agreed to share their educational experiences with me because they believed it was important to share the information with both Mi'kmaq and non-Aboriginal people. They believed it might help to promote understanding and

acceptance. The stories of a great-grandmother, her daughters, and one of her granddaughters will follow.



Jadis Family Photo (mid 1980's)
Back Row: Peter, Judy, Francis, Barbara, Tommy
Seated in Front: Michael, Frank, Mary Jane, Joe
(Mary Jane, Judy, and Barbara are participants in this study.)

I began collecting data by completing qualitative, autobiographical interviews on the educational histories of four women. During August, 2000, the interviews began at a comfortable pace, at a time most convenient to the informants. Full attention was given to the needs and desires of the participants. The time frame for the interviews extended into the fall of 2000.

This research design was carried out with four Mi'kmaq women giving informed consent and with every effort to avoid harming any people or disrupting the setting. I believe that any violation of participant privacy was kept to an absolute minimum. Participants made personal decisions to acknowledge their contribution to this research and I am grateful they took this opportunity to voice personal feelings and thoughts

publicly. All participants agreed that their real names be used in this thesis. There was minimal disruption of the participants' everyday life, minimal risk or danger and minimal possibility of human rights violations.

Several interviews with the individual participants took place in order to achieve my goal of thick description. In-depth interviews to try and capture the deeper meaning of experience in the words of the participants were the primary data collection strategy for this study. All interviews were tape recorded so I could listen intently to each of the participant's stories. Although open-ended in nature, these interviews were semi-structured in that a guiding set of questions were used to keep the research focused. Everyday language was used in the interviews.

As Marshall & Rossman (1999) remind us, data collection does not stop with the interview. "An ethnographic record consists of field notes, tape recordings, pictures, artifacts, and anything else which documents the cultural scene under study (Spradley, 1979, p. 69)." I am including pictures as they may assist the reader in gaining that understanding. It was particularly important to follow Spradley's suggestion and "make an introspective record of fieldwork to take into account personal biases and feelings, to understand personal influence on the research (1979, p. 76)." By personally reflecting on the interpersonal interactions and what was learned immediately following each interview, valuable context was gained for the later analysis of transcripts.

The efficient recording of data facilitated data retrieval and management. I transcribed each individual interview personally. Interview tapes were kept in a locked filing cabinet, intact and organized, along with their complete verbatim transcripts and

other data collected. All data will be returned to the participants as soon as the research process is complete. Keeping disciplined subjectivity in mind throughout the process, it was important that the interview tapes were well organized and readily available to aid in validity checks and triangulation.

Inductive Data Analysis

Inductive analysis was used to discover categories, themes, and patterns from the data. Spradley explains that “the concept of theme has its roots in the general idea that cultures are more than bits and pieces of custom. Rather, every culture is a complex pattern (1979, p. 185).” “Most cultural themes remain at the tacit level of knowledge. People do not express them easily, even though they know the cultural principle and use it to organize their behavior and interpret experience. Themes not only recur again and again throughout different parts of a culture, they also connect different subsystems of a culture (Spradley, 1979, p. 188).” My analysis consisted of comparing and contrasting the stories of these three generations of Mi’kmaq women. In the process, both commonalities and significant differences were revealed which assisted in the interpretation of data. As a qualitative researcher, not knowing what themes might emerge, I followed the advice of an elder to her grandson, “Ye see, Little Tree, there ain’t no way of learning, except by letting ye do.... Ye’ll have to learn as ye go” (Carter, 1976, p. 101).

Clandinin & Connelly (1994) warn researchers: it is a “struggle to express one’s

own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants' experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voices (p. 423)." I soon came to realize the act of reducing data in the process of analysis certainly required a balancing act, as described by Doucet & Mauthner (1998). This balancing act involves three different and sometimes conflicting standpoints: the multiple and varying voices and stories of each of the individuals interviewed; the researcher's own voice; as well as the voices and perspectives from existing theories which the researcher brings to the study. Keeping in mind that "translation includes the entire process of discovering the meanings of one culture and communicating these meanings to people in another culture" (Spradley, 1979, p. 205), every attempt was made to keep the audience in mind and to focus on the substance of the findings as the final thesis was written. My priority, though, was to enable the voices of the participants to carry their own issues and concerns to the audience.

Through the analysis created by weaving significant findings from previous research with my own thoughts and the voices of these women, it is hoped educators will become more aware of some challenges associated with being Aboriginal on Prince Edward Island. The understandings I have taken from this research experience can not possibly represent the full lived experiences of these women, only a cross section thereof. As a Cree man once said to Rupert Ross, "You cannot pass along what another person really told you; you can only pass along what you heard (Ross, p. ix)." The perspective you, the reader, may bring to these stories may be quite different from mine as a white,

middle class female educator. For that reason I have included many direct quotes from each of their stories, as they were literally told to me, so that you may interpret the educational histories of these Native women in your own way. To not let you hear their voices would be yet a further injustice imposed by the dominant society's educational system.

“Staying close to the data is the most powerful means of telling the story. Creative synthesis enables one to bring together as a whole the individual's story including the meaning of the lived experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 47).” The format used to present my research was intentionally created to allow these Mi'kmaq voices to be heard. I realize, that by using stories and pictures, my ways of presenting what I “have chosen to call data are as old as the hills; they may be new in the context of educational research but they have been around forever (Eisner, 1997, p. 5).” My confidence in writing this style of qualitative research was reinforced by Eisner who states: “Human feeling does not pollute understanding. In fact, understanding others and the situations they face may well require it. Facts described literally are unlikely to have the power to evoke in the reader what the reader needs to experience to know the person someone portrays (Eisner, 1997, p. 8).”

I have therefore chosen to weave the voices of all four women participants around recurring themes. My own thoughts, along with those of other researchers, are used intermittently to link the data together into a framework I have designed to hopefully share this research knowledge effectively with my audience. The analysis required to initially weave the three generations of stories together around recurring themes is

supplemented by further analysis woven in and around these voices. Large sections of text are intentionally used as an integral part of the thesis. As Ross (1996) reports, “There seems to be a wide-spread Aboriginal understanding that thought or information must be shared in ways that leave it open to the listeners to take whatever meaning they wish they have heard. There is a clear expectation that different people will react to ‘what was said’ in very different ways (pp. ix-x).” Your interpretation of their stories may be very different than mine, but further academic analysis is included in Chapter Five entitled Building Bridges.

As Agar (1980, p. 9) puts it, “In ethnography...you learn something (collect some data), then you try to make sense out of it (analysis), then you go back and see if the interpretation makes sense in light of new experience (collect more data), then you refine your interpretation (more analysis) and so on. The process is dialectic, not linear.” When one stops to realize the importance of talking circles, healing circles, and the cycles of nature to Aboriginal people, it seemed appropriate to be conducting qualitative, ethnographic-style research for the purpose of studying Native culture. If Aboriginal learning is not of linear style then neither should be the research investigating their traditions.

Design Validity

Following the advice of McMillan & Schumacher (1997), this research was “conducted in a natural setting to reflect the reality of life experience (p. 405).” Other

strategies used to ensure validity include prolonged and persistent fieldwork and the use of low inference descriptors throughout the research process. Mechanically recording data using a high quality tape recorder provided an accurate record of the interviews. Self-questioning, re-evaluation, and informal member checking also assisted in data analysis. Once the weaving of the four Mi'kmaq voices was complete, the participants were very helpful in confirming the accuracy of my data analysis. Positive comments and permission to use the participants' real names provided powerful motivation for the completion of this research. It is encouraging that "validity of qualitative designs is the degree to which the interpretations and concepts have mutual meanings between the participants and the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 404)."

Limitations of the Design

A limitation in this study includes the fact that I am from a different cultural group and represent a majority, Western-European perspective. Spradley reminds us that the ethnographer becomes a major research instrument and that "ethnographic interviewing represents a powerful tool for invading other people's way of life (Spradley, 1979, p. 36)." Invading their privacy was never my intention; it was a privilege to be allowed entry into the very personal lives of these four women. Their full participation was essential in my research for "story-telling is integral to understanding lives (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 158)." As a Prince Edward Island teacher interested in the educational success of Aboriginal students and as a University of Prince Edward Island graduate student

researcher, I clearly explained my purpose, my goals, and how I intended to use their words to help the situation of Native people. Vigilance and discipline were required to prevent the imposition of personal values through an inappropriate phrasing of questions or during the interpretation of data. I tried to convey to the Native people my desire to:

- Understand the educational experience of Native people here on Prince Edward Island from their point of view.
- Understand the meaning of their experiences raising children.
- Tape record conversations so I may use their own words to help me explain things to others, just as they explained things to me.

In being disciplined in accomplishing this, I tried to minimize researcher bias.

This research is not an evaluation of Aboriginal culture, their academic achievement, nor the competency of their teachers; rather it is a study to identify aspects of Native culture which may have an impact on their academic performance within the public school system. Many other factors which may impact on Native education are worthy of further study. I did not delve into the possible desire for, nor the implications of, Band-controlled education for this Reserve, but I understand the Abegweit First Nation has the right to take complete control over the education of their children. Not all First Nations people on Prince Edward Island live on reserve and one Band presently operates its own school for Grades One to Six. This research can not be applied generally to other situations. When we come to understand present-day Native customs, beliefs, values, and attitudes as they may relate to education, I believe we will be able to proceed with increased awareness for all involved in the education of Native youth.

Chapter Three

Background and Contextual Literature Review

Introduction

Although it is not the goal of this research to provide readers with a complete history of Canada's dealings with Native people, I must provide substantial background and history to put this research in context. The following literature has been included here to give you, the reader, a context in which to begin setting your frame of mind before reading the research that follows. In actuality, you will find important pieces of literature woven into many sections of this work. This contextual review, however, outlines many aspects of history and literature that I feel are necessary to help the reader begin to understand life as a Mi'kmaq in contemporary Canadian society. Even though I must agree with Boldt (1993, p. ix) "the story of Canadian government oppression and exploitation of Indians has been well documented," I have intentionally used the Federal Government of Canada's Department of Indian And Northern Affairs Internet resources extensively as a source of historical data to avoid any perceived bias against government actions.

History is such an important factor in the lives of Native people, I believe all educators, all students, indeed all Canadians, need to become well aware of our National policies, past and present, as they apply to the First Nations of Canada. In the words of

Sister Dorothy Moore, "Aboriginal tribes in North America seldom have cause for celebration when the pages of history are turned back. No matter how they look at it, the pain is always there; as a people they were misrepresented, and the resulting injustices have adversely affected them to this day (Moore, 2000, p. 40)." The true picture, according to Chief Fontaine (1998) is that "the lived experience of First Nations people is neither known nor understood by most Canadians." For almost half of the last millennium, Aboriginal people on Prince Edward Island have been victims of deprivation, oppression, and segregation, yet they have managed to survive (Abegweit Review, 1993, p. 20). "Over the past 200 years, Canadian society has stripped Aboriginals of their land, their culture, their spiritual beliefs and their way of life. Virtually every government organization has served to marginalize the needs and rights of native peoples; the education system has been the worst (Chisholm, 1994, p. 28)." Children have lost touch with who they are, where they came from, and what place there might be for them in the contemporary world (Corson, 1996). I believe we must work to change that reality; the oppression of Aboriginals must become more than just a regrettable part of our history. To quote Chief Phil Fontaine (1998), "For true healing to occur, one eye must look to the past to explain how things came to be, and the other must look to the future with a view to designing measures which will make the community healthier for all concerned."

Whether you realize it yet or not, the issues that affect First Nations affect all Canadians.

History of Our Nation

Immigration and Aboriginal History.

The history of Canada is one of immigration; Canada is a nation of people who came from somewhere else. Reflecting on your personal heritage, who you are and where your ancestors came from, may help you realize the majority of Canadians arrived here within the past 400 years, most within the past few generations. Canada's Aboriginal people have lived here for thousands of years. Today we, as Canadians, are only beginning to face up to this historical legacy and I believe the legal and moral issues are far-reaching, deeply affecting the Canadian conscience.

Evidence of indigenous people living in this land dates from roughly 14,000 to 11,000 years ago, during the time when the land reappeared from under the great ice sheets that had covered most of the country during the last ice age. Scientists believe that American Indians are descended from the peoples of eastern Asia, crossing the land bridge from Siberia into the New World. By 12,500 years ago, Indians had spread throughout the New World and were living from the Arctic in the north all the way to southern South America (World Book, 2000).

Indigenous peoples had developed complex societies before the first Europeans, the Vikings, arrived in the 11th century. The Vikings didn't stay long, but a few centuries later, waves of European explorers, fur traders, missionaries, and settlers swept across the

New World, bringing manufactured goods and trading them for furs and other native products. Missionaries often accompanied the early traders and tried to convert the indigenous peoples to Christianity.

The arrival of Europeans marked the beginning of the end of the way of life many Indians had known for centuries. Their delicate balance of life was disrupted. “The introduction of firearms and diseases previously unknown to First Nations brought widespread devastation. The Aboriginal population declined and the very existence of their unique cultures was threatened (INAC, 2000).” Although battles often did occur, disease was the most dramatic effect of European contact. The Europeans brought with them diseases that were unknown in North America, and the indigenous people lacked immunity to them. The population began to decline as soon as the Europeans arrived. “The original Native population of the New World had been numbered between 50 and 80 million people. By the beginning of the 1600's, these numbers had been rapidly reduced to about 10 million (McFadden, 1991, p. 182).” As contact moved gradually north and west, so did epidemics. Indigenous populations in Canada declined continuously from about 1500 to about 1930.

Who Owns the Land?

Land became a major issue between the Europeans and the Indians. The settlers' insistence on ownership of land was in sharp contrast to the Aboriginal use of Nature. More and more Indians were forced off their land as newcomers arrived and eventually

pushed onto reserves. As the Europeans moved westward across North America, they became a greater and greater threat to the Indian way of life. Immigration, combined with the impact of disease, soon made the indigenous nations become minorities in their own land. First Nations signed treaties with various British colonial and, later, Canadian governments before and after Confederation in 1867. No two treaties are identical, but they usually provide for certain rights, including reserve lands, a sum of money paid each year and hunting and fishing rights. The treaty rights of an individual Treaty Indian will depend on the precise terms and conditions of the treaty that his or her First Nation signed. Even when England passed the British North America Act creating the Dominion of Canada in 1867, the new government of Canada continued the earlier policy of confining Indians to reserves. The Canadian government seemed determined to assimilate Indians into mainstream Canadian society. Laws allowed the government to order Indian children to be taken away from their families and sent to boarding schools.

1876 Indian Act.

The Indian Act of 1876 summarized laws concerning who could legally be considered an Indian. People who met the legal definition of Indians were known as Status Indians. They did not have to pay taxes on reserve property and had certain other privileges, but they could not vote in provincial and federal elections and were denied many other civil rights held by Canadian citizens. Only by choosing to become enfranchised, could Indian men gain the right to vote and other privileges held by non-

Indians. Enfranchised Indians lost their legal and treaty rights as Indians as well as their right to live on a reserve. An Indian woman became automatically enfranchised if she married a non-Indian man; this section of the act was not amended until 1985. Laws of the late 1800's also banned certain Indian religious practices, including the sun dance.

Twentieth Century Reality.

By 1901, Canada's indigenous peoples numbered about 100,000, barely 2 percent of the country, and were confined to reserves everywhere outside the far north. Today, Indigenous peoples make up only about 3 percent of Canada's inhabitants. They live across Canada in every province and territory, generally on reserves set aside for them (World Book, 2000). For administrative purposes, indigenous peoples in Canada are divided according to band. A band is a group of First Nation people for whom lands have been set apart and money is held by the Crown. Each band has its own governing band council, usually consisting of one or more chiefs, and several councillors. Community members choose the chief and councillors by election, or sometimes through traditional custom. The members of a band generally share common values, traditions and practices rooted in their ancestral heritage. Today, many bands prefer to be known as First Nations. As of 1997, there were 609 bands across Canada. Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term "First Nations peoples" refers to the Indian people in Canada, both Status and Non-Status. Many Indian people have also adopted the term "First Nation" to replace the word "band" in the name

of their community (INAC, 2000).

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada admits, By the end of the Second World War, First Nations in Canada had suffered through many decades of governmental and social neglect....Indeed, until the mid-1950's federal government Indian agents had control over virtually all aspects of life on reserves, even to the point of issuing passes to allow First Nations members to leave the reserve temporarily. Through the residential school system, the government policy of assimilation continued unabated. Removed from their homes, First Nations children were not permitted to speak their own languages or to practise their spiritual beliefs or rituals. The late 1940's, however, marked the beginning of a new era for First Nations in Canada. Aboriginal leaders emerged, forcefully expressing their people's desire to gain their rightful position of equality with other Canadians, and at the same time, maintain their cultural heritage....Many Aboriginal leaders drew attention to the fact that thousands of First Nations members had fought for their country in both world wars. Although considered good enough to fight, First Nations veterans were nevertheless treated as government wards on their return home. This obvious injustice helped increase the public's awareness of Aboriginal peoples' disadvantaged situation.

(INAC, 2000)

The Canadian public learned how far Aboriginal peoples had fallen behind all other groups of citizens in terms of living standards, health and education. Malnutrition and diseases caused by poor living conditions were widespread. Evidence also revealed that

over 8,000 First Nations children had no access whatever to any kind of schooling.

1951 Indian Act Revisions.

As a result of Aboriginal efforts and public concern, the Federal Government made plans to revise the Indian Act. First Nations rejected the idea of cultural assimilation into non-Native society and spoke out strongly against the enforced enfranchisement provisions of the Indian Act.



**Frank Jadis (back row, 6th from right)
representing Island Mi'kmaq population (1950's)**

First Nations also strongly criticized the extent of powers exercised by the government over their affairs. Many groups asked that powers be vested in the chiefs and

councillors on reserves so that they could determine band membership and manage their own funds and reserve lands. Aboriginal groups also asked that the government adhere more strictly to provisions set out in the various treaties.

Despite these pleas, the new Indian Act of 1951 did not greatly differ from any previous legislation. For instance, involuntary enfranchisement was still on the books and Indian women who married non-Indian men continued to lose their Indian status automatically. Even Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2000) admits, "government powers over First Nations life remained formidable." With the provision of better health services in the mid-1950's, the Status Indian population increased rapidly but the living conditions of Aboriginal peoples were still below standard. Many more First Nations children finally had access to schooling, including secondary and post-secondary education.

Right to Vote.

Although the Indian Act continued to block First Nations' desire for self-determination, by 1960 some definite improvements had been made in their social and economic conditions. It was in 1960 that the right to vote in federal elections was finally extended to First Nations members. Aboriginal veterans played a big role in this change; after all, they had fought for Canada in two world wars, yet were unfairly deprived of the right to vote. In 1966, Parliament established the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). The department was designed to supervise and

promote economic and political development of native lands.

Trudeau's White Paper.

Hoping to help First Nations achieve equality with other Canadians, the Federal Government proposed the 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy. By repealing the Indian Act, ending the federal responsibility for First Nations and terminating their special status, the Trudeau government, with Jean Chretien as Minister responsible, hoped “to abolish what it saw as the false separation between First Nations and the rest of Canadian society (INAC, 2000).” The proposed policy also recommended that an equitable way be found for bringing the treaties to an end. Needless to say, this proposed legislation was overwhelmingly rejected by First Nations. “What the government had not fully understood was the value First Nations placed on their special status within Confederation and on their treaty rights (INAC, 2000).” As much as the Indian Act had been hated as a mechanism for social control and assimilation, it suddenly became “the vehicle that confirmed the special status of First Nations members in Canada (INAC, 2000).” Negative reaction of First Nations and the general public was so strong the Trudeau government withdrew the White Paper. Aboriginal nationalism was revitalized; First Nations leaders from across the country united in a reaffirmation of their separateness. First Nations wanted all the benefits of Canadian citizenship in addition to their special rights deriving from their unique trust relationship with the Crown.

The government began seeking new measures to help Aboriginal peoples gain

from the benefits enjoyed by Canadian society as a whole, while preserving and encouraging their unique cultural heritage. In 1969 all Indian agents were withdrawn from reserves across the country. First Nations agreed that “full recognition of their Aboriginal rights and renegotiation of the treaties” was the only way they could “rise above their disadvantaged position in Canadian society (INAC, 2000).” The government offered support to First Nations in researching treaty rights. Since then, Indigenous people have slowly begun a demographic and cultural revival. Through decades of dedication and persistence, First Nations have succeeded in making the government and the general public aware that they were once free, self-sustaining nations.

Indian Control of Education.

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood produced a policy statement, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, a watershed in Aboriginal education, which called for local control of education by First Nation communities and parents (RCAP, p. 6). In that policy paper, First Nations explained why they wished to take responsibility for their children's education through their own school boards. Most importantly, they wanted their children's identity to be shaped by their own First Nations traditions and values. First Nations children who learned their own history, customs and languages could build their lives around pride in themselves and their culture. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development adopted this policy of First Nations local control of education in 1973. Soon after, church-operated schools were phased out of First Nations education and

residential schools were closed. First Nations began to create an education system that prepared children for modern-day life, while preserving their traditions.

Today, Aboriginal organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations (formerly National Indian Brotherhood) and the Native Council of Canada, continue to assert rights rooted in long-neglected treaties, as well as other rights that had never been defined in a treaty. Even though tensions have sometimes erupted into violence, the courts have been important in helping to define Aboriginal rights, the rights that the indigenous peoples have as first occupiers of the land.

Self-Government.

The United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights seems to have jump-started the Canadian government into action. Insisting, among other things, that Indigenous people have the right to establish and control their educational systems in their own languages and in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning, I believe the United Nations can be credited with changing the future of Aboriginal reality within this country and around the world. Since 1986 the Canadian government has negotiated with indigenous communities to develop self-government (World Book, 2000). The process of transferring the responsibility of managing their own affairs to indigenous reserves has begun, but many of the difficulties involved in handling such responsibilities may stem from the implications of limited educational experiences. Aboriginal authority over education is still limited. The federal government has generally

insisted that schools conform to provincial regulations with respect to curriculum, school year, and so on, thereby restricting schools' ability to include innovative, culture-based curriculum (RCAP, p. 6).

In 1988, the Assembly of First Nations published another report, recommending still greater control of their children's education, *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future* which called for the transfer of federal and provincial jurisdiction over First Nations education to First Nations control. Today, over half of all First Nations students who live on reserve attend schools that their own communities operate, but the majority of Aboriginal children outside of the territories, go to provincial schools. By 1995, First Nations managed over 80 percent of the department's education budget and 98 percent of on-reserve schools were under First Nations control. The number of Aboriginal teachers and school administrators has also increased dramatically. According to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2000) controlling their own education has produced the kind of excellent results First Nations anticipated. Their children stay in school longer. In the early 1960's, of every 100 students who started in Grade 1, fewer than four continued until Grade 12. In reality, though, 42% of First Nations people live off-reserve and most of their children attend provincial schools while another 46 % of the students residing on-reserve also attend provincial schools. The implications for Canada's public education system are clear – provincial schools must be receptive to First Nation families and their culture. Gains have been made, but in 1991, even though Aboriginal youth were staying in school longer, the majority were still leaving before completing high school (RCAP, p. 6). I feel research is needed to investigate why public education continues to be such an

alienating experience for Aboriginal children and youth. By 1994-1995, 73 % of First Nations students attending schools in their own communities went on to Grade 12.

In keeping with the Assembly of First Nations' recommendation, First Nations across the country are obtaining broader powers for administering education. In Nova Scotia, for example, many Mi'kmaq First Nations are taking legal authority and responsibility for educating First Nations children in Nova Scotia. On Prince Edward Island, the Lennox Island First Nation educates from Grades One to Six on their reserve and then students move off reserve to complete their schooling. For the Abegweit First Nation, a Headstart Program for pre-schoolers is controlled locally on the Scotchfort Reserve, but students from all three Abegweit Band Reserves attend various public schools from Grades One to Twelve.

1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

In 1996, Prime Minister Jean Chretien's Federal Government received the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the result of a five-year study of almost every aspect of indigenous life. More than 400 recommendations for governmental policy initiatives were presented for implementation over a 15 year period. The Commission reported that a single pattern has dominated the education of Aboriginal people. "Formal education was, without apology, assimilationist (RCAP, p. 2)." Unfortunately, as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reports, "most Aboriginal students attend schools where there is no special effort to make them or their families feel part of the life

of the school. There is a gap between the culture of the home and that of the school (1996, p. 6).” The Commission has informed the government of the need to recognize Aboriginal peoples' right to govern their education completely as an integral part of Aboriginal self-government. “Aboriginal people want to assume their rightful place in Canadian society. At the same time, they want to maintain the rich diversity of their traditional cultures which evolved over thousands of years before European contact (INAC, 2000).” The Royal Commission admitted,

The main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial and then by Canadian governments, has been wrong. Yet the damage is not beyond repair. To reverse the assumptions of assimilation, Canadians need to understand that Aboriginal peoples are nations – political and cultural groups with values and life-ways distinct from those of other Canadians.

(RCAP, p. x)

I can not help but be suspicious of the Federal Government's good faith in implementing many of the Commission's recommendations when after centuries of misuse, the term Indian is still used to name the department responsible for First Nations affairs. Although I, too, am guilty of using this unfavorable term extensively in this research, I do so out of respect for the sources I have referenced.

Our Island's History

Introduction.

One might be tempted to think there is no need to document the history of our tiny island separately from the rest of Canadian history, but thanks to the power of our colonial rulers that is not the case. Although some patterns are similar, our history and the treatment of Mi'kmaq people remains unique.

Respecting Mother Earth.

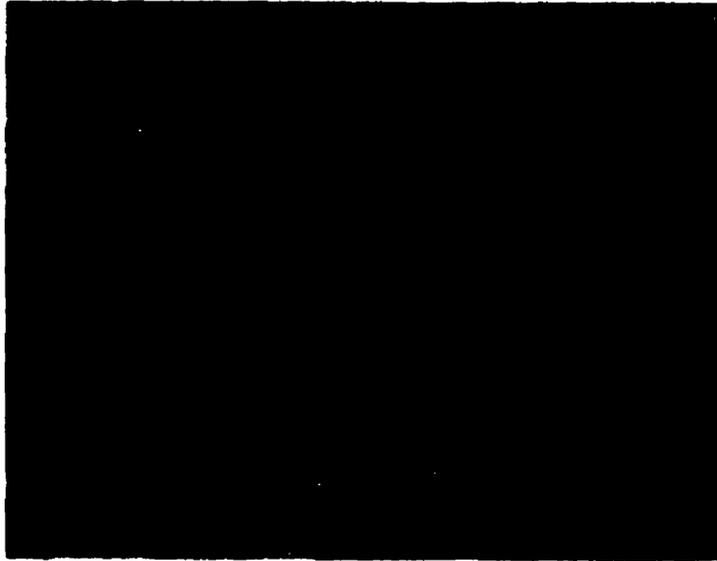
Prince Edward Island had been inhabited by Mi'kmaq people for thousands of years. "Before contact with Europeans, life was free for the Aboriginal people; the woods and the waters provided everything that was needed for food, clothing and shelter. Like other Aboriginal tribes, the Micmacs enjoyed a spiritualized relationship with their total environment (MacIntyre, 1993, p. 8)." They made the utmost use out of whatever Nature offered; they wasted nothing. An animal's meat was their food, its skin their clothing and shelter, its bones their tools and its sinews their threads. By living so close to Nature for thousands of years, the Micmac people came to believe that all living things are spiritually related and respecting Mother Earth was of utmost importance. Native people see Nature as a web of life with humans as equal partners with all other parts of the natural world. In

contrast, other cultures view nature as a pyramid, with humans at the top of the ruling class (McFadden, 1991, pp. 41-42).

First Contact.

The Mi'kmaq earned the dubious distinction of being among the first North American Natives to come into contact with Europeans (Paul, 2000, p. 44). With the coming of European settlers, their way of life changed forever. Although estimates vary widely, Paul (2000) estimates the entire Mi'kmaq population in the region, before Cabot's era of exploration, to be 200,000 minimum. Some scholars have estimated that the Mi'kmaq lost 90 percent of their population between 1500 and 1600 (World Book, 2000). Native cultures further to the West and to the North were much later coming under European influence and so the attacks on their culture differed.

The first record of contact with Europeans comes from Jacques Cartier's 1534 voyage to the area. For almost two hundred years, the French and the Micmac engaged in the fur trade and the fisheries on a seasonal basis. A close relationship between the Native people and the French developed to the point where the Micmac were increasingly dependent on trading for survival. Even though many Micmacs adopted the Roman Catholic religion during this era, MacIntyre (1993), reports, "they were never totally alienated from their native tradition and culture (p. 9)."



**Frank Jadis (far right)
Re-enactment (1960's) of First Contact with Jacques Cartier**

British Control since 1763.

Once the fur trade in Micmac territory was no longer viable, the next wave of newcomers wanted to control Micmac lands for farming purposes. By clearing the forests and restricting the Indian's freedom of movement on the land, these newcomers made it difficult, if not impossible, for the natives to pursue their traditional subsistence activities (MacIntyre, 1993). When the British took control of the island in 1763, the Micmac were only willing to pledge allegiance after the British Crown's Proclamation which "affirmed the Indians legal title to the land, an agreement which could only be extinguished by a treaty with the Crown (MacIntyre, 1993, p. 10)."

"The British government was not as friendly towards the Micmac as France had

been. Many Micmac had been converted to Roman Catholicism and had fought at the side of Britain's enemy, the French (Baldwin, 1985, p. 228).” The cruelty of colonial powers soon became evident to the Island's Micmac population. Only one year later, the King of England commissioned Captain Samuel Holland to survey the island. Even when the Island's 67 townships, surveyed by Holland, were given away in a 1767 lottery to British landowners, “the Micmacs were ignored, but left in undisturbed possession of their traditional isolated encampments for a number of years (MacIntyre, 1993, p. 11).”

Where Is Our Home?

The area known as Lennox Island had been overlooked in the King's lottery and so was granted to Sir James Montgomery in 1772. Numerous attempts were made by private individuals to acquire Lennox Island for use by the Micmac, but “the Micmacs were officially landless (MacIntyre, 1993, p. 12)!” Even attempts by private landowners to provide land for the Native people were unsuccessful. Charles Worrell, a landowner, gave 204 acres of his land to a few Micmac families in 1842, but Irish immigrants soon took over this land. In 1859, the Colonial government was convinced to replace this land with 204 acres along the Morell River in Lot 39.

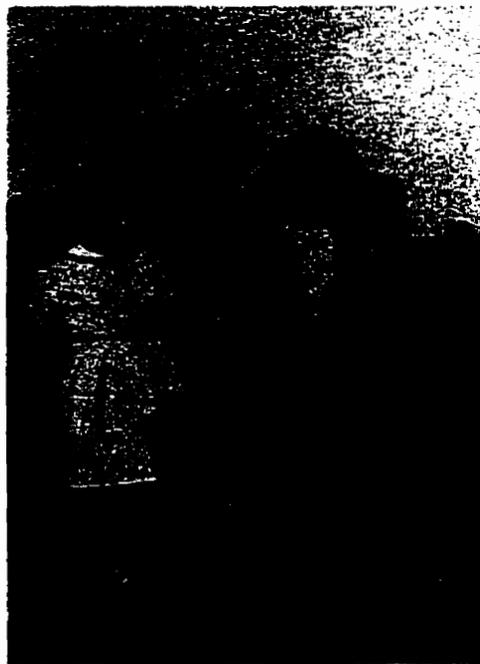
Thanks to the effort of Theophilus Stewart, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the distress of the Micmacs was finally heard by the Aborigines Protection Society of London, England, and progress was finally made. The sale of Lennox Island was completed in 1870 and that was the first formal claim the Indians had to Lennox Island as their Special

Reserve. Approximately 1100 of the Island's 1328 acres were described as excellent for agriculture and the Micmacs "had a place they could call home (MacIntyre, 1993, pp. 13-14)."

When Prince Edward Island joined Confederation in 1873, the Micmacs had no real property other than Lennox Island which was held in trust by the Aborigines Society of London and the 204 acres held in trust for eight Micmac families. MacIntyre (1993) reports that the natives of Prince Edward Island fared no better under the Canadian government. In 1875, there was reported to be only 302 Micmacs on Prince Edward Island. "By 1880, the Native population had fallen to 266 and it appeared that the Micmac might disappear from the Island (Baldwin, 1985, p. 342)." "The Indian Act of 1876 rendered the Micmacs powerless economically and politically. The Victorian policy of relegating the Indians to reserves was fully endorsed by the Federal government, and most of the lands granted the Micmacs by private individuals were confiscated. For example, a farm of 140 acres in Scotchfort which had been given over to the Indians was reduced to 100 acres by a sheriff's sale in 1896 (MacIntyre, 1993, pp. 15-16)." In 1917, a land concession of three acres was reserved for them at Rocky Point, resulting in a total of four reserves: Lennox Island, Morell, Scotchfort, and Rocky Point. "The Micmacs were virtually prisoners in a province which was aboriginally theirs! The only alternative was enfranchisement – the exchange of Indian status for the status of Canadian citizen (MacIntyre, 1993, p. 16)." During the Depression years, the able-bodied moved off Prince Edward Island to find work; those left behind became utterly dependent on welfare.

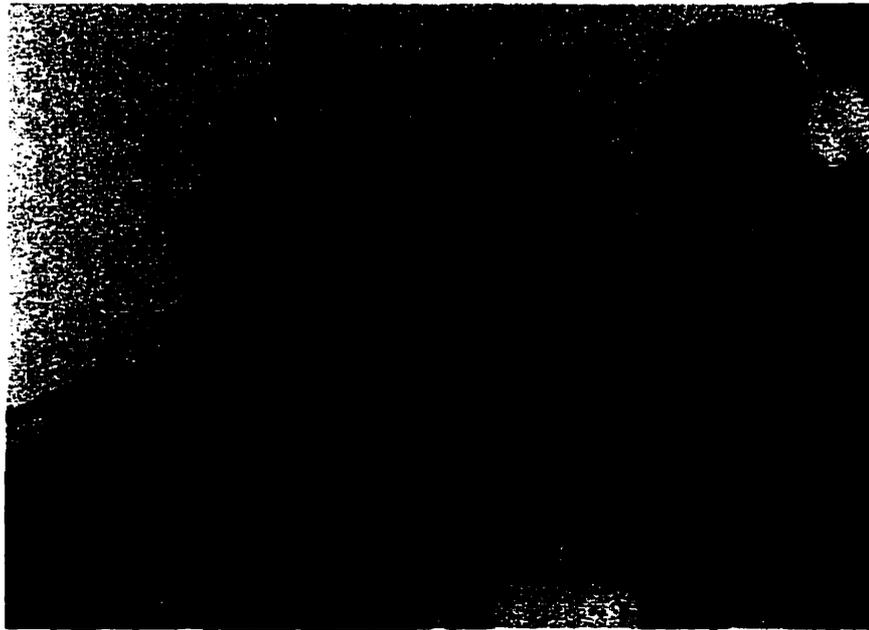
Getting An Education.

Even though there was a pre-Confederation Micmac Day School on Lennox Island, schooling was not a priority for the Micmac since education was life itself. Through the daily routines of life, customs were passed from one generation to the next. When the residential school at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, was erected by the Federal Department of Indian Affairs, and parents were urged and even forced to send their children, the loss of cultural identity and the disruption of family life for those who went was disastrous.



**Judy (far left) with some friends
who attended "Shube" Residential School (early 1960's)**

By the 1940's the Island's Micmacs became more politically active. MacIntyre (1993) reports "every able-bodied Micmac on Prince Edward Island answered the call to arms, even though Indians were exempt under Canada's Military Service Act (p. 17)." In 1948, Indian Affairs arranged for the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha to begin a health and education program on Lennox Island. With increasing welfare services and free housing being provided by the government, there was little incentive to work. "By the early 1960's, morale was at an all-time low; Indians found themselves victims of a system over which they had no control (MacIntyre, 1993, p. 18)."



Mary Jane (standing at far left)
aboard the Ferry Boat to Lennox Island (1950's)

Ups and Downs.

Hopes were raised early in 1969 when Prince Edward Island signed a 15 year Development Plan with the Federal government and Lennox Island was to be included. Later in 1969, the Federal government's proposed White Paper put an end to those hopes. Survival was at stake! Natives from all across Canada forced the Federal Government to back down. Actually, new opportunities did arise on Prince Edward Island; "a new awareness of Indian identity had taken place among the people (MacIntyre, 1993, p. 20)." Lennox Island, a Special Reserve since 1912, was officially set apart as a reserve with full status and in 1973, a causeway connecting Lennox Island Reserve to the mainland of Prince Edward Island was opened. In 1972, a second Band, known as the Abegweit Band, was approved for the Micmacs living on the three small reserves in Eastern Prince Edward Island: Morell, Rocky Point and Scotchfort. As well, local Band councils were given more responsibilities from the Regional Office in Amherst, Nova Scotia. The hope of a cultural revival rose among some Micmac people.

Mr. J. Sark became the first chief of the Abegweit Band and for the next 28 years, his leadership was uncontested, even though elections could be held every four years. In 1999, Francis Jadis, a well respected carpenter of the Scotchfort Reserve, challenged Mr. Sark in the Band election and took control of the Abegweit Band with a strong majority backing him. For the people of the Abegweit Band, and the Scotchfort Reserve in particular, a cultural revival has just begun. As of December, 1999, the total population

of the Abegweit Band is 294, with a total of 172 living on the three reserves and 122 living off reserve. Of these on-reserve members, about 45 reside in Rocky Point, 119 in Scotchfort, and 8 live in Morell. A recent telephone check by researchers from U. P. E. I. (November, 2000) reports that Prince Edward Island has a total of 692 Mi'kmaq citizens, members of either the Lennox Island First Nation or the Abegweit First Nation. The Abegweit Band's population Island-wide includes eight children attending kindergarten, 40 elementary students, 22 high school students, 15 enrolled in post secondary programs and 9 enrolled in adult education. Although the Mi'kmaq population on Prince Edward Island is small, its members deserve our respect. I believe we must listen to Native voices for they have been silenced for too long.

The Challenge.

Mi'kmaq people and other First Nations of Canada are not alone in this historical context. Around the world, as Nee-Benham (2000) reports, "Many educational traditions and practices have been lost or only remain in the memories of survivors of the indigenous peoples' holocaust (p. xi)." At the edge of the millennium, we find many indigenous groups that are fighting for survival. They are demanding the return of their lands, the end of colonialization, control of the education of their children, and the right to be self-determining regarding their own futures and living by their own cultural ways. Most importantly, at this time, many indigenous cultures continue to survive, or are being revitalized (Nee-Benham, 2000, p. xvi).

History teaches us that Canada is still a relatively young country striving to forge a cultural identity that is distinct from those of its European founding nations and its neighbor, the United States. With one glance at the cultural mosaic Canadian society proudly presents to the rest of the world, I realize the daunting task of accommodating so many different cultures within the national identity. In my opinion, we must not allow Canada to be represented as one culture. Along with others in our multicultural society, First Nations deserve respect for their cultural heritage. Canada's education system has a major role to play in pursuing that goal.

Educational Research

Presentation of Literature.

The educational research section which follows is intentionally designed to represent only a limited amount of the relevant research available on Aboriginal education. I have deliberately chosen to incorporate many additional pieces of valuable literature throughout my analysis and among the Mi'kmaq voices. This approach to presenting literature is patterned on the Aboriginal tradition of appreciating things as an interconnected whole, rather than isolating them in a linear fashion. I find the work of other researchers to be more relevant when woven within the context of the Mi'kmaq teachings offered as data in this thesis. I hope you will agree and understand why this contextual literature review is best examined as only a fraction of the literature you will

find woven throughout the study.

Educational Implications.

As educators, I believe we may be failing to meet the needs of Prince Edward Island's Aboriginal people. Canada's educational system has been accused by Chartrand (1992) of ignoring Aboriginal issues. "Regrettably, there is much in the way the Canadian education system treats history that supports the notion that the past of the many Aboriginal peoples does not matter. The story of the Aboriginal peoples themselves has largely not been told in the classrooms of Canada (Chartrand, 1992, p. 9)."

Acknowledging that First Nations history is Canadian history introduces, in a personal and meaningful way, Aboriginal content into the education and the lives of all Canadians (Reynolds, 1997, p. 9). The basic argument put forth by Cummins (1996) is that culturally diverse students are disempowered educationally in very much the same way that their communities have been treated historically in their interactions with societal institutions (p. iii). Educators individually and collectively, have the potential to work towards the creation of contexts of empowerment (Cummins, 1996, p. 150). As the B.C. mother reminds teachers, "Our children are skillful interpreters of the silent language...what they learn will depend on you (Northian Newsletter, 1991)."

Awareness and Sensitivity.

Realizing, as pointed out by Chisholm (1994, p. 34), "Canada's educational system has proven its power as a tool of social change," I believe education must be used as a positive force in respecting First Nations traditions. As educators, administrators and policy makers, I feel we must respond immediately with positive action. Incorporating Aboriginal content into the curriculum is not enough. Awareness of culture and cultural differences is imperative for educators working to create schools that function productively now and in the coming decades.

Jordan (1984) believes that culturally sensitive instruction is one tool schools can use to become more effective and more responsive to the needs of a culturally diverse student population (p. 59). The basic argument used by those advocating culturally specific teaching techniques for Native students is that these children have culturally unique ways of knowing, learning, working, and communicating as a result of their cultural upbringing, values, and beliefs (Kaulback, 1984). Teachers need to recognize such cultural differences as positive elements upon which to build appropriate educational experiences. In fact, Mi'kmaq and Maliseet people have been subject to non-Aboriginal education, whether academic, spiritual, political, economic, or social, for more than four centuries. Yet despite relentless pressure to assimilate, Leavitt (1994b, p. 185) reports that Aboriginal communities of the Maritime region have maintained traditional ways of teaching, including respecting children's ability to make decisions for themselves and to

make sense of what they experience.

There is a need for schools to work closely with Aboriginal parents and elders to build upon that cultural background, for as Leavitt (1991, p. 267) reports, traditional native education seems to rely upon ways of knowing, ways of interacting, and ways of using language which are not normally exploited in formal schooling. Teachers at all levels need to become familiar with the culture of their students. As the *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools* outlines, by shifting the focus in the curriculum from teaching/learning about cultural heritage as another subject to teaching/learning through the local culture as a foundation for all education, it is intended that all forms of knowledge, ways of knowing and world views be recognized as equally valid, adaptable, and complementary to one another in mutually beneficial ways. Culturally-responsive educators recognize the full educational potential of each student and provide the challenges necessary for them to achieve that potential (1998, p. 2).

Identity and Cultural Negotiation.

Spradley (1979, p. 12) reminds us that we do not have a homogeneous culture; people who live in modern, complex societies actually live by many different cultural codes. Problems arise as people move from one cultural scene to another in complex societies and are expected to employ different cultural values. In the words of Goodlad (1990, pp. 6-7), ethnic minority children are “caught and often savaged between the language and expectations of the school and those of the home.” As Cummins (1996)

points out, "In far too many contexts, the message given to students and communities is that success in school and in wider society requires that they abandon any identification or affiliation with the culture and experiences they brought to school. Students' prior experiences are seen as impediments to academic growth rather than as the foundation upon which academic development can be built (p. 12)."

"Students who are empowered by their school experiences develop the ability, confidence and motivation to succeed academically. They participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed a confident cultural identity as well as appropriate school-based knowledge and interactional structures (Cummins, 1986, p. 23)." "The process of identity negotiation is interwoven into all educator-student interactions. This process is usually non-problematic when there is a cultural, linguistic and social class match between educator and student but often highly problematic when there are mismatches or discontinuities in culture, language or class. In these cases, educators must make special efforts to ensure that students' prior experiences and identities are affirmed rather than devalued (Cummins, 1996, p. 12)." If students' prior experiences are not valued, academic effort may not be forthcoming, with dropping out of school often the result. Culture conflicts adversely affect self-concept and easily destroy the learning environment.

To build a strong positive identity, Reyhner (1992, p. 32) believes educators interacting with the child in school need to reinforce and build on the cultural training and messages that the child has previously received. When educators give Indian children messages that conflict with those promoted by Indian parents and communities, they can

confuse the children and create resistance to school (Bowers & Flinders, 1990; Jacob & Jordan, 1987; Spindler, 1987). The identity of Aboriginal students and their ability to achieve their full potential are directly related. Educators can promote positive identity among Native students and their parents by learning about and incorporating Aboriginal traditions and values throughout the entire educational system. Involving parents and promoting positive cultural identity for the entire school community is important since “students from subordinated communities will be empowered in the school context to the extent that their parents are empowered through their interactions with the school (Cummins, 1996, p. 150).”

Stairs (1993, p. 23) believes the authenticity of indigenous educational development rests on visions of conscious and deep cultural negotiation. Historically, and in terms of particular program development, we began with the *what* of schooling – the choice of language of instruction, content, and materials. Increasingly over the last decade we have moved to the *how* of learning and teaching – attending to cultural modes of interaction with the human and non-human world. Now, we are reaching for the levels of the *why* of education – the cultural values and goals, future pictures, evolving identities, and meaning (Stairs, 1993, p. 23). Even though I believe two of these advancements (the *what* and the *how* as described by Stairs, 1993) are currently being advanced here on Prince Edward Island, I agree with Jordan (1984) that the theory of cultural discontinuity needs to be addressed. The cultural discontinuity approach, as described by Jordan, suggests that culture conflict, rather than low ability or the lack of desire to succeed, is often the reason that the achievement of children from some ethnic

groups lags behind that of their majority-group peers (1984, p. 59). Although it could be argued that academic achievement for Aboriginal youth is presently improving, the records are also likely to show that many Aboriginal youth are experiencing problems of failing grades, absenteeism, and a high dropout rate. Part of the problem, I believe, stems from the theory that “without greater exposure to the students’ culture, teachers lack the tools with which to make sense of much that transpires in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 134).” The frustrations arising from conflicts of culture are devastating to academic achievement. Real learning can not take place without mutual respect.

Equality and Racism.

Before conducting this research I could only imagine to what degree racial discrimination might affect one’s experiences in school. The privileges I enjoy as a white middle-class person have sheltered me from that knowledge. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples heard stories of “regular encounters with racism, racism expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through the denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum as well as the life of formal education institutions (RCAP, p. 2).”

As reported in a 1992 Canadian Teachers’ Federation position paper, *Racism and Education: Different Perspectives and Experiences*, the demoralizing and debilitating effects of racism have no place in our educational system. “Racism is always present in a situation where there is an imbalance of power. The education system reflects in some

aspects the imbalance of power that permits racism to hurt (Chartrand, 1992, p. 12).” By destroying the environments in which racism thrives, I am confident we will be promoting academic achievement through increased self esteem and confidence. “The Canadian wall of racism against Indians must be torn down. Doing so will require an extensive and intensive effort that goes beyond tolerant racism. The racial image of Indians must be replaced with an image of cultural and human worth, thus enabling Canadians, psychologically, to accept Indians as people of value, as equal, and as co-workers (Boldt, 1993, p. 263).” I believe we need to challenge the status quo; it should not continue to be a *them* vs. *us* style of relationship. First Nations deserve the right to assert themselves as an integral part of the Canadian mosaic. As Boldt (1993) explains, “More than Canadian money and constitutional guarantees are involved here; the survival of Indian cultures is more dependent upon Canadians understanding the value of, and showing respect for, Indian cultures than upon money and constitutional guarantees (p. 220).” Canada is still struggling to accept Aboriginal people and racism continues to affect their daily lives. As you and I may struggle with acceptance, many Aboriginal youth are struggling for their lives.

Best of Both Worlds.

Cummins (1986) suggests the relationship between educators and minority students and between schools and minority communities requires change. Those changes must “involve personal re-definitions of the way classroom teachers interact with the

children and the communities they serve (p. 18).” Stairs (1993, p. 23) suggests the *why* of education – the cultural values and goals, evolving identities, and meaning – needs to be investigated in an attempt to empower Native students to seek the best of both worlds. As Chief Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapa Band of the Lakota states:

Take the best from both worlds. That is a very powerful mandate. The best from the Native world is to be a Native person. The best from the white world is the education system. Many Natives cannot function effectively any longer without an education.

Medicine (1987, p. 24)

Cummins (1986, p. 21) reminds us that minority students are either empowered or disabled as a direct result of their interactions with educators in schools. The intercultural classroom, according to Arbess (1981, p. 13), is perhaps the most challenging environment that a teacher could work in, since it adds the critical variable of culture to the concept of individualization. Few teachers have had the opportunity to address more than the material level of native culture. Even where curriculum pays heed to social, cognitive, and linguistic culture, it is almost always from a material point of view (Leavitt, 1991, p. 269). I feel we must stop focussing on a superficial approach to culture.

“Teachers must know more about the backgrounds and cultures from which their students come and be prepared to teach them in ways that maximize their chances to succeed in the school, the community, the nation, and the world (Cummins, 1986, p. 117).” “A serious effort toward preparing teachers to teach in a culturally relevant manner requires a

rethinking of the teacher preparation process (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 131).” Subtle changes in the operation of the teaching environment may empower Native students.

Subtle differences in peoples' ways of acting turn out to have profound effects on peoples' reactions during face to face interaction – on feelings and on inferences of intent – especially in encounters between people of differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The idea that implicit, informal culture shapes peoples' ways of acting in everyday life does not seem to be generally taught to teachers. By discovering the small differences in social relations which make a big difference in the interactional ways children engage the content of the school curriculum, practical contributions can be made to the improvement of minority children's school achievement and to the improvement of the quality of everyday school life for such children and their teachers. Making small changes in everyday classroom participation structures may be one of the means by which more culturally responsive pedagogy can be developed.

Erickson & Mohatt (1982, p. 167)

Teachers must face the fact that imparting the amount of knowledge needed for students to be successful in life is impossible. Only by teaching students the skills of problem solving and cooperative learning can we hope to give them lifelong learning tools. Ladson-Billings (1994) is hopeful that scholars and educators alike are coming to see knowledge as social construction. Students become empowered by their sense of ownership in the knowledge-construction process (pp. 77-78). As an advocate of

culturally relevant teaching, Ladson-Billings promotes the “kinds of social interactions in the classroom that support the individual in the group context. Students feel a part of the collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence (p. 76).”

Making Connections.

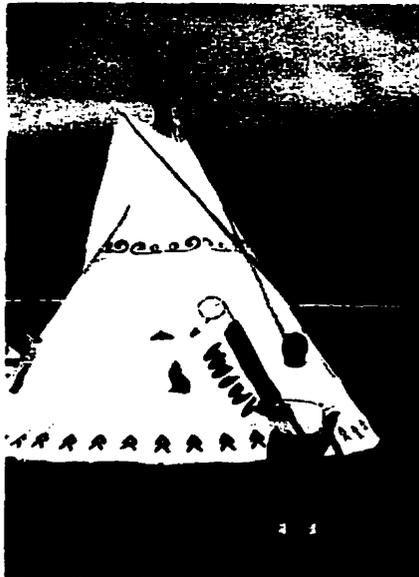
Early in the research process, my limited work as a volunteer tutor with a few Native students had me wondering if my own research would correspond with much of the literature on the topic of Aboriginal education. After all, “many journals contain articles written about the ‘difficulties’ of teaching native students, often relating these difficulties to native learning styles or some other inherently ‘native’ variable. The ‘difficulties’ usually refer to a list of characteristics attributed to native students: unwillingness to speak up in class, a lack of eye contact, different body language...almost always couched in negative terms (Collier, 1998, p. 55).” I soon came to realize though, through my research, as Sanders (1987, p. 82) reports: “Researchers generally agree that the universally poor achievement record of American Indian students is directly related to the cultural value conflicts evident in Anglo-American classrooms (Giles, 1985; Kluckholm & Strodbeck, 1960; Martin, 1978; Philips, 1983; Sando, 1973; Wilson & Black, 1978; Youngman & Sadongei, 1974).” Rather than discovering so much about *what* Native values do exist here on Prince Edward Island, insights were gained through this research as to *how* any cultural traditions, values, or beliefs might have survived the forces of assimilation at work here on Prince Edward Island.

Chapter Four

Mi'kmaq Stories and Analysis

A Place Called Home

Nestled high on a hill overlooking the Hillsborough River, about 24 km Northeast of Charlottetown, you will find the largest populated reserve of the Abegweit First Nation of Prince Edward Island – the Scotchfort Reserve. From personal observations, I note a great deal of pride surfacing among Abegweit Band members, under the leadership of Chief Francis Jadis. Having their friend and neighbor, Fran, as their leader has uplifted the spirit of the people. Holding their first ever Powwow in 1999 was symbolic of the cultural revival I believe is underway. Young and old alike are showing pride in their culture.



Chief Francis Jadis

proudly hosting 1st Annual

Abegweit First Nation Powwow

August, 1999

This reserve is the place called home to the three generations of women whose voices will follow. It is a neat and tidy community with only a small population but it is playing an integral role in the spread of Mi'kmaq culture throughout Central and Eastern Prince Edward Island. Mary Jane Jadis, the oldest female elder on the reserve agreed to be a participant in this study. She is very proud of her son, Francis, for taking on the challenge of being Chief of the Abegweit Band. By intertwining Mary Jane's recollections with the stories of her two daughters and one of her granddaughters, three generations of one family will be examined. In my opinion, the experiences of these Mi'kmaq women represent a prime example of how "Indian powerlessness has its roots in Canada's Indian policies (Boldt, 1993, p. xvii)."

Introductory Sketches

I will introduce all four women with a brief sketch which provides some background to help you, the reader, identify each of them as I begin to weave their stories.

Meet Mary Jane.

Mary Jane is an eighty year old great-grandmother whose second youngest son is in his first term as Chief of the Abegweit Band for on Prince Edward Island. She lives in her own home on the Scotchfort Reserve with her extended family living close-by.

Because Mary Jane's life was threatened several years ago, she really appreciates having someone with her at all times. Mary Jane is well known for her many years of intricate basket making, selling door to door, and hard work in fields and forests of the Maritimes and in Maine. Arthritis has slowed the action of her feet and her hands, but her spirit remains strong and she is a well respected elder within the Native community. Mary Jane loves playing Bingo almost as much as she loves wearing a hat. Rarely is she seen without one of her favourite hats adorning her head.



Mary Jane observing
Abegweit Band Powwow 2000

Mary Jane was born on Lennox Island but lost her mother at the age of five. Facing many struggles in her lifetime, not the least of which was her struggle to get an education, Mary Jane is proud of the family she raised. Mary Jane's husband, Frank, was a well educated Mi'kmaq born in 1908 in Kentville, Nova Scotia and educated in New Brunswick. Married at age 17, Mary Jane gave birth to 14 children, only 7 of whom survived. Even though they experienced a very transient lifestyle, Mary Jane and Frank

started raising their young family on Lennox Island, where an Indian Day School was in operation. In 1968, for political reasons, the family moved to the Scotchfort Reserve. Even with a very limited formal education, Mary Jane has proven herself to be very capable of handling many extra responsibilities since her husband died fifteen years ago.

Meet Judy.

Mary Jane's eldest daughter, Judy, enjoyed most aspects of school. She has fond memories of a high school trip to Europe celebrating Prince Edward Island's 1973 Centennial and she credits her teenage travels to foreign countries for helping her become more assertive and adventurous. From those unique experiences she knew the world offered more than could be experienced on Reserve.

Judy did quit school in Grade Ten, but only after an act of verbal discrimination by a teacher pushed her to the limit. That one incident which limited her education in the public school system brings back strong emotion to this day. By early in her teens, Judy was able to identify that she never wanted to be stereotyped. She also knew she didn't want to get involved with drugs and alcohol. That determination can now be seen in her commitment to helping youth in her home community.

Judy soon worked to attain her GED and received training in Early Childhood Education. She fell in love with a non-native man who taught Abegweit Band members how to scuba dive. Judy realized what she was giving up by falling in love with a white man, but she knew she loved him enough to take on the challenge, even though it meant

losing her Indian status. Shortly after their marriage in the 1975, her husband joined the Armed Forces and Judy has lived most of her married life in Western Canada. Although Judy worked at various jobs and volunteered as a Girl Guide instructor, she prides herself in being the kind of mom who was always there for her children.

One might be tempted to describe Judy as “assimilated”, but she proudly informed me that would be an insult. She feels she has adapted well to the many challenges of living in the dominant white society and feels that “bicultural” is the best way to describe her situation as she has adapted well to both cultures. In 1999, she felt a strong desire to move home to help her brother, Francis, in his new challenge of being Chief. With the support of her husband and two daughters, she has become the Abegweit Band’s Financial Comptroller. Her older daughter completed a Degree in Native Studies from the University of Alberta, studying Cree as part of her program. In 2000, Judy’s younger daughter also completed a Degree in Native Studies, from the University of Lethbridge, studying Blackfoot as part of her program and has joined her mother on Prince Edward Island to work as an assistant to the Chief of the Abegweit Band.



Judy and her husband, John,
with their younger daughter,
Cheryl, Graduation Day, 2000

Being Christian with a strong Catholic orientation throughout most of her life, Judy has just been introduced to traditional ways since moving back home to Prince Edward Island. In a short time she has become a respected Elder, a Sun Dancer and has earned her pipe, all very important aspects of Native Spirituality. Judy takes her role as Elder very seriously and tries to set a positive example for all around her. She is a firm believer in what Elders call “the ripple effect” and reminds us all, “What goes around, comes around!” Looking back on the many decisions she was forced to make as a Native woman, she feels she now has a better understanding of what Aboriginals, in general, go through. Realizing her personal struggle was not an isolated case is, in some ways, a relief to Judy.

Meet Barbara.

Mary Jane’s youngest daughter, Barbara, is a driving force for the revitalization of Mi’kmaq culture on Prince Edward Island. She works very hard in spreading awareness through her professional role as Education Director for the Abegweit Band and as a member on many committees involving cultural issues. Barbara is a strong, positive role model in her Native community and throughout the Maritimes.

Barbara’s determination has been a big factor in her life. Feeling the pressure of racism, Barbara left high school and her home province to attend Grade Nine in British Columbia. Returning the next year to the same high school on P.E.I., Barbara soon felt alienated and decided to quit high school again. This time Barbara’s father persuaded her

to switch high schools. She agreed and her determination to graduate from high school was stronger than ever. Even missing one credit required for Grade 12 graduation thanks to a 47% mark, at age 20, did not deter her from continuing. Becoming pregnant and getting married didn't force her to quit either. The obstacles overcome in completing the credits necessary for high school graduation, are prime examples of her determination. Just ten days after completing the final semester of work required for Grade 12 graduation, Barbara gave birth to her daughter, Amelia.

At age 21, Barbara became the first member of the Abegweit Band to complete her high school education. Barbara now has four children, ranging in age from Misiksk, age 3 to Amelia, age 18. Deciding to further her education years later, she also became the band's first university graduate when she completed her Bachelor of Education from the University of New Brunswick.



Barbara Jadis (2000)

Graduating in 1994, Barbara tried desperately to obtain a teaching job on Prince

Edward Island. Viewing the lack of Aboriginal teachers in this province as a matter of great concern, Barbara even pleaded with the local school board to develop a position if that was the only way she was going to get in, but the request was not approved. By moving to Nova Scotia, Barbara was able to obtain a full time teaching position for three years, before returning to work for her home community. Upon her return to Prince Edward Island a part-time teaching job became available for Barbara, but she decided her new role as Education Director of the Abegweit Band took priority, at least for the time being.

Meet Amelia.

Barbara's eldest daughter, Amelia, is a vibrant 18 year old mother of two. Amelia quit school in Grade Ten, but has since earned her GED. She is a single mom who has taken her first year of college in Computer Applications for Business. With her second baby only a few months old, she plans on going back to college in 2001 to become a paramedic. Amelia has grown up feeling a very close tie with her Gram, Mary Jane. As told by Leslie Garrett in *An Eagle Feather For Amelia* from *Super Kids, Young Heroes in Action* (1997), Amelia, at age 11, repeatedly sacrificed her own safety to save her grandmother from being stabbed. Getting in front of the intruder's scissors resulted in extensive injuries to Amelia, including 26 stab wounds and collapsing lungs, but she managed to save her Gram's life. Amelia is determined to keep education as a major focus in her life. She wants to raise her children in a multicultural setting, not on a

Reserve because she feels life is too easy there. She guarantees her children will grow up knowing their culture.



**Amelia (age 11) and her Gramm (1993)
Back Together after the Attack**

Cultural Web

Style of Presentation.

The interconnectedness of all facets of these four life stories does not follow a straight and narrow path. A linear style of headings and categories does not really suit this unique web of information, so I have organized their life stories around central themes which I found recurring in the data. Their stories are analysed, not only through the weaving process itself, but also by relating insights gained from previous literature and from my personal observations. In an attempt to let you truly “hear” these Native voices, the words in **bold print** are their stories as told to me and I have also used capital letters within the dialogue to show particularly **STRONG** emphasis placed on words during the interview process. Quotation marks are used only for referencing the research of others.

These life histories, spanning almost eight decades have yielded numerous similarities of experiences with the dominant society, but also deep contrasts in the ways these women learned to cope with the reality of their situation. In my opinion, the challenges this family faced in the process of lifelong learning provide insight into the power we, in the education system, hold.

Struggling for an Education.

“What the native child generally finds in school is a culturally-incongruent situation which places him/her in culture shock since the school threatens the assumptions and expectations underlying everyday life that, for the most part, are not even consciously held. These are expectations as to how people interact with each other and about personal freedom and dignity (Arbess, 1981, p. 4).” For the four women in this study, contact with a formal style of education system left an indelible mark on their memories – much of it negative.

Mary Jane lost her mother when she was five and had to live with different extended family members during her youth. **Oh my goodness, I had a hard time!** Even though she had less than two years of schooling on the Lennox Island Reserve she proudly recalls her lessons: **I learn only Cathecism...Cathecism only...I know Cathecism pretty good! Over a year learning!** Mary Jane remains a strong Catholic to this day but her formal schooling is not a time she wishes to remember. **John Sark learned me and he learned my mother too, I guess. He was strict all those years ago. I don't want to talk about John Sark!** Mary Jane was eager for an education; as a teenager she was willing to travel to Nova Scotia in order to attend residential school. **“OK! I would go to school at Shubenacadie. Yeh! I want to go away anyway! My stepsister, we went to Shube and the school is...uh, overloaded. Too many kids in there. I can't get in!”** Determined to get an education, Mary Jane attended school in Truro. Mary Jane recalls:

Teacher said, Why are you so low? You...you...going on sixteen. You don't know ANYTHING! I said, N'yehs, I know. I never sit down and go to school. I was sixteen on January 26th and that woman, I stay with her, she said, You can't go to school anymore. YOU...SIXTEEN years old! When responding to the researcher's comment about having a tough time getting an education, the elder replies, in a lamenting tone, Nobody looking after me, that's why! Only uncles! Great-grandmother. But they can't learn me. I had no learning! Mary Jane's personal struggle for a formal education had ended but the many life skills she learned in her Aboriginal home communities served her well in the years to come.

The educational story of Mary Jane's eldest daughter, Judy, is one of a young girl who thought school was a great place to go, even if it was regimental in nature. It was interesting. You know you learned a lot of things. It was new to me. Judy's introduction to schooling began on the streets of Charlottetown. She recalls her positive experiences as a 6 year old walking all those streets right across town. I remember a lot of non-Natives, women especially, I'd be walking, just toddling along and they'd grab my hand and take me across the street. I was new to the city and really didn't know a lot of rules. I grew up on a reserve and you just walked and so that was a big culture difference for me. Everything there was really regimental because we went to Catholic School. I remember it was really interesting for me. We had books to learn to print; that was interesting I thought. I enjoyed it, we were learning something.

Mary Jane's youngest daughter, Barbara, recalls memories of her early years in

school which were virtually the opposite. She first attended school on the Reserve on Lennox Island: I only remember a few times I went. It was a scary thing! I hardly spoke and I couldn't understand why I never spoke. I think I was very fluent at that time. Maybe I couldn't speak English...probably...the only thing I can think of...why I didn't speak to the teacher. Maybe I didn't understand him. I wasn't there very often. I don't know why but like my mom said, we travelled a lot and I travelled with them, so I would kinda miss out on a lot of school.

A generation later, Barbara's daughter, Amelia also experienced a tough time with her introduction to the dominant white society at a very young age. She remembers going on the high school bus to daycare. I used to get on the bus every morning with my cousin. I remember falling asleep on the bus on the way home and I remember getting teased. They never really teased me to hurt me...it was just...you know, you're only so big. I remember crying a lot and I didn't like going there at all. It was just because of what happened to me.

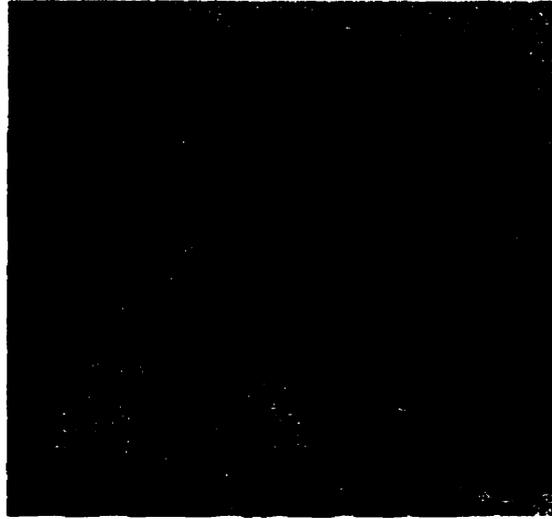
Learning to Cope.

Each of these women developed strategies to deal with the challenges involved in getting an education. Mary Jane had no choice but to turn to her skilful basket weaving and other labor intensive jobs as she started raising her family. Judy soon learned how to stay out of trouble in school on Lennox Island. The teacher was really, really strict and there was a lot of times you could smell alcohol. Those were the days we really

watched for; she had a Temper! We were really scared; we knew that! Everybody would try to be really good those days and we'd go outside. She'd let us go outside on the playground a lot those days. If she lost her temper, she'd take that strap and just whip it on the desk. Being a little girl and just being so afraid, you know, if you even move, but so, I enjoyed my work because you didn't get into trouble if you did what you were told.



**Jadis children at home on Lennox Island (early 1960's)
Standing (from left): Francis, Peter, Judy
Sitting (from left): Barbara, Tommy**



**Barbara and Judy with their cousins, Brucie and Bobby,
before leaving Lennox Island to live in Scotchfort (1968)**

Retention played a major role in discouraging Judy from continuing her education. When we moved from Lennox Island, I should have been going into Grade Eight but in public school, they put me back to Grade Six! I was getting older so that really bothered me. I was old and most of my classmates were younger than I was. I was almost 15 by the time I made it to Grade eight! I remember the Sister wasn't going to advance me because she wanted me to stay behind another year. She said that I wasn't ready. She let me go, because she asked me "If I...if you don't pass, if I don't advance you in Grade 8, will you come back in the fall?" I said, "No, because I don't want to be here! And I know it's a waste of my time and your time!" She advanced me and let me go to high school. I WORKED HARD that year just to prove that I...that it was OK for me to be there. As my brother Peter says, whenever

they make you stay back or something...you lose your interest! It interrupts everything; you lose your friends and all that!

After missing a lot of time in Grade One, Barbara wasn't so fortunate. When the family moved to a Reserve where Native children attended public school, Barbara recalls: We moved up here in '68. I should have been in Grade 2, but my parents didn't put me in school. Finally they told me I should be in school. I wasn't up to the grade level so they put me in Grade 1 and I still...they couldn't get me to do the lessons. I couldn't do anything I guess, so they kinda...that kept on for a couple of years and I guess they labelled me as having a learning disability and they put me in this special class.

Just a little over a decade ago, in the late 1980's, Amelia had difficulties being accepted in the primary grades as well. She recalls, When I was going to elementary school, I remember going to school with NUNS. Oh yah, all the primary grades were just another bad experience. My teachers from Grade 1 to 4 were strict...really, really strict and it just wasn't with Natives kids at all, it was with all of us. I seen it, I even seen it happen, like one of my teachers took a ruler to another student and we were scared. Like, we wouldn't prompt her at all! I don't have very fond memories from Grade 1 to Grade 4. I don't like my primary teachers, especially one. She really was too tough! One teacher I'm scared of to this day!

In the early grades, I just learned not to talk back. I kinda learned not to say anything. It scared me the first few years. Like, we talked when we were told to and that was it. Even when I was told to talk, I wouldn't say much because after seeing a

few kids getting hit with a ruler or their ears tugged at or sometime their pony tail kinda picked at a little or....I was scared to talk. The only other Native student in my class all the way through got a lot of discipline, but for some reason, he was never disciplined in front of the class at all. I remember the teacher would only take a few students out of the room. Most of the students she'd discipline right in front of everybody like we'd all see what she would do, but he was always taken out of the room so I don't know if anything ever happened to him or he was just sat out in the hallway. But I was scared! I was scared not to stay still. "When students' language, culture and experience are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage. Students' silence and non-participation under these conditions have frequently been interpreted as lack of academic ability or effort, and teachers' interactions with students have reflected a pattern of low expectations which become self-fulfilling (Cummins, 1996, p. 2)."

The strategies children create to cope under such circumstances affect not only their academic achievement but also their self esteem and self confidence. As Cummins (1996) reminds us, the interactions that occur between teachers and students in the classroom can "be empowering or disempowering for both teachers and students. The ways in which student-teacher identities are negotiated in classroom and school interactions play a major role in determining students' orientation to self and their orientation to academic effort (Cummins, 1996, pp. iii-iv)." As teachers, I feel we must realize the power of our profession and how much of an authority figure we each represent to individual students and to parents. It appears this position of power and

authority is amplified when minority cultures are part of the student body.

Stop for a moment and imagine an “apple for the teacher” ornament displaying the message: *2 TEACH & 2 TOUCH LIVES 4 EVER!* Just a moment of reflection on the power of that tiny mathematical style statement makes one realize one’s experiences with the formal education process can have a lasting effect, whether it’s positive or negative. Teachers can make a positive difference by delivering quality educational experiences for all of the students we have the opportunity to reach. And even though the negative extreme is also possible, it remains a given that people who teach, do in some way touch us and therefore, do indeed remain a part of us, possibly forever. We are not just individuals, we are the product of many interactions. When the interactions experienced by Barbara, Judy and Amelia were negative, they were disempowered to the point of giving up on the system. As teachers, I believe we must constantly be vigilant of the power our words and our actions possess in transforming young minds.

Powerlessness and Cultural Survival.

“No one can deny that the systematic destruction of cultural patterns, beliefs, and social and normative systems and structures to which, for over a century, Indians were subjected by the Canadian government has had a devastating impact on Indian cultures (Boldt, 1993, p. 169).” “For more than one hundred years, the Indian Act segregated and isolated Indians geographically (by the reserve system), socially (by prejudice and discrimination), politically (by a colonial system of administration) and legally (by the

constitution and the Indian Act) from the world external to their reserves. Some argue that this enforced isolation sheltered Indians from being overwhelmed by the acculturating forces of Canadian society. While this notion has some merit, a much more persuasive analysis is that Canada's policy of isolating Indians dealt their cultures a crippling blow (Boldt, 1993, p. 171)."

"Successive governments have tried – sometimes intentionally, sometimes in ignorance – to absorb Aboriginal people into Canadian society, thus eliminating them as distinct peoples. Policies pursued over the decades have undermined – and almost erased – Aboriginal cultures and identities. This is assimilation. It is a denial of the principles of peace, harmony and justice for which this country stands – and it has failed (RCAP, 1996, p. x)." As you listen to these Mi'kmaq voices, you will discover reality as Boldt describes it, "They were taught to devalue their traditional spirituality, values, and norms. Their communities experienced punitive legal prohibitions against traditional spiritual expressions, ceremonies and other cultural practices. One consequence of this policy of individual assimilation and collective cultural repression was that a number of traditional cultural practices disappeared for want of transmission to new generations, thus creating cultural voids (Boldt, 1993, p. 168)." Each of these women, as they lived their lives, experienced the effect of growing up in a type of cultural void which denied them the ability to practice their traditional forms of spirituality. It has only been through their parents' self-determination that their culture was passed down. Mary Jane and Frank demonstrated a deep conviction for the survival of their traditional ways, even if it was a by silent and secretive practice. As Ross describes the situation, "the teachings had gone

underground (Ross, 1996, p. 228).”

As Amelia put it: **Our tradition didn't really survive – it struggled, then survived. It really struggled; it was lost for so many years. We weren't even allowed to practice it at all. The only Native teachings that I learned was from my mom. Just lately, the last five or six years maybe. Barbara recalls, A lot of things were taken away from us. We weren't able to conduct all the ceremonies and everything like that: the Waltes game, the drumming, the Powwows, anything like that was stopped. Micmac culture had to be repressed for fear of reprisals from the Indian agent. My parents did not dare talk about cultural traditions with us. The first missionaries took away all those things. They took away the sacred objects. They wanted you to be Christian, eh, they didn't want you to practice your own culture. Even names, my grandfather, Mom's father was Tom Snake, ehh. The priest don't like that name and he change it to Peters. So there's a whole generation, my mom's generation, that didn't have any of this culture and it was hard to reinstate it again. It's OK to learn these things now. A lot of things were taken away, like a lot of traditions; it still remained but it came in different forms. I remember when I was young, my parents always offering water to the Earth before we all had a drink if we were out in the blueberry fields or out in the woods or somewhere. I always remember seeing that. I was surprised that tradition was still there and it's coming back to the next generation. It was almost lost.**

Judy too praises her parents for teaching them cultural traditions. **When we were growing up we weren't allowed to have Powwows or even to talk about our culture.**

I always asked Dad and Mom why, but they said THEY (Indian Affairs) don't want us to. Whenever someone would come to visit that was non Aboriginal, I remember we had a wood-stove and if Mom would see them coming, she'd take everything and hide it! I couldn't believe it! I'd ask why and she'd say I don't want them to see what we're eating. She used to hide everything in the oven. I always remember Mom hiding all our food. And even the medicines, we had them, but I didn't grow up knowing these things were medicines. Dad walked us through, each one of us, he left a legacy behind! When he died we realized just exactly what he left behind.

"Assimilation policies failed because Aboriginal people have the secret of cultural survival. They have an enduring sense of themselves as peoples with a unique heritage and the right to cultural continuity (RCAP, 1996, p. x)."

"The consistent all pervasive denigration of virtually everything Aboriginal over the course of many generations has created an alarming number of broken communities where traditional virtues have been eroded to the point that power and fear are in the driver's seat (Ross, 1996, p. 200)." Barbara recalls: There was a lot of rules set on us. You had to get permission to leave the Reserves, you had to have this little ticket from the Indian Agent in order to leave the Reserve that's how well monitored we were! Dad always said he wanted to continue more in school but he had to stop going after Grade Ten because if he didn't he would have been enfranchised and lost his status and been forced to move off the Reserve. In the time from 1920 to 1959, if you were able to support yourself you were enfranchised and told to leave the Reserve and support yourself. My father was so afraid of that he didn't want us to lose his status

that he didn't continue.

As the Abegweit Review (1993) reminds us, "The Micmacs were virtually prisoners in a province which was aboriginally theirs! Not only was their relationship to the land curtailed; opportunities for developing meaningful relationships with the white population was almost non-existent. In effect, they were cut off from the mainstream of Canadian society. The Indian Act of 1876 rendered the Micmacs powerless economically and politically (MacIntyre, 1993, p. 16)." The Indian Act dictated that if an Indian wanted to leave the reserve for any reason, if he wanted to build a house or cultivate a piece of land, he first had to ask the agent who might take months reporting to and receiving a reply from Ottawa. The only alternative was enfranchisement – the exchange of Indian status for the status of Canadian citizen. "Enfranchisement is the process by which an Indian gives up both the benefits and burdens of the Indian Act. The enfranchised Indian is obligated to dispose of any interest in reserve lands which he may have and to cease active participation in the reserve community. In short, enfranchisement means that an Indian is expected to surrender his special legal status as an Indian and join the Canadian community at large (Cumming & Mickenberg, 1972)."

Learning Environment.

Discrimination and prejudice challenged these women from many directions. One can only wonder where academic achievement fits into a student's thinking when such things are going on, front and center, in one's daily life. It's easy to visualize how racist

attitudes can destroy a learning atmosphere, but one must be aware that even more subtle forms of expression and varying degrees of sensitivity play key roles in the education process. The schooling experiences of Mary Jane's children unfortunately reflect discriminatory practices which sooner or later, led to each one of them quitting school. Recalling an incident one of her sons experienced at public school, Mary Jane explains what her son told her:

"That little boy called me a squaw! Oh, I hate that! I'm not a woman!" The next day he went to school again. I think it was Grade 8. He said he called me again. I hit him 'til he had black eye. Then he finished school. "I'm not going to school anymore!" he said. He hit the guy. He didn't go to school anymore. If there's any trouble they stop go to school and don't want to go to school. Only one went to school a lot.

Barbara saw that happen in other families as well. I found that a lot of the parents never went up against the teacher. They wouldn't go to the teacher and talk about a situation, they'd just let it be. Like Mom said, they keep their kids home because they couldn't handle dealing with an authority figure. It was just scars from residential school, the same with the nuns and the priests, and other things like lack of self-confidence.

Judy didn't find school easy, but she did enjoy the opportunity to learn so many new things. She recalls going to public school: **We used to get on the bus and because most of the children weren't dressed like non-Aboriginals they were always being teased and there was a lot of problems on the school bus. I remember always**

protecting them, you know...that it didn't matter how you dressed, you know, it mattered that you were going to school. But in high school, Judy recalls: There was only two Aboriginals in my high school. That was a time when a lot of my classmates didn't know a lot about Aboriginals. My classmates, my friends were good to me! They took care of me; they helped me. Like the ones I went on the bus with and even the boys that were in my class were really good to me; they helped me a lot! And even the teachers!

Five years younger in age, Barbara's memories aren't so positive. We used to have a lot of problems on the school bus. A lot of non-Natives didn't want to sit with us or there would be a fight break out and then we'd have to walk home. I mean that happened SOOOO much. That's why we have our own bussing today; it was very difficult! On one occasion, something had been stolen from one of the other students. OUR bus was the ONLY one that got searched. It was really degrading! And in high school things didn't get any better. I couldn't get the help I needed over there. I tried! I tried to get the help, you know if I missed an assignment or didn't understand the assignment or...teachers just kind of brushed me off...they wouldn't...like you know...I wasn't worth their time of day! It was hard! The English teacher up there, she was really hard! And a lot of students wouldn't talk to us. They kind of alienated us, I don't know. They wouldn't talk...I didn't like going to school. I had to push myself every morning to go to school...I hated it! Couldn't stand it! I tried to make friends and they just didn't want to have nothing to do with you. Or they'd make friends with you in the classroom, but outside the classroom, they wouldn't talk to you. And

now I realize it was me being Native that made that difference.

Toughing it out is how Barbara recalls her first years in high school. Even my sewing teacher...so many times I tried to get her to help me in Home Ec. and she'd just tell me very quickly or you know, it looked like she didn't...I was a bother. And that would happen TOO many times! And I'd end up not going to school; I'd miss a couple days and then my Dad would encourage me to go back. I'd try, try again, but it was the same thing, happening all over again. At the end of it, it was just too much! All my other friends – it started off with 7 of us going to High School – by November, I guess it was, everyone else had quit! So that was hard too! They all quit school and it was hard going on your own. But I had some good friends. Maybe about a handful of them that they got me through the next couple of months. But I quit school! I told Dad, I can't go back! And he wouldn't let it down; he just wouldn't let me give up! A friend of mine from Rocky Point was going to a different high school so I told Dad I wanted a transfer. Dad had a hard time getting me in there; but finally he got me in there.

Quitting is one option, but in this particular Native family, a key player in their life, their Father, was instrumental in encouraging them, especially the youngest, Barbara, to further her education. The cultural discontinuity approach as described by Jordan (1984) suggests that culture conflict, rather than low ability or the lack of desire to succeed, is often the reason that the achievement of children from some ethnic groups lags behind that of their majority-group peers (p. 59). "By the time children come to school, they have already learned very complex material as part of being socialized into their own

culture. This means that in minority schooling we are dealing with a situation involving two cultures – the culture of the school and the culture of the child. When the two are not compatible, the school fails to teach and the child fails to learn (Jordan, 1984, p. 61)."

Informal Education.

Research on culture and learning begins with the assumption that children are not "empty vessels" when they enter the educational system. They have already internalized standards of communication, interaction, language use, and behavior from their home environments (Saville-Troike, 1978). Learning from and working with their parents after school hours was a very important part of the Jadis family's informal education.



**Frank Jadis
Skilled Artisan at work**

As Barbara remembers her upbringing: I always seen my parents working on something. They were either making baskets all the time or trap rings or axe handles, or a lot of different things...picking mayflowers, collecting medicines, ...anything. We were always picking sweet-grass, going clam digging...always had something to do. Mom could make any kind of basket from those big hampers to right tiny little fancy baskets. Mom and Dad are so opposite in terms of education, but Mom is so smart in many other ways. That's the way it was!

A Matter of Priorities.

Mary Jane was a woman determined to get an education, but the response was negative. Now, when asked to reflect on her feelings about youngsters dropping out of school these days, Mary Jane replies, Well,...I don't know...let them go anyway...I don't, I don't tell them go to school. One wonders how much of that sentiment is felt today by other Native parents and grandparents.

When Judy was attending school it was like this: When you're in an Aboriginal community, homework wasn't a priority! You went to school all day, you come home and you either cook, did dishes, then you were out...social! The structure wasn't there, like study habits weren't a priority. We had it rough when we were growing up. Mom and Dad, we always made baskets and we always made trap rings, lobster trap rings and we did that like after we went to school. Our books just went in the

corner! Yah, we threw them in the corner! And we picked them back up in the morning when we went back to school. There was no such thing. We didn't know what homework was! But you know what...the teachers never, they never stressed homework. We'd come in and especially on Lennox Island they never expected us to have it done and never forced us.

Cultural Awareness and Identity.

"Knowing little about their students' background, teachers are unable to make connections between the kind of relationship with students that motivates them to succeed. Albeit unwillingly, such teachers contribute to academic problems for many students because they lack the kind of knowledge and experience that would enable them to better serve student needs (Lipka & Mohatt, 1998, p. 92)."

To Native people, identity, pride, and a positive self image are one and the same thing. They are crucial to achievement in school and in all aspects of life (Dawson, 1988, p.49). "If my children are proud, if my children have identity, if my children know who they are and if they are proud to be who they are, they'll be able to encounter anything in life, I think this is what education means (Native Mother's quote from New Brunswick Dept. of Education Teacher's Handbook, Perley, 1997)." Judy was able to cope with most of the challenges confronting her in elementary school. **I didn't know what prejudice was, I didn't...I was brought up, I was accepted. People took care of me and I appreciated that. There was some that, you know, had a problem, but they stayed**

away from me. Friends – it's mostly who you hang around with. And you know...you're accepted or you're not, right. It wasn't until Grade Ten that Judy started to feel alienated in school. When I had failed Grade Ten, I went back in the fall. A lot of classmates had gone on and there was just a few of us left behind. I remember telling Mom and Dad: I was 18 in October and I'd go to school 'til I was 18. I didn't have the initiative to go on. I was getting tired because I had spent all these years in school and I still had a long way to go yet. I think when I went to school with that type of mentality, I thought OK; I'd pretty well made up my mind this was what I was going to do. An incident happened and suddenly, it was just like someone had slapped me across the face. The English teacher just screamed, "Will you guys be quiet; you're acting like a bunch of WILD INDIANS!"

And I remember that bothered me SO much and maybe because of the frame of mind that I was in...getting older and things like that. But after that I just felt not welcome! It was like, just how can I face somebody every day when someone lashes out at you for no reason. It would be different, I guess, maybe, if I was the one that was disrupting class, then maybe I could understand that, yah...maybe she did have the right to say that. But it really bothered me but at that time too in my life, I had already made up my mind that I was 18 and I didn't really want to be in school. When it turned my eighteenth birthday, I didn't go back. I knew I had spent 12 years in school and I'd still have a few...I just needed a rest. That's what really pushed my last button!

Attitude and Self Esteem.

For the vast majority of Indian students, far from being an opportunity, education is a critical filter indeed, filtering out hope and self esteem (Hampton in Battiste & Barman, p. 7). "Achievement in school is highly related to self concept...Without self esteem, without hope, students have no reason to try. To every student in every culture, self-respect is essential to success and a good life (Gilliland, 1986)." That feeling of low self-worth plagued Judy's life for years to come. As she recalls getting her GED, I had that attitude again because I knew I was going to fail! Even when she was accepting her GED certificate she continued to question reality. "Are you SURE you have the right person?" When I realized I passed, my self-confidence was regained. It was not until Judy started learning all over again as she worked with young children and began to feel more comfortable with the basics of reading comprehension.

School Environment.

Barbara points out that it's not just the attitude of the student but also that of the institution that affects one's academic achievement. Yeah, I switched high schools. I couldn't get the help I needed over there. My first day in my new school, I had to report to the office, to talk with the principal. The first thing he told me was, "How long do you want to go to school...only a couple of months?" I said, "No, until I

graduate!” JEEZ, it’s his ATTITUDE right off the bat. He was setting me up to fail. I was determined to keep going. As Cummins (1996) states, “human relationships are at the heart of schooling. The interactions that take place between students and teachers and among students are more central to student success than any method for teaching literacy, or science or math. When powerful relationships are established between teachers and students, these relationships frequently can transcend the economic and social disadvantages that afflict communities (Cummins, 1996, p. 1).” Starting to feel accepted as an equal in her new school, Barbara believes the cultural mix made a difference: I think where it was a large school and there was a variety of people there, like there was different race and teachers were OK with that. They didn’t single me out as being the only minority there and that made a big difference! I enjoyed it! I had a lot of good memories there.

Amelia admits, I had self-confidence; there just came a time when I was bored. It started with skipping one class after lunch and then not going at all and then taking off, right off the bus. We’d be going to school on the bus, but we wouldn’t go to class. I found myself bored. I think there was only one class and one teacher that really got me staying in class. The subject didn’t matter; it was the teacher. I can’t blame anyone or even the books, it was just myself. I wanted better things to do! I was looking for...I didn’t have better things to do, but I was looking for better things to do!

Curriculum.

Curriculum too can make a big difference. The teaching that appealed the most to these Native students was active in nature. Barbara found something that really interested her: **It was Art that kept me going; I'd live just to go to Art class! And I knew I found something I really enjoyed. I ended up taking Home Ec. there again and it was different!**

Judy remembers: **I only had advanced one subject and that was Home Ec. and that was something else too. I thought that was really amazing because I love to cook and when you come from an Aboriginal family, that's all you do is cook! We always had the basics, you know, potatoes, vegetables, and meat, but I remember going to high school and learning the different recipes and trying different methods and I thought this was just amazing, that just intrigued me. And the sewing part I enjoyed too, because we didn't do that.**

Some of Amelia's fondest memories of her years in school revolve around sports. **Sports! Sports! I participated in a lot of sports. I was in soccer, I was in baseball, pretty much everything they offered. At the end of Grade Eight I got Athlete of the Year Award! I got all kinds of certificates and medals from when we went out to meets. It was sports! I really enjoyed sports! I took Grade Nine gym, but like I said, "I got bored with everything! Even sports! I didn't participate in any in high school sports.**

Personal Frustrations.

The frustrations experienced by all four of these Mi'kmaq women may reflect one of the findings of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (1996) which states: "Most Aboriginal students attend schools where there is no special effort to make them or their families feel part of the life of the school. There is a gap between the culture of the home and that of the school (p. 6)."

Amelia admits: **My quitting was one thing that was especially hard on my mom. I was the first one to quit out of all my friends and the only one to quit. I don't think there was any other people that I started off with in Grade One or around here that quit other than the only other Native in my class. It was just me! Everybody stayed in school and that was hard on me seeing my friends, you know, accomplishing it and getting through high school. With my Mom, it was hard for her because everyone quit on her so it was sort of similar in a way. It was hard on both of us. We both got through it.**

Barbara takes getting an education very seriously and so she admits, **My own kids are having a difficult time in school and it's a struggle EVERY day! Speaking about her own teenagers dealing with many of the same issues she faced, Barbara admits her greatest fear: The children are learning a lot about our culture and it helps them deal with a lot, but it's still not easy for them. All summer we were all on the Powwow trail and when they get back into school, what's around them...drugs and alcoholism,**

racism, people making fun of Indian people and I'm so afraid they're going to say, No, Mom, I don't want to be an Indian and they would walk away from it. It's a TOUGH world! Barbara knows the pressure they are under from their peers and from society in general because she experienced them firsthand. I thought those thoughts too when I was a young adult, because I had to deal with so much racism in school, I didn't want to let anyone know I was from the Reserve. They couldn't pick it up from my name because it was not really a Native name. When I was a young adult I did EVERYTHING I could NOT to look Native. I curled my hair, I cut it, I didn't wear ANYTHING Native, no jewellery and I became so strong a Catholic I just tried to fight it, but it DIDN'T WORK! (Laughs)

Breaking the Cycle.

Barbara was then a prime example of that “ generation of children who are virtual strangers to the Native culture” as Stairs describes Aboriginal people after years of assimilationist education (in Battiste & Barman, 1995, p. 149). Barbara can now laugh about that time of her life; today she is very proud of who she is and what her culture represents. Her educational experiences at the University of New Brunswick made a big difference in her life. In her late twenties, she had received just a little taste of teachings during meetings in Western Canada, but at U.N.B.'s Micmac-Maliseet Institute, true respect for her own culture was re-born. We were in an environment where we had a Native teacher, we had all Native students, and it was great! I was finally able to

learn more about my culture. I started to feel proud of who I was! Up to then, each time you tried to express who you were...you being a Micmac...it was like you had to deal with racism, so you kinda hid it and wouldn't express who you were. Finally we were in a classroom and you could bring in Native culture and it was OK. It was acceptable; finally, after so many years. We learned everything from the language to medicines. We played Waltes, learned music, dance, Native stories, the legends, everything...everything...there was nothing left out. We learned a lot about our history, petroglyphs, symbols and it was very interesting. We did a lot of storytelling. Each one of us was from different regions and shared different stories, our oral history, that was great. We didn't realize we had so much in common with other communities all over the Maritimes, the Atlantic Provinces.

Prince Edward Island should offer its residents opportunities to explore and learn about Mi'kmaq culture. It should not be necessary for Aboriginal people to travel out of province to learn about their culture. The Island government and the University of Prince Edward Island should follow the philosophy of the Micmac-Maliseet Institute and hire people to ease the transition of Aboriginal students onto higher education, both at the high school and the post-secondary level.

Challenges Getting an Education

Home and Community.

“An important factor in the cognitive development of a child is the lifestyle and culture of the home; parents’ values are translated through their views on achievement, academic expectations, and career goals (Henry & Pepper, 1990, p. 87).” The home and community environment present additional challenges to Native students. Wondering what factors within the home and community affect academic achievement, Amelia responds: Maybe discipline...maybe some of the parents don’t push at all. They just let their kids go. You know, you’re old enough now, just make your own decision. Because around here it’s like 18, I guess, you know...when you’re 18, you can go on welfare. That’s another thing – just because that’s there and they know it’s there, I can go on welfare, I’m going to drop out of school...I’m going to do this, I’m going to do that. I’m going to stay home or they can even get a house when they’re 18, so maybe it’s just letting go of them too easy! Most of them aren’t ready to graduate at age 18 anyway. It’s too easy living on reserve! I don’t want my kids to have it that easy. They are going to know they are Mi’kmaq, 100%, all the way growing up, it’s just that I don’t think we’re going to live on reserve. Anywhere else but on the reserve...it’s my own personal view. I want my children to live and go to schools mixed with cultures.

Indian time could be another factor. Like it's for real! It's laid back! We didn't have a clock; we lived by the sun. And I guess that could be one reason why I wasn't in school half the time (giggling). It could be a Small factor, but not a very big one! I grew up around it! When anyone mentions it, it's just normal for me! I will be awake at unreal hours. We don't work with the clock. We work on our own time.

Judy recalls: We didn't have anything at home. We didn't have coloring books like they have today. There wasn't things like that. You know, we didn't have a lot of paper or pencils or anything. I didn't have the resources in my community or even a car to go to a library. Libraries weren't introduced to me as a place you can go and get other material or resources.

Barbara feels the reality of reserve life had an impact on Native students quitting school: Well, when I was growing up, a lot of...they didn't have...the structure at home, the family structure, like most parents were...like a lot of alcoholism, a lot of students had to take care of their younger kids. Poverty too...they didn't have nice things to wear or proper lunch or the right winter clothes. If you went to school like that, they'd make fun of you. It was so hard, not having nice things! Our families couldn't afford it! On a lot of reserves, the money still doesn't filter down to the people, but a lot of positive things are happening in the Abegweit Band now.

Negative or positive, one's school experiences, are passed on through the socialization process. For most Aboriginal parents and older siblings, those experiences were often negative. The majority of Native parents may have trouble relating to whatever was being taught, especially at high school. Judy remembers: I think that was

the encouragement we didn't get. Like you know, the pat on the back...you're doing a good job! Nowadays you see children have stickers and that to encourage them and actually I find that's really good because at least they get some kind of recognition. You know, that, hey, they are doing a good job and that encourages them. So little things like that!

And most of my community...because we got on the bus, we went to school, they just assumed that we stayed in class and we were doing well. Nobody ever questioned how we were doing; they never asked to help. We never had that or just we never knew that we could ask for it. In Grade Ten, I was almost 18. I remember trying to study hard and with the grades advancing more, it got difficult. There was some things I couldn't comprehend. I had nobody at home...Dad could help me up until I started high school but he didn't understand the Algebra part and Metric started and he didn't understand that. It frustrated Dad. He could help me up to a point...up until I reached maybe high school, but after that he didn't understand. I didn't have a tutor and maybe that was what my biggest problem was – to have somebody. When you're in an Aboriginal community, homework wasn't a priority! Many students would not have a parent with strong educational background.

As defined in the Assembly of First Nations' *Tradition and Education*, "Education is life-long and holistic, and is the vehicle for transmitting our languages, our social, cultural, and traditional values to our children." Judy's struggle with getting an education represents this lifelong journey very well. She recalls her job training as a teacher aide at the early elementary and early childhood level: "That course taught me a lot that I

probably missed out when I was growing up. I could finally understand the patterns, why they did things. By having the opportunity to work with the younger kids, three, four, and five year olds, I remembered what I had always really wanted growing up – the help to enjoy reading, the storybooks and things, because that was something we lacked on the Reserve, like have bedtime stories, ...the reading part was missing. Books and pictures, just to do things like that was something! I remember learning as I was playing with and teaching these kids. I was grown up and this was an experience for me again, learning all of this, even with the little kids. The children worked together and it was good because the children got to socialize more. That was something we just did in families, eh, but not in the schools.

Judy really understood as one of her own daughters struggled with pronunciation and comprehension. I knew the frustration I had gone through; I went through the same thing. I remember there was one teacher who really was always singling her out and she hated to read – just to open the book she'd cry because she didn't want to read. My girls, I supported them all the way through. When my girls both graduated at age 17, it brought back the memories of when I was 18 in Grade Ten. But we worked hard! I think I learned just as much as they did.

Even though generations apart, all of these women have experienced and continue to enjoy a transient lifestyle. Often times this transient nature was of necessity, but freedom to move reflects a traditional lifestyle for this family. In the lives of these women this migrant style of living created yet another challenge to academic achievement. For Mary Jane and her children, it was a matter of necessity: Yeah, we

travel a lot; we have to work! As Barbara recalls, We always went everywhere with them. She didn't like leaving us behind. The effects on schooling become evident as Judy remembers: Our family travelled a lot in the fall of the year. In August we were in Maine picking blueberries, so when we came back it was already September. School had already started and then, as soon as we'd go to school for a few weeks, potato picking would come and we'd migrate again to Maine. Then we would come back to the Island and it was different times of the year. We would travel like from PEI and we were in Charlottetown, we'd go to Maine and then come back. It was just like...we were very transient people or at least our family was.

Although not always for work, this lifestyle remains. Barbara and her family continue to travel on what is fondly called the Powwow trail and she has been working to keep the ties of kinship strong. People thought I was very unsettled because I was doing a lot of travelling but I was developing that kinship with both sides of the family. Freedom to travel was also a factor in Amelia's education. You wouldn't see someone my age taking off for the weekend, but, heh, I was doing it! At a very young age, Amelia had the freedom and the self-confidence to travel alone to other reserves in the Maritimes. Attending school regularly was not as important as visiting friends and family. Arbess (1981, p. 2) reminds us, "The child is given freedom to intensely explore and experience the world directly without personal interference. Although the parent is always there for the child, it is the child who typically initiates contact with the parent. The child moves within a large web of kinship and will have close relationships with many kin and households far beyond the narrow focus of the nuclear family."

Teachers Make A Difference.

Even with the extra challenges that being Native and living on Reserve entailed, academic achievement often rested on the difference a single teacher can make in the classroom situation. As Cummins reminds us, “The interactions between educators and students always entail a process of negotiating identities. The ways in which student-teacher identities are negotiated in classroom and school interactions play a major role in determining students’ orientation to self and their orientation to academic effort (Cummins, 1996, p. iv).”

Amelia is quick to admit: I think there was only one class and one teacher that really caught my...got me staying in class. Yah, he’s the only teacher that could keep me in class. I’d even come back...like if I went to school in the morning, I’d hang out all morning but I’d go back for his class and then I’d take off right away. If someone went to look at my records, they’d see she went to her English class all Grade Ten year and that’s about it! The subject didn’t matter; it was the teacher. Even my Science class, when I was there I was getting like 90’s. I was just bored overall with everything; I just got bored easily! I can’t blame anyone or even the books, it was just myself. I wish I would have had more discipline to stay in school, but my mom wasn’t living here at the time. She was in Nova Scotia and I was with Gramm, so....Well, she did chase me to school, but, you know, I never got caught! I took advantage of it, but I really, really wish I would have went now.

“Teaching success is tied to a teacher’s ability to devise a curriculum that is more personal and more directly linked to their students’ cultural experiences, local values, shared communicative norms, and interactional styles....The teacher’s cultural understanding and ability to communicate with and motivate students on the basis of that understanding can be most critical to student learning (Lipka & Mohatt, 1998, p. 92).”

Leavitt’s (1994b) observations about the relationship between formal and informal learning and the creative possibilities of “mixed ways” places identity at the core of Aboriginal concerns. Students will respond positively if the material suits their learning style and is culturally relevant.

Situations do arise from cultural misunderstandings, classroom expectations that don’t suit Native learning styles, or an emphasis on seemingly irrelevant curriculum. Judy recalls: My biggest problem was to pronounce words because both of my parents spoke Indian so we didn’t have the opportunity to learn English at home. I used to laugh because Mom and Dad always spoke Aboriginal...Mi’kmaq and when I’m trying to remember French, I would laugh because things would come out in Indian. It was Mi’kmaq not French. I thought it was funny, but a lot of people, they’d laugh at you, but they were laughing for the wrong reason. It frustrated the teachers because they thought we were doing it on purpose. “Negative messages can be overt or covert, intentional, or more frequently, unintentional. When students’ developing sense of self is affirmed and extended through their interactions with teachers, they are more likely to apply themselves to academic effort and participate actively in instruction (Cummins, 1996, p. 2).”

Judy continues: I was OK when I went to school and I thought it was so interesting...but the reading aspect of it, I had difficulty. What they used to do was we'd have to stand in front of the class and read the chapters and I was always scared. I didn't like that! The comprehension I had problems with and so that was my biggest fear.

I proved I could do it in Grade Nine and so I advanced to Grade Ten. I worked hard so then I got sort of lazy in Grade Ten! Math and Science got really hard with the conversion to Metric at that time. All they did was drilled and drilled those conversions, conversions. I remember my study habits were poor, just being a teenager. And BOOKS! I could read the words, but my comprehension was like – what did that actually mean? It got to a point where the teacher was standing there and the words were coming out, but nothing – OK, it was like HERE WE GO AGAIN!

But then when I got to Grade Ten, I had to repeat Grade Ten. I only had advanced one subject and that was Home Ec.; I failed all my subjects and I remember it's the comprehension. I always looked at it as, why study it if you knew you were never going to get there. And that was the attitude a lot of my friends had...you know, why bother going to school, cause we're always going to be here on the Reserve. I remember trying to study hard and with the grades advancing more, it got difficult. There was some things I couldn't comprehend. I remember I was in Grade Ten, writing exams and I looked at these questions and I was SO disappointed because everything I studied – there was not ONE question on the test and I said,

“OHHHHHHH” I knew, I wasn’t going to pass, I knew it and so I just put my name on the test, dated it, and then turned it over. I could picture him there in class and I could hear him, but...yet I didn’t, I couldn’t remember enough.

I didn’t have the initiative to go on. I was getting tired because I had spent all these years in school and I still had a long way to go yet. I just couldn’t understand why...why did they want to know this? This was not interesting! I was trying to comprehend it so hard and I think that was my biggest problem. I was struggling so hard I didn’t have the courage to even put up my hand and ask for help. I didn’t feel like I wanted to be the only one in the whole class that couldn’t comprehend; I just assumed everybody else in the classroom understood. As I grew older it dawned on me...the boys that were disruptive in that class, they probably didn’t understand... that’s probably why they were disruptive. But it didn’t sink in until after. Looking back now, Judy realizes many other Aboriginal people bore the brunt of racial discrimination as well. At the time, Judy considered the teacher’s remarks a very personal attack on her identity.

Relevant Curriculum.

“If the instruction is cognitively undemanding, students will learn very little and quickly become bored in the process; if the instruction goes beyond what students can cope with cognitively, then they will also learn very little and become frustrated and mentally withdraw from academic effort. The crucial dimension in helping students

succeed in cognitively demanding tasks and activities is the contextual support that is activated in the learner (motivation, prior knowledge, etc) and embedded in the instruction (Cummins, 1996, p. 72).” It is easy to see how one’s personal attitude towards life sometimes gets in the way of schooling as well. Giving up too easily is what Barbara’s daughter Amelia regrets.

Amelia recalls: Ohhh, in high school, I found myself bored. As soon as I went to high school, I found myself bored. I was learning more in Grade Eight than when I went to high school. I was just bored overall with everything; I just got bored easily! I can’t blame anyone or even the books, it was just myself. I wanted better things to do! I was looking for...I didn’t have better things to do, but I was looking for better things to do! I regret it! I really regret it! I wish I would have had more discipline to stay in school. I mean my GED is just as good, but it’s not good enough. I wish I had my high school diploma. I still wish I would have stayed in school. For Amelia, an abundance of self confidence and a case of situational freedom gave her the opportunity to do as she pleased. I didn’t want to be in school! I wanted to be out doing other things! I think I knew I could do it. I’m a lot different from everybody else; I knew I could do it! So, you know, hey, I don’t have to be here...I know it all! At age sixteen, I had no idea! I just didn’t want to be in school! God, I wanted to be out all night with my friends and I wanted to be in town. I was jumping on the boat every weekend going to other reserves. I was caught up in boys. I was just too busy with everything else...too busy being a teenager. I had that freedom with my mom not around. Academic achievement often fails to take center stage in the minds of

teenagers. With such a high degree of physical freedom possible in some Aboriginal family situations, the school system faces quite a challenge enticing Native youth to attend.

Finding A Balance.

“We are taught that everyone comes with their own gifts. It is the job of teachers to find those gifts. To help children grow. All the gifts are sacred (Ross, 1996, p. 54).”

Wishing she could reverse the drop-out trend for others on the Reserve, Amelia explains her feelings on dropping out of school: **It makes me sick to the stomach! Because I did it and it was a big mistake! I mean I wish I could tell them, but I know, like, it’s not going to get through. They quit for a reason and they’re stubborn and they’re hardheaded and they’re not going to let anyone tell them different! I try! I tell all of them to stay in school; it’s worth it! Really worth it! I feel sad for them, really sad, for down the road, I know they are going to regret it! They might not admit it, but they will regret it! Wondering what might work, Amelia feels: If they had a teacher for every subject and a teacher who was going to, you know, get down to EARTH with them, you’d still have to have a miracle to keep them all there. Computers maybe; that seems to catch everybody’s eye around here. The miracle which Aboriginal students need may be found in the philosophy behind “culturally relevant teaching” as explained by Ladson-Billings (1994). “Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural**

referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (p. 17).” By meeting students where they are, both intellectually and functionally, culturally relevant teaching helps them to be where they need to be to participate fully and meaningfully in the construction of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 96).

Using her experiences as a classroom teacher in Nova Scotia, Barbara’s recipe for what worked for her includes: **a really relaxed atmosphere, Native content, stories, Native art, guest speakers, Music and talking circles.** Ladson-Billings reminds us that culturally relevant teaching fosters the kinds of social interactions in the classroom that support the individual in the group context. Students feel a part of the collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence. Self-worth and self-concept is promoted in a very basic way, by acknowledging the individual’s worthiness to be a part of a supportive and loving group (1994, p. 76). By adapting traditional teaching methods such as experiential learning, observation, intergenerational teaching, and activating the imagination through storytelling, teachers may be able to provide powerful educational experiences for all students, but especially for Aboriginal students. As Collier suggests, we need to break down the power structure...sit in circles, more group work, avoid letting a few students dominate, become aware of hidden biases...and in doing so, “contribute to a more comfortable learning environment for native students (1998, p. 57).”

Even as a Native teacher herself, Barbara had a hard time getting Native parents on her side. **I was their first Native teacher and at that time they were so used to having Natives in there as being teacher aides or you know, people that are cleaning up, or something, but it was a little bit of a surprise for them that I was their teacher.**

I was Native, but it still took a little while for them to trust me. The parents, it was hard to talk to them. They didn't trust the system. They were not very sure of teachers. I guess they would lack confidence too, I guess.

In our culture a lot of our ways are not spoken. It's more like expressions. There's no verbal demands. The first thing is you have to capture their interest. Whenever we did an activity we'd start the activity and work with a few students at a time. Some would get used to it and then finally the other students would start getting interested. It was like they had to...they were lacking in, I guess you would say they lack confidence. Each one had a learning style...different. Like some could go right into something and make it, but somebody else would have to watch and check it out first before he'd try. That's how I'd notice with them -- all things we did...that's how it always worked out. The other few in the background would sit and watch to see how this activity was done. Once they seen it, they feel OK with it and they'd try it, but if you put it right in front of them and told them to do it, they wouldn't do it. I think what happens was they have been in the school system so long, they failed at something, and instead of risking being failed again, or going through the frustration of failing in front of everyone, they'd rather not do it. Stairs (in Battiste, 1985) reminds us of the conclusions teachers often make. For instance, it is often concluded that Native students do not know a particular topic when they can not verbalize the knowledge, that Native students are not involved in their learning when they reject early attempts at a new skill, or that they are lost and unable to learn a skill when they fail at preliminary isolated steps. "In fact, a non participating Native student may be watching

the process until she feels ready for a proficient first try or a real world application arises (p. 141).”

Barbara recalls: We had to test them separately or in a different way...either orally or we had to shorten the questions down. It's just they knew the material, but when they look at a sheet and they seen all these questions, they just couldn't focus. I noticed that, but they had a lot of gifts! In some areas they were weak, but in other areas they would excel! We had to concentrate on the areas they were really good in, just to bring up their confidence in themselves. Up to that point, at just Grade 3, they were already affected by the school system and had no confidence.

Teach them something but in a natural atmosphere. Native students need to feel comfortable in the schools and it will make a big difference. The key is allowing the child to accept who he is and to present a lot of Native content so that it's OK to be Native. Introduce a lot of positive things and they develop a positive identity because you have to accept who you are in order to deal with society if you are a different race; it's hard! You know, you have to accept who you are; you can't hide it! Kids need to be encouraged to express their own heritage...be free to express who they are and to be encouraged.

Barbara admits it is no easy task to get Native parents more involved in the formal education of their children, but she offers some advice. It's going to be difficult but you have to open doors to get parents involved. In my generation...parents didn't go to the schools, didn't meet the principal or teachers. They shyed away from any kind of parent teacher night or any kind of event. Maybe if there was a concert they would

go, but they didn't mingle very much with other parents. What I find is if a parent is encouraged to take part in their child's education, the child feels really proud. They're friends – my parents and this teacher are friends. It makes a big difference! Before there was no interaction. A lot of teachers, they may have to go out of their way to make it easier for Native parents. "When educators and culturally diverse parents become genuine partners in children's education, this partnership repudiates the myth that culturally diverse parents are apathetic and don't care about their children's education (Cummins, 1996, pp. 3-4)."

Barbara' advice continues: Teachers have to be culturally sensitive to the parents, to the families. Once a child knows you accept their parents, you don't look down on them, you don't think you're on another level than them, you have to be equal to gain that trust. It is something that doesn't happen overnight; you have to be very sincere. It takes awhile and you have to be patient. You just can't just go to their home and you, know, think because they open the door – you have to approach them at their own level. It's something you can't predict. There's still some families that are so assimilated they are not open to tradition so you can't expect they know a lot about their traditions – they don't. Because of assimilation they have lost a lot of ways, traditional ways.

Cummins (1996) reminds us that "to create contexts of empowerment in classroom interaction involves not only establishing the respect, trust, and affirmation required for students (and educators) to reflect critically on their own experience and identities; it also challenges explicitly the devaluation of identity that many culturally

diverse students and communities still experience in the society as a whole (Cummins, 1996, p. iii).” You have to get through that residential school syndrome that’s still out there – the effects of it: parents not trusting teachers, parents not trusting authority figures, and that’s embedded into the child and until that’s corrected, you know, we’re always going to have that barrier between Native people and schools. I find that a lot of people who went to residential schools are so afraid of anything that’s Native. They feel it’s wrong to speak the language or to let your hair grow. It’s still wrong in their eyes, it’s their tradition assimilated, I guess. You still see it a lot. “The value placed on their culture and its minority language by the community as a whole affects how it is perceived in the classroom. Since language and culture are deeply embedded in our communicative interaction patterns, the Aboriginal child’s academic success depends on the cultural integrity of the classroom (Mc Alpine & Herodier, 1994).”

Education designed as *One Size Fits All* does not work and never did work!

Sometimes in order to be fair, I believe educators need to treat students differently.

Barbara wants educators and guidance counsellors to realize: A lot of Native people are not very expressive. They don’t speak very loud, they don’t speak very many words, and they don’t like eye contact and I think it has a lot to do with residential schools, the hardships they endured. I always noticed my mother; if she didn’t know someone or didn’t feel comfortable with someone, she wouldn’t look at the person and there would be no eye contact. And if she REALLY didn’t want to speak to the person she would physically turn herself around and face the other direction, like that person

wasn't even there! She'd just block that person out! They don't show much affection; I'm not sure why but I've noticed it in different families. They don't overly show their affection. There is affection there but it is very subtle. They show concern but they won't go over and hug a person. There isn't much physical expression. The teachers need to recognize and adjust to specific learning styles. Spending a lot of time out of the classroom, sitting out in the hallway...that's a bore! Students need to focus. There are a lot of Native students who are just getting by; they find it difficult. It's hard to ask for help. It's really hard! They definitely need someone to help them out. It's like they give up so easily. Without a doubt, education occurs in the home, the community and the school. Aboriginal students, their parents, and their teachers need to take a close look at their roles in the education process and make whatever changes are necessary for the sake of their future well-being. I believe the entire community must demonstrate more than respect and acceptance, they must meet the challenges of the future with a deep commitment to progress.

Meeting the Challenge.

Danziger (1996) suggests that work experiences for secondary Aboriginal students and community recognition for their academic efforts would show young Native people the importance of education for both the individual and the entire community. With role models in place, the circle would be complete. Mary Jane's family is providing some of those role models. With strong-willed women such as Barbara and Judy in positions of

power, helping their brother, Joe, as one of the councillors, and brother, Francis as Chief, run the Abegweit First Nation, the future looks bright. The willingness of these four women to share their educational histories is proof that they care deeply about improving relations between Aboriginals and the dominant society. It is indeed a challenge for as Boldt states, "Although the current generation of Indians bears little responsibility for the present cultural crisis, they must assume full responsibility for the future of their cultures (Boldt, 1993, p. 218)." I feel we must find ways to assist them in this demanding role.

Barbara's hopes include: In the public schools, and secondary and post secondary, I'd like to see the First Nations people recognized. It's been a big struggle this year trying to get some recognition and a lot of things happened. Aboriginal Day is finally recognized in a lot of schools and Native studies courses are starting up. I'd like to see more Native people getting work published – art, literature, poems, anything. If we had more people having books out, you know that opens the doors for a lot of other people. You know, that gives them a dream! I know we have a lot of talented people, but they just don't have the opportunity. With Francis as Chief there's more reason now to get an education; he recognizes everyone who makes an effort. Just lately was the first time Powwows started. In the powwows, in the evenings, we have talking circles and storytelling and this is probably the only chance during the whole year that our cultural traditions are open to the kids and the public. It's bringing the culture back to the community! They see it through example. The children are learning a lot and it helps them deal with a lot but it's still not easy for them. I find that we're finally getting to know other communities, other Native

communities and that wasn't so in the past. We were kinda separated...I don't know if that was due to Indian Affairs or what, but we were all separated. Finally with these powwows and allowing these ceremonies, all these different communities are getting together now. It's great! I think it's heading in the right direction.

Judy is hopeful too. Now we are bringing the culture back and I think that's going to help them be proud of who they were and who they are. Once you build self-esteem up, you know you can meet the challenges and I think that's what we need. Right now, we're giving them computers and giving them opportunities we never had. We're buying school supplies and passing them out on reserve. Those LITTLE things, you don't think they make a difference, but they DO! We want them to see this community supports them. I think what they need is a lot of support. And some of them, their parents don't support them or encourage them and I think it's up to us, the rest of us in the community to show we do care what happens. It's important to go out in the world and get your education because that's where it's at.

As Amelia points out: A lot of younger people around here are into our cultural traditions through Powwows. Even the ones at the Daycare are learning Native songs, learning to count in Native and coming home to teach their parents. This transmission of cultural values may be the direct opposite of the way it should normally be, but the children represent the future hopes and aspirations of all generations. I believe it is important to do whatever we can, as individuals and as a country, to help make the future of Aboriginal citizens much brighter than what was forced upon their forefathers.

Determination to keep going is necessary for graduation. Amelia regrets her

decision to quit high school and wishes other Native students would listen to her advice.

You can't really get through to the high school kids wanting to quit! They're just as stubborn as me! Like I said, it's hard to get through! Nobody could get through to me and I know it's going to be hard for anyone to get through to any of the younger ones around here, but just tough it out! Like, oh, it's worth it! Really worth it! As partners in the education system, I believe we must do our best to get through to each and every student. In my opinion, teachers who care and offer relevant programs can make a huge difference!

Completing the Circle.

Barbara follows in her father's footsteps in many ways. Not only have both travelled extensively to meetings as advocates of Native rights, both were determined to make education a priority in their own lives and in the lives of their children. Mary Jane recalls her husband: **Frank went to school in English school all the time. When his mother was in the hospital in Moncton for a long time, he went to school there. He could talk English and talk Indian just like that! Frank was a Chief for six years, eh. Judy recalls, Dad was a jack of all trades. He knew a little about fishing, politics, carpentry, a lot of different things and he taught us at home, a lot of the skills we still use today. And he drew out the best in each one; like he knew what we were capable of! All the boys knew how to fish, they knew how to make spears. They knew how to make boats, they knew carpentry and mechanical skills, they knew how to survive.**

Dad was the educated one, he had Grade Ten. He loved to read; he'd read the Reader's Digest all the time. I thought he was very educated and a lot of my teachers always said his handwriting was like script writing. He was very intelligent, I always thought! And I guess he was...when he'd go to a meeting he'd come back and he'd share it with us, so that made me more eager to learn! I was really surprised and even as I got older, just how educated he was! Because of his travelling he always encouraged us; he never discouraged us! To know as much as we could – any time there was a learning opportunity, he always encouraged us. Like his story telling too; he was a great storyteller!



**Frank Jadis (far right)
working with Holland College (late 1970's)**

Amelia's pride in her Mom stands out as well: I have to admit my mom was a big role model. I mean I seen her do it. Like I knew she did it! I was determined to

do it too! “Education empowers learners to move forward to educate others (Leavitt, 1994b, p. 191)” and Barbara is a prime example of that.

Both Barbara and her father were responsible for the transmission of traditional ways, even though there were many forces working against both of them. As Judy proudly states, **We’re Aboriginal people and for years we didn’t have the culture, but yet I know Mom and Dad gave us that culture. We were one of the fortunate families that had what we had. Dad taught us a lot about the environment, about trees, and survival. No matter where we went he would take tar paper and we’d make a tar paper shack and even a wigwam and spend a couple of days there. He taught each one of us something different! And he drew out the best in each one; like he knew what we were capable of!** As an outsider viewing the progress of this Native community in the past few years, I agree with Amelia as she proudly states, **I can say that we brought our culture back. Maybe it never would have come here as quick if my Mom didn’t go away and bring it back. She taught everybody when she came home and they started to change slowly. Both Barbara and Frank attended meetings near and far, always coming back to the community to share what had been learned. As Judy recalls, when he’d go to a meeting he’d come back and he’d share it with us, so that made me more eager to learn!** Even though, “the systematic destruction of Native culture and identity through the educational system has had a long history in Canada (Dawson, 1988, p. 45)”, Barbara has managed through her continued education to bring Native culture back to the forefront of her family’s and her community’s lifestyle.



Frank Jadis (third from left, back row)

voicing Mi'kmaq concerns (1970's)

Both Barbara and her father found Native spirituality to be their strength and guiding light. Barbara recalls: I was with my both parents all the time. I was fortunate enough to be shown how to pick sweetgrass and I'm probably I'm the only one around here who can pick sweetgrass and I don't know how it happens that I'm chosen to do all these things but I was chosen and to this day, I always pick sweetgrass. Both were strong believers in the strength of family connections. Barbara feels, A lot of things have been left up to me and it's hard being the youngest because my father always told me...don't forget your relatives...don't forget where you come from...always know who your relatives are, always turn to them no matter what, and

always be there for them.

In many ways what you have just read is true for students of all cultures. I feel we tend to take culture for granted and on the surface, its loss is almost invisible until you reach toward the heart and soul of one's identity. The topic which follows though may distinguish Mi'kmaq culture from many others found in Island classrooms. "Culture is a tricky concept for anyone, majority or minority, to talk about (Mc Caskill, 1984)." We are reminded that Native culture needs to be understood as much more than art, pow wow dancing, feather headdresses, and the trappings that are often associated with cultural traditions. The artistic and material aspects of Native culture are only a small part of the reality and need to be understood within the framework of these people's world view, values, belief systems and changing way of life. It is something very deeply felt. Even to properly interpret or to show appreciation for Mi'kmaq legends and storytelling, or to interpret Native arts and crafts, it is necessary for both teachers and students to have some understanding of the spiritual beliefs which are in existence in Native communities today.

Spirituality

Introduction.

In the New Brunswick Department of Education document entitled *Sacred Objects and Sacred Ceremonies of Maliseet and Micmac Traditionalists*, (1996) Ennis writes:

Our beliefs, our values, our ceremonies, our pain, and our sufferings, are not a religion; they are a way of life. We are the center of all that is happening. Each individual is the center of the world. Where you stand is the centre of the universe. All else surrounds you! But most importantly, in our circle, we are one with the universe and dependent on everything we touch, see, smell, taste, hear, feel, sense, and experience. With this understanding comes a great sense of responsibility and awe....Traditional Native cultures are authentic....Native spiritual and cultural life is founded on a belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of all things, with primary importance being attached to Mother Earth. There is no difference between spiritual and cultural life. There is no written doctrine. Individuals learn about their inner selves through oral teachings and ceremonies. Both of these are supervised by recognized Elders and spiritual leaders. The elders may be men or women. Their distinguishing characteristic is wisdom, with each elder having his/her own special gift or talent.

(1996, preface)

“We see the world differently than you (Ross, p. 59).” “The symbolism attached to the drum, the eagle feather, the pipe, the smudging, the tobacco, the sweat lodge, and the medicine wheel are all profoundly sacred. They speak to us not only of sacredness, but also an acknowledgment of our unique identity as Aboriginal people, and our connectedness to Mother Earth (Moore, 2000, p. 41).”

These women, whose educational histories you are reading, were raised in the

Catholic religion, but for Barbara and her extended family, Native spirituality is now central. The Native values and beliefs, as explained here by Barbara, may represent only a fraction of what remains to be told.

All Is One.

Spirituality is incorporated into everything we do because everything is connected. You have to thank the creator for everything he gives you: food, shelter, medicines, air...everything in life is from the creator...the tree gives us oxygen, wood, food, medicines, shade from the sun...everything from Nature and you have to understand the connection. My parents always went into the woods to get a lot of things they needed to collect medicines but they wouldn't take very much, just enough, just what they needed. They only cut what they needed and they used every bit of that material; nothing was wasted.

Sacred Medicine.

My mother was a Catholic and I was a strong Catholic too and I've seen how elders a hundred years ago easily accepted the Catholic way because there is a lot of similarities. Our elders burnt sweetgrass hundreds of years ago but then there was a time they used palm leaves and they would burn it when they needed to be cleansed or when they needed to be reassured that things were going to be OK. The church,

they burned incense and in our culture we always had a smudge bowl all the time. There was no smudge bowl when I was growing up but we had sweetgrass around us all the time; it wasn't burnt, but it was always hanging up around the door. Mom showed me how to pick sweetgrass, how to clean it, how to dry it and how to braid it. Later I learned this is a very sacred medicine; it's the hair of Mother Earth. And it is braided because it's the mind, body and spirit connected! You burn this to purify yourself. You know if you are afraid, you burn it and it takes the fear away. If you are angry, it takes the anger away. It gives you calmness. If you are upset, you burn sweetgrass.

Language and Sharing.

There are different dialects of Native language even in the Maritimes. If you are far away from your home, and you meet another Micmac and if they share a few words of Micmac to each other, it's like they're family; it's really a big family...that's how you feel when you're away from your community. In our language, there's a whole meaning behind one word. It's a whole meaning and expression. When you live in a Native community, or we can call it a Reserve, homes are open to people. Our mother and father always had our home open to anyone – anyone that needed a home-cooked meal or someone that was passing through or anyone visiting – they were welcome in our home. They'd share anything, the food, the bed, anything to make them as comfortable as possible because they had a strong connection with

their relatives. You had to treat them really well. Don't disrespect anyone! You'd bring out all your food and feed as many people as possible. Now when we have Powwows, we have a traditional feast; it's so common in our culture because that's an old practice. Food is sacred. We always made sure there was a little bit left behind every time and that goes back to food offerings. You always put something aside for the spirits.

Respecting Elders.

It's an honour to be called an elder, even a young elder. When we go into ceremonies or into sweat lodges, elders go in first. If we're at a feast, elders are fed first. If we're going into a Grand Entry, the elders are up front. The elders are always called upon for prayers. They have the wisdom and they are the closest to the creator. In a lot of ceremonies they have to respect elders. When I was growing up you always called an elder an aunt, Auntie, or Uncle even though they weren't your Aunt or Uncle. You showed them respect all the time. We had a lot of young elders. Elders carried a lot of sacred items, like a pipe or they could conduct ceremonies. We have a white eagle feather that is an elder's feather and once you receive that then that's your feather for life. Even when a youngster just begins to dance they have a "coming out". If you have accomplished something most people receive an eagle feather, it shows people in that community are watching that person. If they accomplish something and if they respect our traditional ways, they've come a long

ways and they are acknowledged.

Oral Traditions.

Elders were our storytellers and as we were growing up we knew we couldn't interrupt when an elder was talking. We also felt comfortable that we could trust elders; they accepted us and they wouldn't scoot us away. I remember my father was told stories from his elders and he passed them on to us, stories of how certain medicines came to us and how to use a certain medicine. Elders didn't like to be recorded or their pictures taken or they didn't like their stories being written down. They were very protective of that because they wanted to preserve our oral tradition. They didn't want it to be in books and videos or tape recorders; they wanted it to be kept as an oral tradition. The proper way to learn something is spending time with an elder and you need that connection. It has to be a personal thing. That's how oral traditions are passed down.

Spirit Messengers.

On each round of the sweat lodge, the door is open and we offer water. We all take a drink of water, but before we take a drink we offer water back to the Earth and we offer water back to the rocks for giving up their life, for a rock has a spirit. Sometimes we get messages from spirits. An animal might come at our window, or a

wild animal might come real close to us, come right up to us. I always remember my parents saying: Respect that animal; don't cause any harm to that animal because he's here as a messenger. Usually he always brings us news. It could be good or bad news; I've seen it happen a lot of times. My father always used to tell legends about different medicine men and one medicine man, Ulgimoo, was so powerful he could transform into anything. He could transform into a rabbit, a tree or anything. He could go into all these worlds because we are all connected. I remember him telling me that story.

Women and Spiritual Cleansing.

We are told by our elders that a woman is sacred because she gives life. She is the Creator on Earth! She is so strong spiritually from her menstrual time that she doesn't need to be cleansed during smudging or sweat lodges. She has been cleansed spiritually. She's so strong that it can be positive; she can do a lot of good things, but there's a downfall to it – she can also be powerful being negative too. Now that we're bringing back a lot of our ceremonies, women can't take part in certain ceremonies. If a woman is more than three months pregnant they don't want her going into a sweat lodge because it goes against Nature. A sweat lodge is a womb.

At the end of a Powwow, on the last day, they have a Giveaway. All the people that participated receive a gift and at the very end they have a Giveaway dance. A song is played and the people dance around and on the Honor beat you

raise your gift. You give thanks for the gift you received. A pregnant woman can't take part in that ceremony because you don't want to give your gift, your unborn baby, away so they are really cautious about that. Or you can't be lifting your child up either; you can't have your child up in your arms because the old spirits will think you are giving your child up. You have to be careful what you do.

When you are on your Moon time (our menstrual cycle for women) you are very sensitive, your body is going through a natural cleansing and you are very strong spiritually. A lot of people don't like to be around you when it's your Moon time because spiritually you are very strong and well protected. If it's your Moon time you can't take part in some ceremonies. Another thing happens during the Full Moon; we notice there is a lot of energy because of that gravitational pull. It causes a lot of things in people. It causes a lot of tension and people can't handle it. It's like people are not themselves during the Full Moon. What we do is we have a ceremony during the Full Moon to make that balance.

Death.

We are slowly coming back to our traditional ways. When there is a death in the community, sometimes we light a sacred fire, place eagle feathers, or offer tobacco as an offering to help them in the spirit world. When a person dies you don't speak ill of them. You let them be at peace. You can't mourn too long for a person. The spirit won't continue on to the spirit world if you are constantly sad; you have to

let go and let that person go off into the spirit world. I've always heard that if there's a death in your family, they want you to stay in the community for at least six months. They say if you leave too soon, you are taking that hurt with you and you are unable to come back to that community because that hurt is still with you. When you stay in the community you are healing and that hurt goes away. It doesn't stay with you.

Spiritual Names.

When a child is born we have a naming ceremony. Spiritual names were almost forgotten only two generations ago. Now they are coming back. Sometimes a name will come to the Mother of the child or the grandfather will pick the name for the child. In the past you were given a nickname. That nickname always stuck to you. Spiritual names were taken away from us for a couple of generations so our Mi'kmaq society has replaced it with little names. Everyone has a little nickname, but now a lot of people are looking for their spiritual name. When we go into the spirit world, when we are called upon, they call us on our spiritual name.

Raising Children.

In our community kids are free to visit; there was no restrictions. If anyone saw someone misbehaving and they weren't near their home, usually a parent would

correct that child. It was a community thing; everyone helped raise the children. It wasn't just a family thing, it was a community. We never told our children you can't leave the yard; they were free to roam around. We put a lot of emphasis on letting kids explore things.

Special Powers.

Some people are gifted and they have to be careful how they use their abilities. Like even today when we have ceremonies we have to have a smudge bowl going and be sure everyone is in a clear state of mind. Smudging is the burning of medicines such as sweetgrass, sage, tobacco, or cedar. You can't go into a sweat lodge if you are really mad about somebody and you are wishing them bad things. It is a cleansing period and if you can't get cleansed, then you can't handle the heat in there.

It's hard talking about supernatural powers because it was frowned upon so much. It got to the point where elders wouldn't talk about it. The missionaries or the priests would take things away from them. Like a Waltes game was taken away and was banned. Pipes, sacred pipes were taken away; making certain medicines was frowned upon so it ended up everything had to be hidden. You had to be careful who you told things to because if the word got out they made it hard for you. There was a few people in my community when I was growing up and I remember my parents telling me...we were warned as children, always to be careful you didn't upset certain people. Also you had to be careful not to accept things from certain people. It was

always understood that we had to be careful of non-Natives because we were losing so much from them. But in our own community, in our own society, we had to be careful of certain people because they had abilities, like supernatural abilities. Certain elders had that ability. Their words were so strong! They still had their old ways.

Cleansing and Offering Tobacco.

I'm a spiritual person so I have to keep my house free from alcohol and drugs. I also have to keep it away from anger, anything negative. I can't stop people from coming in; sometimes someone will come in and they're carrying something not good. They are either taking drugs or alcohol or they have a lot of hate around them. I have to cleanse the house after they leave. If I don't, it stays here and it upsets the whole family. The main thing is trying to keep positive people and clean people in your life. Sometimes you have to offer tobacco for safe keeping your family. The same when you go on a trip; you have to put tobacco down. I follow my feelings like that.

We do smudging and say prayers; it's part of our healing. In order to get back to our traditional ways, our connection to the Creator and our connection to the spirit world, you have to be clean...your mind, your body and your spirit...they have to be connected and the only way they are going to be connected is if you keep them clean. You keep your body clean...no alcohol or drugs or lust or all that stuff and

your mind...you have to think positive of people and your spirit...you have to pray to the Creator and you have to pray for people who get you upset. You can't think the worst of people; you have to pray for them. Once you made that connection, it's our old traditional ways.

Pointing.

In our culture laughter is the best medicine. There's a lot of gestures, but the one most common thing is they don't like pointing! Even if you see an eagle, a sacred animal, they don't like you pointing at it. Or if you are asking someone to get something for you they won't point. They'll use their lips and gesture that way.

Follow Your Instincts.

You have to put more emphasis on Bigger things; what's Really important! You can't overly stress yourself with little tedious things; they are important but you have to take things in perspective. In today's society, everyone has to be punctual; you have to be at work at a certain, at meetings or whatever. You have to always go by a schedule and we still set schedules in our community, but if there's a meeting or Powwow everyone knows it will be at least half an hour late starting. It's just understood and we don't rush to get there. We can't let things take control of you. You can't get stressed out; you have to allow people time. Sometimes there's a

reason why you can't get to a certain place at a certain time. Maybe you're delayed or you've got this feeling you can't go and you have to follow all your instincts. You have to pay close attention to your feelings and think about why I am feeling like I shouldn't go. There's a lot of senses you have to observe; it could be your spirit guide warning you of a situation; it could be someone is going to give you a hard time when you get to this place or an accident or your spirit guide is telling you to be aware of something else that's going on. We get a lot of signs like this and some people don't pay any attention to them. I know it doesn't happen every day but people go at their own rate. If they feel comfortable to be at a certain place at a certain time, then that's fine, but a lot follow their instincts.

Significance of Dreams.

We get a lot of messages in dreams. If the spirit wants to send a message, you have to protect yourself too. Forerunners are common to this day; you thank the messenger; you thank the messenger for giving you that message and you offer tobacco. Nightmares, you have to protect yourself. One of the things they protect themselves with is a dream catcher. Everything has a spirit; it could be a good spirit or a bad spirit. Whenever you get something new you have to smudge to cleanse it. If someone gives you a gift, but I have hidden feelings that I don't like you, all that negative stuff is within it, so that negative feeling goes onto you. That's why whenever you receive something you have to smudge it. I can't overemphasize how

important dreams are! In today's society, if you don't get a well balanced sleep, it can disrupt your whole day. You're overtired and can't function and that's how easy dreams can off balance you if you don't get that rest. Dream catchers are an old tradition, an old protection. Sometimes I am not that receptive to dreams but other times I am awakened by them and sometimes I see things in the future, like I've done this before. In our language there's a Micmac word that means "you're ahead of your time."

Spiritual Guidance.

I was told one time by a traditional person, 'How am I going to separate my spiritual teachings from my profession? How am I going to do it without having them get into conflict?' I said, No! My spiritual teachings are going to help me deal with professional life. I noticed that right from the beginning when I was going to school that it helped me through a lot of situations. No matter how far you get in today's society, your spirituality doesn't leave you. It's always there!

"'Teachings' are not seen as being in any way out of date...instead they are considered to be more important at this time in history than ever before and for people living urban as well as rural lives (Ross, p. 60)." I consider it an honor and a privilege to have been offered this gift of teachings to share with you. My insistence on using the voices of these Mi'kmaq women so extensively in my data analysis is a matter of total respect; my words alone do not do justice to the wisdom they offer to society.

Chapter Five

Building Bridges

Contributing Factors

As these life stories relate, there are many internal and external factors associated with the academic achievement of Aboriginal youth. The factors of racism, voicelessness, low self esteem, poor attendance, dominant society's authority figures, a sense of helplessness, lack of material resources, lack of family and community structure, and too much emphasis on memorization can be identified as negative challenges to First Nations students succeeding academically. The presence of a caring teacher, a strong sense of identity, self-determination, encouragement from home, relevant curriculum, holistic learning experiences, appropriate mix of teaching styles, readily available tutoring, a strong sense of school community, role models in place, and active participation by parents, along with understanding and support from the First Nations Band are viewed as positive influences which promote academic achievement among First Nations students. Another significant factor is the spiritual upbringing within families. I believe this is a determining factor in one's success in handling life's challenges for, as Barbara reminds us, one's spirit is always with you.

Spiritual and Cultural Awareness

Classroom Implications.

As I understand it, no one who believes in the spiritual teachings as described here would ever feel justified in pressuring themselves or their children into a situation where they did not feel comfortable. For some Mi'kmaq students and their parents, the public school system may still represent an alienating experience. Keeping this in mind, each home, each classroom, each school, each community in Canada needs to be a safe, trusting environment for all children so their sacred traditions and cultures can be honored and respected. I believe learning about the cultural background of others facilitates the creation of a welcoming environment.

Ladson-Billings (1994) reminds us that without significant exposure to the students' culture "teachers lack the tools with which to make sense of much that transpires in the classroom (p. 134)." For instance, Mi'kmaq students may be labeled as shy and withdrawn when they do not answer right away. Often the act of failing to look someone in the eyes is determined by people in authority to equate with low self-esteem or guilt, even though being forced to look someone in the eye goes against the cultural upbringing of First Nations people, young or old. Mi'kmaq students may also be seen as troublemakers when boredom with the educational system or low levels of self-esteem become overbearing. Whenever students do not feel like they belong in a particular

school situation, for any combination of academic or social reasons, the likelihood of these students withdrawing participation or seeking attention through inappropriate behavior is very high. When teaching and working with First Nations students, all teachers and administrators must realize the underlying cause may have much to do with their cultural upbringing.

Parental Involvement.

Teachers and school administrators must realize that many First Nations parents may have had a poor relationship with the formal education process. This generation of parents may not have personally experienced the horrific residential school system forced upon First Nations families, but their upbringing would still reflect those negative images shared by friends and relatives. The generation following the residential school era did not have many positive experiences either; it appears most either quit or were kicked out of our provincial school system. Teachers may often feel frustrated or even powerless when working with parents who outwardly show little concern for the education of their children. After listening to the voices of these Mi'kmaq women, we may have a better understanding of the causes for these stumbling blocks.

It has never been the physical distance between Aboriginal homes and their formal schooling that has created problems. Whether just a short walk across the reserve to the Day School or an entire province away, the distance was insignificant. Instead, it has always been the emotional and psychological upheavals created by spiritual and cultural

barriers that have created problems for Aboriginal people, young and old alike. I feel teachers must take on a whole new perspective when working with First Nations families. There may be a very good reason why some First Nations parents are uncomfortable coming to school and concluding it is a sign of disinterest may be wrong. Non-Aboriginal educators must put forth extra effort and communicate their willingness to understand the situation. The effort required to convince these parents and their children that school can be a positive learning environment will indeed take dedication and respectful dialogue and participation by the home, the school, and the community. Parental and community support is a critical factor affecting student attendance and academic achievement.

Aboriginal Staff.

Lipka & Mohatt remind us that for many students in ethnically diverse classes, the images of teaching – the actual language used, the strategies devised to manage interaction, the approaches drawn on to facilitate control, ways of organizing activities, the styles used to display authority, and so on, run contrary to the taken-for-granted models of ‘real’ teaching or accepted norms in their own communities (1998, p. 91). I believe the Aboriginal students of the Abegweit Band would benefit from First Nations staff being present at all levels of the formal education system. It is not presently possible to supply enough qualified teachers from the Lennox Island or the Abegweit Band to satisfy this need, but still there should be a concerted effort to have Mi’kmaq personnel on staff to act as advisors, student assistants, or teacher assistants. Whether it’s elementary,

high school, or post secondary level, the government should follow the philosophy of New Brunswick's Micmac-Maliseet Institute and have Aboriginal advisors always on hand to ease the transition from the culture of the home community to that of the educational institution. Even if these Aboriginal employees are not trained for the academic requirements at a certain level, they may prove to be beneficial as a liaison between cultures. Students and parents who feel intimidated by the structure of the school situation might seek out the advice and assistance of someone from their own culture more readily, thereby reducing frustration levels for all concerned.

Indian Time and Attendance.

After listening to these First Nations voices, I have a much better understanding of how time is a relative thing for Aboriginal people. As a member of the dominant white society, time, for me, is all important – not a moment is to be wasted and being on time is considered a matter of respect. That is not the role time plays in Aboriginal society. Indian Time is not a joke. From an Aboriginal perspective, it is not disrespectful or irresponsible to be late; it is definitely a matter of priorities.

Failing to get school projects and assignments in on time is a major stumbling block for anyone hoping to achieve academic success, yet Aboriginal students and their parents tend to place more importance on daily needs than organizing their lives around future responsibilities. Even though some administrators and teachers may find it difficult to accept, I believe it is important to recognize Indian Time as a natural way of life for

First Nations people. There is no reason to lower expectations, it just requires more understanding of the need for individual attention in a positive way. Time oriented accommodations would best be negotiated through honest and open dialogue about the benefits of 100% attendance in each and every class, rather than with disciplining and suspensions for repeated occurrences of tardiness or absenteeism. Attendance also depends a lot upon what is going on in the home community. Family life is so highly valued, that any problems within the extended family take priority over attendance at school or work. Families are tightly linked in close-knit reserves so one situation affects the life of many others. Pressuring students to attend school is not likely to happen when Native values are first and foremost in parental or community thinking. The attendance problem may be compounded by the practice of living with extended family members rather than with their parents. Teachers must realize that living with grandparents rather than parents, for example, does not mean there is necessarily a problem at home; it is common practice in Aboriginal communities. The more inviting classrooms and schools are for students, the less likely attendance will be a problem.

Home Learning Situation.

From informal conversations with Abegweit Band members, I understand that reading and writing have not been commonplace in many Aboriginal home situations. As a sense of empowerment has risen under the leadership of the new Abegweit Band Chief and Council, so too has the interest in improving one's education. The Band's Headstart

program for preschoolers and incentives for adults taking college upgrading courses are signs of improvement.

In the Aboriginal home, storytelling comes naturally; many other forms of literacy result in a struggle. Fluency in reading and writing only comes with continued exposure and practicing until it becomes second nature. In many cases, the Aboriginal home environment may not provide that exposure. Rather, the home environment may involve a mix of languages in daily use and translating thoughts into “proper/school” English, either spoken or written, requires more thinking time. Discomfort with proper English may lead to avoidance behavior. Challenges appear when First Nations students take more time to respond than teachers expect or when they shy away from speaking out in public, in case, they are wrong. First Nations students may also be too shy to ask for clarification and their silence may be wrongly interpreted as an unwillingness to participate. Teachers must also take into consideration the lack of educational material resources in many homes and realize that expecting help with homework may be next to impossible. Finding available tutors Aboriginal students feel comfortable with is another stumbling block to academic success.

Reaching Out.

I believe First Nations students need to experience a sense of significance, a feeling of acceptance by their peers and a sense of respect and caring by their teachers and the entire school community. Caring teachers are willing to learn about their students and

their culture as well as to teach. From what they learn, caring teachers adjust their teaching to fit the cultural background of their students. Effective teaching requires in-depth knowledge of individual students as well as the subject matter. Caring teachers must find out where each student is at academically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally, then work at empowering students to extend their thinking and abilities to a higher level.

Unfortunately, caring alone is not enough. In order to educate Mi'kmaq students, I believe it is vital to understand their culture; their success as students and our success as teachers depend on that connection. "Conditions for establishing trust between teacher and students necessarily entail understanding particular cultural values; culturally acceptable communication patterns that allow students to participate in classroom discussion need to be respected if critical thinking is to be tapped and fostered; and linking students' personal experience with learning activities requires an appreciation for and understanding of those experiences (Lipka & Mohatt, 1998, p. 92)." Teachers need to learn culturally appropriate teaching strategies in their teacher training and in-service programs and use these instructional methodologies in their classroom. This will require some rethinking; too often, I feel, we focus only on learning/teaching about the material aspects of a culture. Teachers must be taught how to move beyond celebrating other cultures by tasting their foods, dancing to the rhythm of their music or producing crafts. "By shifting the focus in the curriculum from teaching/learning about cultural heritage as another subject to teaching/learning through the local culture as a foundation for all education, it is intended that all forms of knowledge, ways of knowing and world views be

recognized as equally valid, adaptable, and complementary to one another in mutually beneficial ways (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 1998, p. 3).” Teaching for cross-cultural respect and harmony takes education to an even higher level. Learning to respect diversity is a lifelong lesson which I believe we, in the education system, need to model and to cultivate.

Existence of Racism.

Destroying any racist notions that exist within the school community is one good place to start. Ladson-Billings reminds us that if students are to be equipped to struggle against racism they need excellent skills from the basics of reading, writing and math, to understanding history, thinking critically, solving problems and making decisions (1994, p. 139). As a teacher, I believe it is important to work toward that end every day. As Ladson-Billings suggests, we must prepare students “to question the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society (1994, p. 128).”

In order to understand racism, I feel we must become critical thinkers ourselves. I believe it is our responsibility to be open to all cultures and to teach our children and our students to do the same. I firmly believe we must recognize, respect, and foster difference – we should never be afraid to ask questions and neither should our students be afraid to question. In my opinion, we must continually challenge our own assumptions and teach others to do the same. “Implementation of genuine educational reform aimed at reversing centuries of discrimination requires personal redefinitions of the ways in which individual

educators interact with the students and communities they serve (Cummins, 1996, p. 136).” By incorporating critical thinking, respect for diversity and the entire notion of a civil society into our daily teaching and daily lives, I believe we may be able to instill the love of lifelong learning and acceptance of difference, into the Canadian conscience of our youth. I feel it is our responsibility to at least try, by embracing one person, one notion, one action, at a time.

I believe we must recognize and take responsibility for the existence of racism in the education system; we must also take responsibility for its elimination, sooner rather than later. Any and all messages received from the home, school, and the community as a whole, play key roles in terms of acceptance and equality. One only has to watch a cultural mix of preschoolers at play to see that racism is indeed a social construct; I feel we learn it and we categorize it. In order to meet the challenge of dismantling racist practices, I believe we must add another R to the 3 R’s of schooling and yes, it does involve Racism. All students need more than the three R’s a public education can offer, they need and deserve a fourth R – Respect! In the words of Chief Dan George (1970, n.p.): “We want first of all to be respected and to feel we are people of worth. We want an equal opportunity to succeed in life.” There are many barriers of ignorance, prejudice, and even fear, that have to be overcome on both sides of the equation. It will take some effort to convince First Nations people they can trust the dominant white society and its authority figures, because the truth may be, “The problem in educating native students lies not in the children, but in the refusal of the dominant society to accept the native people as equals (Collier, 1998, p. 49).” The words of an elder make it clear, “we cannot change

the past, but we can change tomorrow by what we do today (Battiste & Barman, 1995, p. xiv).” Improving relations requires adjustment on the part of everyone involved; a deep understanding and respect for each other’s point of view is crucial. Involving all parents and entire communities in the public education of their children is a good starting place.

Education as a Force for Positive Change.

“Although the educational system has done much to violate Native self esteem, it may become the way in which some of the enormous social, economic, and psychological difficulties facing Native people may be addressed. It may indeed build bridges of understanding and in doing so, help restore pride and confidence to Canada’s native people (Dawson, 1988, pp. 43-44).” As Barbara and many others realize, “The future of education in our communities will depend on whether we can find the balance between our traditions and the requirements of a modern society. The thirst for knowledge and the quest for a balanced education is as real for us as it is for the rest of society (A.F.N., 1998).”

Balancing Act.

Being Aboriginal presents a considerable challenge, often requiring a delicate balancing act. Whether it’s a matter of trying to fit in with the dominant culture or striving to maintain their cultural identity, Aboriginal peoples must constantly adapt to

this fusion of cultures. Finding a balance that suits each particular situation is an overwhelming task for Aboriginals of all ages. Teachers can assist Aboriginal students in this balancing act by recognizing and respecting the academic implications of cultural differences. Ladson-Billings reminds us, “Moving between the two cultures lays the foundation for a skill that the students will need in order to reach academic and cultural success (1994, p. 17).” If we, as Canadians, consider just how many of our dominant societal values First Nations people must presently adhere to in order to succeed in the formal education system or in professional life, I believe the daily struggle facing Aboriginal people becomes apparent.

Incorporating Aboriginal Culture.

“As teachers we are the interface between the students and whatever learning objectives and materials are chosen. We must teach accordingly (McAlpine & Herodier, 1994).” Most of what I have learned about Aboriginal culture seems to be holistic in nature. The more our schools can build upon that process, the more successful I believe First Nations students will be. One only has to look at the state of the world’s environment and the need for holistic solutions to those problems to see a prime example of the need for cooperation. Our Science classes give us a great opportunity to incorporate many aspects of Native spirituality. The importance of treating Mother Earth with utmost respect and learning to take only what we need are vital to our survival on this planet. Giving back to the Earth and understanding the interconnectedness of life are

perhaps the most important Science concepts ever to be taught. More emphasis on environmental education may improve the chances of Aboriginal students achieving academic success.

Students' needs must come first, even if that means diverting from standard pedagogy. Teachers and curriculum planners must put extra effort into planning lessons and creating text for our multicultural society. First Nations students need to see and understand a lesson's connection to real life situations. Understanding is the key to learning and we all know there is a major difference between memorizing and understanding. Memorizing charts and formulas is really insignificant in the overall scheme of life. Connections to real life reinforce understanding and provide that necessary hook for remembering the significance of any lesson.

Teaching Strategies and Assessment.

"Good teaching does not require us to internalize an endless list of instructional techniques. Much more fundamental is the recognition that human relationships are central to effective instruction (Cummins, 1996, p. 73)." I believe collaborative style teaching methods may improve the participation rate of Aboriginal students. The Aboriginal students I have come to know do not wish to be put in a position of being singled out. By working in a group, the fear of being singled out is decreased. Even when a First Nations student does know the correct answer, the best way to avoid being singled out, may be to refuse to answer. Even though the teacher's reaction to giving a correct

answer is most likely to be positive, drawing attention to themselves, for any reason, is usually avoided. The reaction of the other students must also be taken into account. When you stop and think about the teasing often associated with being smart and knowing the right answer, part of the reasoning behind remaining quiet may be understood.

As our curriculum now places more emphasis on collaborative learning, and group problem solving, Aboriginal students may find classroom learning more in tune with their natural tendencies. Kinesthetic/tactile and auditory learning styles seem to best suit the Aboriginal students I have worked with. Their keen observational skills help promote independent learning. By providing hands-on experiences and being content to let them watch and listen to others until their confidence allows them to take part is another positive step in promoting successful learning for Aboriginal students. The methods of evaluation must also reflect the style of learning that has been taking place. For instance, demonstrating understanding of a hands-on activity with a paper and pencil test negates the entire process of learning. Even the offer of an oral presentation or examination may be threatening to Aboriginal students under most circumstances. By being flexible in the methods of evaluation, as well as instruction, the confidence of Aboriginal students to demonstrate their understanding may improve.

Take Up The Challenge.

As partners in the education system, I believe we must take up this challenge right away. "We have alternatives to the current directions. These alternatives require

educators to recognize that relations of power are at the core of schooling and also to recognize that, as educators, we have choices regarding how power is negotiated in our classroom interactions (Cummins, 1996, p. v).” I believe it is up to each one of us, in whatever capacity possible, to initiate change, one small step at time. In the classroom, in the hallways, in the office, in society in general, you and I can make a difference. Neither you, nor I, need to wait for government policy to change since individual actions can, in turn, produce great deeds. As Cummins puts it, we must “challenge the structures of injustice in small, but significant ways (1996, p. 150).” Overhauling the entire educational system or changing society’s philosophy will not happen overnight, but in our daily lives you and I can choose a communication style which is genuine, respectful, and empathetic. Educators are in the unique position of being able to apply personal, political, and pedagogical influence in an effort to create change for the better of all. I firmly believe each one of us can become a positive force for change within the Prince Edward Island education system.

Whether you listen to the advice given by these Mi’kmaq women or that of prominent researchers, I feel the message is the same. “Individual educators do have a considerable degree of control over how they structure their interactions with culturally diverse students. Although there are usually many constraints and influences on how educators define their roles, ultimately they have choices in the messages they communicate regarding students’ language and culture, in the form of parent and community participation they encourage, and in the extent to which they promote collaborative critical inquiry as a dominant form of learning in their classrooms

(Cummins, 1996, p. v).”

I believe present research indicates it is important for educators to continue to question and re-evaluate the concept of an equal education for all. Canada should be a country where every child, regardless of cultural background, has an equal opportunity to grow up, full of hope and enthusiasm for the future. “Assimilation policies have done great damage, leaving a legacy of brokenness affecting Aboriginal individuals, families, and communities. The damage has been equally serious to the spirit of Canada – the spirit of generosity and mutual accommodation in which Canadians take pride (RCAP, 1996, p. x).” The results of my literature search imply that Canada’s educational system has the potential to be the best means available to ensure that the goal of equality is met, but unfortunately, as you have gathered from reading the words of Mi’kmaq women on P.E.I., the current system is falling short. I hope the goal of my educational research – to increase awareness and thereby increase cross-cultural communication and understanding – has been achieved. With Boldt (1993), I truly believe what happens in the schools of today will determine what it means to be Aboriginal tomorrow. We must realize the implications of denying Aboriginal people an equal education which truly addresses their needs. I believe this requires that we reach deep into the Canadian conscience.

Try to always remember: your culture is at the heart of who you are.

Ketnite’tmnej!

Remember Who You Are!

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Specific information questions with regard to age, birthplace, residences, mobility, level of schooling, and family background were asked during the first interview.

Descriptive questions and more structured questions were added as needed. Guiding questions used only when needed to investigate experiences with schooling as a child, mother, grandparent, and great grandparent included:

- If I had been watching you as a child, how would you have spent your preschool years?**
- Describe how you got along in school.**
- Describe the challenges or difficulties in getting an education when you were young.**
- Tell me about some of the good experiences you had while going to school.**
- Tell me about some of the not so good experiences you had while going to school.**
- Describe how your children got along in school.**
- How would you describe your personal contact, as a parent, with the teachers of your children?**
- How do you (Native families, communities) reward your children and for what reason?**
- Describe the challenges or difficulties in getting an education now.**
- What Native customs do you feel may affect how well students perform in school?**
- What value do you (your family, the Native community) place on getting a Grade 12 education? - Describe how you feel when Native students drop out of school.**
- Why do you feel some Native students decide to drop out of school?**
- Tell me what you know about the challenges young Natives face today.**
- What would you like to see happen in the education of Native young people today?**
- Describe the role of elders today. Has that role changed during your life time? How?**
- Is there anything else you would like to add?**

Appendix B

Band Approval Request Letter

Band Approval Request Letter

**Mount Stewart, PE
COA 1T0
July 11, 2000**

**Chief Francis Jadis
Abegweit Band Council
Scotchfort, PE
COA 1T0**

Dear Chief Jadis and Councillors:

My name is Roberta Clark and I am a teacher enrolled in U. P. E. I.'s Master of Education Program. A major requirement of this degree is to personally conduct research in education. I have chosen to do my research on the academic achievement of Mi'kmaq students. By conducting this research I hope to make everyone involved in the education process more aware of the cultural traditions of Native people here on Prince Edward Island and help improve the educational situation of Native students.

I am requesting permission to come to the Scotchfort Reserve several times during the coming months to interview residents who are willing to participate in this study. I will be attempting to learn about Aboriginal cultural traditions by conducting several interviews with different generations of Mi'kmaq adults. People willing to participate may withdraw from the study at any time. No names will be used in the report unless the person specifically wants to be identified. All information will be kept confidential and the final report will be made available to the Abegweit Band and all who agree to participate.

If you agree to allow this research to take place on the Scotchfort Reserve, please sign the attached letter. If you would like to contact me, my home phone number is 676 - 2055. Thank you for your considering my request.

Sincerely,

Roberta Clark

Appendix C

Band Approval Consent Form

Band Approval Consent Form

The Abegweit Band agrees to allow Roberta Clark to contact adult residents living on the Scotchfort Reserve and to interview those adults willing to participate in this educational research study of Aboriginal culture.

Signature of Abegweit Band Chief: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Councillor(s):

Date

Date

Appendix D

Participant Consent Request Letter (Participant's Copy):

Participant Consent Request Letter (Participant's Copy):

**Mount Stewart, P E
COA 1T0
July __, 2000**

Dear

My name is Roberta Clark and I am a teacher enrolled in U. P. E. I.'s Master of Education Program. A major requirement of this degree is to personally conduct research in education. I have chosen to explore the educational histories of two generations of Mi'kmaq women. By conducting this research, I hope to make everyone involved in the education process more aware of the educational experiences of Native people here on Prince Edward Island and help improve the educational situation of Native students.

I would like to come to the Scotchfort Reserve a few times during the coming months to interview you, if you are willing to participate in this study. You may choose to withdraw your information from this research at any time. No real names will be used in writing the results of this research, unless the person specifically wants to be identified. All information will be carefully stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home, kept confidential, and returned to you when the research is complete. The two members of my thesis committee from U.P.E.I. will be the only people, other than myself, with access to the original information. No copies will be made.

I will check the accuracy of my research with you before writing the final copy. The final results of my research will be made to available to you, the Abegweit Band Council and all who agree to participate. Please read and sign the two attached consent forms if you agree to participate in this research. One copy of the consent form is for you to keep. Thank you for your considering my request. If you have any questions, my home phone number is 676-2055.

Sincerely,

Roberta Clark

Appendix E

Participant Approval Consent Form (Researcher's Copy):

Participant Approval Consent Form (Researcher's Copy):

I, _____, agree to participate in this educational research project. I understand the purpose of the study is to learn about the educational experiences of myself and my family. I am aware that my participation in this research is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time, without explanation. If I choose to withdraw from the study, I am aware that information I have provided will not be used in this study without my permission.

I understand the researcher, Roberta Clark, wants to learn about the educational experience of Native people here on Prince Edward Island from my point of view. As well, the researcher wants to understand the experiences of raising children who live on reserve and attend public schools on Prince Edward Island. I understand the researcher will come to interview me privately, several times, during the coming months. I agree to the use of a tape recorder during our interviews so the researcher does not miss any important information. I am assured that each interview will be typed by the researcher herself. I understand that all written data and audiotapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and all information will remain confidential. I understand that only the two members of the researcher's U.P.E.I. thesis committee and the researcher herself will have access to the original information. I also understand that no copies will be made. Real names will not be used, unless it is by personal request. I will be given the opportunity to read the written data and make any changes I feel are necessary, before the final research thesis is written. When the research is complete in 2001, I understand all data will be returned to the participants for their own personal use, or destroyed, if you so desire. I understand the final results of the research will be made available to all participants.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F

Joann Sebastian Morris'

Native Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors, Together with Educational Considerations

Native Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors, Together with Educational Considerations

by Joann Sebastian Morris

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Values	Attitudes and behaviors	Educational considerations
1. Cooperation	1. Cooperation is highly valued. The value placed on cooperation is strongly rooted in the past, when cooperation was necessary for the survival of family and group. Because of strong feelings of group solidarity, competition within the group is rare. There is security in being a member of the group and in not being singled out and placed in a position above or below others. Approved behavior includes improving on and competing with one's own past performance, however.	1. A common result of the disparity between cooperation and competition is that, under certain circumstances, when a fellow Native student does not answer a question in class, some Native children may state they too do not know the answer, even though they might. This practice stems from their noncompetitive culture and concern that other individuals do not lose face.
2. Group Harmony	2. Emphasis is placed on the group and the importance of maintaining harmony within the group. Most Natives have a low ego level and strive for anonymity. They stress the importance of personal orientation (social harmony) rather than task orientation. The needs of the group are considered over those of the individual. This value is often at variance with the concept of rugged individualism.	2. One result of the difference between group and individual emphasis is that internal conflict may result since the accent in most schools is generally on work for personal gain, not on group work. The native child may not forge ahead as an independent person and may prefer to work with and for the group. Some educators consider this to be behavior that should be discouraged and modified.
3. Silence	3. Silence is comfortable. Most Natives have few nervous mannerisms. Feelings of discomfort are frequently masked in silence to avoid embarrassment of self or others. When ill at ease, Natives observe in silence while inwardly determining what is expected of them. Natives are generally slow to demonstrate signs of anger or other strong emotions. This value may differ sharply from that of the dominant society, which often values action over inaction.	3. This conflict in values often results in Native people being incorrectly viewed as shy, slow, or backward. The silence of some Natives can also be misconstrued as behavior that snubs, ignores, or appears to be sulking.

Values	Attitudes and behaviors	Educational considerations
4. Patience	4. To have the patience and ability to wait quietly is considered a good quality among Natives. Evidence of this value is apparent in delicate, time-consuming works of art, such as beadwork, quillwork, or sandpainting. Patience might not be valued by others who may have been taught "never to allow grass to grow under one's feet."	4. Educators may press Native students or parents to make rapid responses and immediate decisions and may become impatient with their slowness and deliberateness of discussion
5. Careful Listening	5. Being a good listener is highly valued. Because Natives have developed listening skills, they have simultaneously developed a keen sense of perception that quickly detects insincerity. The listening skills are emphasized, since culture was traditionally passed on orally. Storytelling and oral recitations were important means of recounting Aboriginal history and teaching lessons.	5. Problems may arise if Native students are taught only in non-Native ways. Their ability to follow the traditional behavior of remaining quiet and actively listening to others may be affected. This value may be at variance with teaching methods that emphasize speaking over listening and place importance on expressing one's opinion.
6. Careful Observation	6. Most Natives have sharp observational skills and note fine details. Likewise, nonverbal messages and signals, such as facial expressions, gestures, or different tones of voice, are easily perceived. Natives tend to convey and perceive ideas and feelings through behavior.	6. The difference between the use of verbal and nonverbal means of communication may cause Native students and parents to be labeled erroneously as being shy, backward, or disinterested. Their keen observational skills are rarely utilized or encouraged.

Values	Attitudes and behaviors	Educational considerations
7. Permissive Child Rearing	7. Traditional Native child-rearing practices are labeled permissive in comparison with European standards. This misunderstanding occurs primarily because Native child rearing is self-exploratory rather than restrictive. Native children are generally raised in an atmosphere of love. A great deal of attention is lavished on them by a large array of relatives, usually including many surrogate mothers and fathers. The child is usually with relatives in all situations. Native adults generally lower rather than raise their voices when correcting a child. The Native child learns to be seen and not heard when adults are present.	7. In-school conflicts may arise since most educators are taught to value the outgoing child. While a Native child may be showing respect by responding only when called upon, the teacher may interpret the behavior as backward, different, or even sullen. Teachers may also misinterpret and fail to appreciate the Native child's lack of need to draw attention, either positive or negative, upon himself or herself.
8. Orientation to the Present	8. Natives are more oriented to living in the present. There is a tendency toward an immediate rather than postponed gratification of desires. Living each day as it comes is emphasized. This value is closely tied to the philosophy that one should be more interested in being than in becoming.	8. One result of the disparity between the Native's present orientation and the European's future orientation is that frustration often results when Native students are pressured to forgo present needs for future vague rewards.
9. Veneration of Age	9. Native people value age. They believe that wisdom comes with age and experience. Elders are treated with great respect. It is not considered necessary to conceal white hair or other signs of age. This stage of life is highly esteemed. To be old is synonymous with being wise. The talents of the Elders are utilized for the continuance of the group. Hence, even today there is little evidence of a generation gap, since each age group is afforded respect. The Native view of aging is at odds with the emphasis on youthfulness and physical beauty evident in the dominant culture.	9. Conflict may result when Natives are influenced by non-Native attitudes toward youthfulness. A generation gap may result, causing a loss to Native people of the wisdom and knowledge of the Elders, who are the speakers of Native languages and the carriers of the culture.

Values	Attitudes and behaviors	Educational considerations
10. Avoidance of Eye Contact	10. Most Native people avoid prolonged direct eye contact as a sign of respect. Among some Aboriginal cultures, one stares at another only when angry. It is also a simple matter of being courteous to keep one's eyes cast downward.	10. Frequently and erroneously, non-Native presume that Natives are disrespectful, are behaving in a suspicious manner, or are hiding something when they fail to look a person in the eye. Since educators consider direct eye contact as a measure of another's honesty and sincerity, they often become upset with Native students and say, "Look at me when I speak to you!" when the student is looking down out of respect.
11. Importance of Bilingualism	11. It is important to Natives to retain their native languages. Many cultural elements are contained within the context of a native language. Certain words and concepts are not easily translatable into English. Each Native language contains the key to that society's view of the universe.	11. Often, non-Natives become impatient with Natives who still speak their own language and whose grasp of English may not be as strong as or as fluent as the non-Natives would prefer. The Native parent and student may need a longer time to formulate a response, since they may be thinking in their native language and must translate into English before verbalizing. Clear and accurate communication between Natives and non-Natives may be difficult, since words do not always translate identically in either's language. Because the general population prefers that everyone speak English, the importance of native languages goes unrecognized.