

**ELDER, STUDENT, TEACHER:  
A KAINAI CURRICULUM MÉTISSAGE**

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DEDICATION

*To Grandma, who knew all along.*

*For Georgina, and hope for Tomorrow.*

## ABSTRACT

Aboriginal education is an ambiguous field of study that presents many challenging dilemmas for educators today. A major part of this ambiguity stems from the tendency to emphasize traditional cultural values, Aboriginal identity, and experiences as distinct and unique, and therefore essentially different from mainstream approaches to education. By drawing upon the memories and narratives of my own Métis family as well as the history and memories of the people of the Kainai community from the Blood Reserve in Alberta, I confront some of these dilemmas in both personal and collective ways. Following Edouard Glissant, Françoise Lionnet, and Mark Zuss, I explore the character of the Kainai community as a métissage of texts and genres which overlap, interact, juxtapose, and mix the textual contributions of an elder, a student, and a teacher (myself) to create a more complicated portrait of the Kainai community that stretches beyond the 'us versus them' binary. These texts are then interpreted using a (post)colonial framework largely based upon the works of Frantz Fanon, Gerald Vizenor, Homi Bhabha, and Neal McLeod.

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## Introduction

My work as a teacher at Kainai High School on the Blood Reserve in southwestern Alberta has focused primarily on issues of Blood or *Kainai* culture and the development of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. These are critical and pressing issues in Aboriginal education largely because so many students continue to struggle in educational settings, and many educators want to help them succeed in school. Another reason is that Aboriginal people wish to find *their own* ways of teaching *their own* beliefs in schools attended by their children.

As a teacher on the Blood Reserve, I have the unique opportunity to play a part in reconceptualizing education with the Kainai people. My role began by developing lesson plans that integrated curricular materials approved by Alberta Learning with my own collection of Aboriginal resource materials. Then, after achieving limited success in the classroom with this approach, I began to pay closer attention to the behaviors and attitudes of the students I taught. When the students confused me, I turned to the elders for guidance on how to proceed. I found that what the elders were saying did not necessarily reflect the attitudes or feelings of the students, and so my efforts in the reconceptualization of curriculum on the Blood Reserve never seemed to be satisfactory. I wanted an answer, a concrete framework on which to base all of my work. It seemed impossible. But, that's the point. Curriculum is not about static knowledge nor should it ever be considered as such. It is really a dynamic dialogue about what is important to people. I was saying one thing, my students were saying something else, the elders had a different message, and the government had its own mandates. I realized that my

challenge as a teacher was to create a place for these perspectives to meet and to honour all of them in my classroom.

This study facilitates a conversation or dialogue about what is important to know and experience in the Kainai educational community. This thesis involves a textual dialogue among myself, a student from Kainai High School, and an elder from the Blood Reserve. My own prejudices and pre-judgments as a teacher are expressed through autobiographical writing, with a particular focus on my identity as a Métis person and as a teacher of Aboriginal students. My own narratives and memories are presented alongside writing samples from the student. Samples may consist of poems, plays, or essays. Connected to these are the elder's texts transcribed by me.

I hope to place this study in the "in-between" (Arendt, 1958, p. 182) or place of tension regarding curriculum and education on the Blood Reserve. By honouring the stories and language of each participant in this study, I have worked to interpret the interrelated and ongoing curriculum dialogue at Kainai High School. The elder emphasizes traditional culture and values; the student is much more influenced by contemporary society; and the teacher tries to teach the prescribed curriculum in ways that address the wants and needs of both. Thus, the sharing of these seemingly disparate points of view—the familiar and strange—is very much a hermeneutic endeavor as described by Gadamer (1975). An aim of this study is to create a conversation or dialogue about curriculum and identity that will offer significant insight into the curriculum question as it concerns Aboriginal educators and communities today. I hope to juxtapose stories and insights of the people involved to create a "métissage" of messages, genres, and text that will highlight the unique character and contributions of each individual

(Zuss, 1999). By placing myself and my own stories in-between the student and the elder, I hope to present and interpret the ambiguous and confusing position I occupy every day that I enter the classroom at Kainai High School.

### Curriculum

My interest in this kind of study stems from my desire to address the complexities of curriculum and pedagogy in Aboriginal education. Many educators and parents often assume that Aboriginal education is simply teaching Aboriginal language, history, and culture in place of mainstream curriculum. Yet, the task of considering the history, the language, the culture as well as the traditional and contemporary worldviews of Aboriginal societies in the classroom is a challenging educational project. At least part of the challenge is overcoming the stereotypes that Aboriginal people all have the same values, beliefs, and attitudes. But, a much more significant project involves working with the elders to bring their knowledge and wisdom into the classroom setting in ways which are appropriate and meaningful to *both* the students and the elders. This is a complex and daunting task because it requires thoughtful consideration of Aboriginal epistemology and traditions within a Eurocentric construct of education and knowledge.

At Kainai High School, there are several teachers who regularly attempt to work with Aboriginal traditions in the school setting. Most often, they invite the elders to the school to speak about Kainai history, culture, and traditional knowledge. The students are required to listen and achieve some understanding of the elders' messages. Unfortunately, these meetings between elders and students are often uninspired. The majority of the students seem bored with the elders, and they appear unable to listen to, and concentrate



on, what is being said for an extended period of time. In addition, many students complain that the elders repeat the same things over and over again.

These complaints and attitudes could be interpreted in two different ways. Perhaps the students are simply disrespectful and lack the values that would enable them to see the significance of the elders' role in Kainai tradition. Or, maybe their complaints are a way of expressing their frustration over the ambiguous position in which they find themselves when they are exposed to traditional knowledge in the postmodern world. Either way, the teachers at Kainai High School might benefit from alternative pedagogical approaches to bridge the generational and cultural gap that exists between the elders and the students. In this inquiry, I want to facilitate a dialogue among elder, student, and teacher. I wish to show the understandings and concerns of educators, students, and elders as each group, individually and collectively, comments on the past, present, and future of education on the Blood Reserve. Through a *métissage* of participants' texts, I will show the significance of the elder-student-teacher relationship as each contributes to a curriculum dialogue on the Blood Reserve.

Asking what is important for people to know is the classic curriculum question. There is significant disagreement among teachers doing curriculum development work regarding curriculum. For some, curriculum is a developmental and technical exercise in which the goal is to get the topics of study accurately organized and presented once and for all. An underlying belief associated with this view of curriculum is that the "right" kind of knowledge will help reduce the ambiguity of teaching. In turn, the students receive the knowledge necessary for them to be "successful" students and citizens. It is this notion of curriculum which informs most Aboriginal education projects designed to

improve the educational experience of Aboriginal students. The common feeling is that the “right” kind of knowledge will “set the students free” from the oppressiveness of mainstream education. My experience working with the Alberta Learning Ad Hoc Committee, charged with developing a Program of Studies for Aboriginal Studies in Alberta, is a telling example of this sort of orientation to curriculum. Most of the educators on this Committee showed a genuine concern for the content of the courses being developed. However, it was clear that the hope was that this “new” curriculum would help repair the damage done to the students by the mainstream curriculum with its emphasis on European notions of history, language, and culture. In this sense, curriculum is designed and developed to be “the last word; it longs for a world in which the droning silence of objective presentability finally holds sway over human life” (Jardine, 1992a, p. 118).

The notion of curriculum at work in this thesis is rooted in hermeneutic inquiry and the concept of *currere*. The goal, then, is not to develop curriculum and create a bank of knowledge for students to acquire. The goal of hermeneutic inquiry is to “educate understanding” (Jardine, 1992a, p.116). Rather than working to remove ambiguity, hermeneutics works to give voice to and interpret the ambiguity of life itself. As Smith (1994) has pointed out, hermeneutics requires educators to use a certain kind of imagination when thinking about curriculum and pedagogy and the conditions which make it possible for them to “speak, think and act” in the ways that they do (p. 101). Curriculum, then, is understood here as an investigation and interpretation of educational experience (Pinar, 1975a, p. 400). *Currere*, the Latin root of the word curriculum, refers to the educational experience of running the course of study (Grumet, 1992, p. 32). To

run the course means “to examine one’s response to a text, a response to an idea, response to a colleague in ways which invite depth understanding and transformation of that response” (Pinar, 1979a, p. 119).

This thesis is dedicated to the interpretation and understanding of educational experience on the Blood Reserve, specifically the experiences of myself, an elder, and a student. As such, this study fits well with the goals of hermeneutics and *currere*. Creating understanding requires “hermeneutic imagination” (Smith, 1994) in this case because the traditional knowledge of the Kainai people, as articulated by the elder, seems to be in conflict with the realities of the contemporary school setting and the needs of Aboriginal youth today. This imagination creates an opportunity for dialogue between people and traditions that have been considered at odds with one another (p. 114). Thus, the task of interpreting and understanding the ambiguity of the situation created when a teacher facilitates the consideration of traditional Aboriginal knowledge in a Eurocentric school system can be seen as a form of curriculum theorizing. Hermeneutics informs curriculum theory by reminding the researcher of “the way in which the meaning of anything is always arrived at referentially and relationally rather than absolutely” (p. 119).

### Hermeneutics

The term hermeneutics refers to a method, philosophy, and critique often used to interpret text or language (Byrne, 1998, p. 1). A major factor to consider when interpreting text or language using hermeneutics is the notion of intersubjectivity. “Intersubjectivity assumes that persons share a common world” each with their prejudices and biases that influence the way they view the world (p. 2). According to Gadamer (1975), prejudices are pre-judgments necessary to make way through everyday

thought, conversation, and action (p. 240). In fact, Gadamer (1975) argues that our prejudices form our personal identity as historical beings because they reflect our understanding of ourselves as members of a family, society, culture, and community (p. 245). If we cannot understand and identify our own prejudices, we cannot understand ourselves or someone else. It is precisely this idea of difference that Gadamer (1975) identifies as the true work of hermeneutics. Gadamer (1975) argues that it is impossible for us to identify our prejudices and recognize new ways of seeing things without a situation or exchange which provokes us to question our understandings (p. 266). It is the tension created when someone fails to understand somebody or something that generates the desire to find out more about that situation. According to Gadamer (1975), the work of hermeneutics is based on the “polarity of familiarity and strangeness ... in regard to what has been said: the language in which the text addresses us, the story it tells us” (p. 262). The true home of hermeneutics, then, is the space in-between the familiar and the strange. Gadamer (1975) goes on to suggest that the sharing of familiar and strange ideas causes the prejudices of ourselves and others to blend into something new, a new perspective, a new space (pp. 272-273).

A curriculum dialogue, in which the offerings of the participants are juxtaposed, could be considered something new. However, it is important to state that a curriculum dialogue such as the one created in this thesis is unique in that the format provided is contrived. Although I will argue that the dialogue presented in this thesis has a close relationship to the voices that interact in my classroom on any given day, it is not reality. I am not interested in creating a “realistic and representative” view of the Kainai community. Instead, I want to problematize the unique dialogue that can occur among

teacher, student, and elder on the Blood Reserve and reflect upon the affect it has had on me as a teacher and as a person. David Jardine (1992b) writes that research opportunities are generated when researchers focus on individual people and their experiences. Jardine (1992b) argues that interpretative inquiry does not aim to clearly define an instance; “Rather, it wishes to playfully explore what understandings and meanings this instance makes possible” (p. 56). For these reasons, I focused this research on the individual, unique, and personal experiences of each research participant.

#### Curriculum and Dialogue in the Kainai Context

My belief in the process of dialogue as a curricular and pedagogical force is based on my experience with dialogue as a primary way for humans to communicate. Human beings have been engaging in dialogue ever since we could sit around a fire and talk. With the influences of contemporary society, we seem to have lost the desire to continue this practice in formal and ritualized ways. However, some indigenous communities have kept dialogue alive as a social practice through which knowledge and understanding is enhanced for all participants. My experience with elders on the Blood Reserve confirms this. Elders of the Blood Tribe ensure that stories, histories, and legends remain an important part of tribal culture by engaging in story telling through dialogue. In other words, the elders work through different topics of tribal knowledge together and collectively tell and retell the stories. They actively correct or question each others’ understanding of the topics until, through consensus, the group is satisfied that the information reflects their collective and individual understandings and memories. This is purposeful talk, not random conversation, and clearly serves vital social and pedagogical purposes and functions. This process of identifying and assessing information is socially

constructed through open dialogue. To me, this orientation to curriculum offers a refreshing, yet venerable, perspective on the purposes and processes of education.

#### Dialogue: What It Is and Is Not

The idea lives not in one person's isolated individual consciousness—if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of others. Human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else's voice, that is, in someone else's consciousness expressed in discourse. At that point of contact between voice-consciousness the idea is born and lives. (Bakhtin, 1981 quoted in Honeycutt, 1994)

Ideas are not developed in isolation. Any type of knowledge at any stage in its conception and development is influenced by others and, in fact, depends upon the ideas and opinions of others to be perpetuated and subsumed. Bakhtin is suggesting that this process can only be achieved through rigorous dialogue. It seems that Bakhtin was convinced that dialogue is a process through which knowledge can be continuously challenged, refined, revised, or reconceptualized. Dialogue, in this sense, works to create an appreciation of the dynamic nature of human experience and understanding.

Bakhtin aside, the term dialogue refers to an approach to education that values students and teachers communicating with each other equally. This does not mean informal chatting or Socratic questioning, but actual purposeful consideration of real issues and problems through expressing views, and building upon, or questioning, the

views of others (Freire, 1985, pp. 54-55). Dialogue works to illuminate common concerns and problems and recognizes these as sources of knowledge and understandings of the world. This type of dialogue is, by its nature, democratic, and allows the participants the freedom to analyze and remake their reality through communicating with others. As Ira Shor has stated, the value of dialogue is in the way it “affirms or challenges the relationship between the people communicating, the object they are relating around, and the society they are in” (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 99).

This kind of approach to education seems to be in direct contrast and conflict with traditional forms of education, at least education according to the Eurocentric model. My entry into the Master of Education program at the University of Lethbridge and the exposure I have had to the work of Paulo Freire and Freirean-inspired scholars have significantly impacted on my views of education, curriculum, and critical thinking. But, perhaps the most profound influence of these theories and ideas on my professional outlook has been the ways in which my perceptions of knowledge have been altered. One of the major assumptions of the “banking system” approach to education and teaching is that knowledge is static, timeless, objective, and acquired through rote memorization. Freire (1970) claims this banking approach treats knowledge as “a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 53). This attitude towards knowledge and education destroys the very vitality and creativity of the human experience of knowing and given that humans know through interactions with others, and with reality (Freire & Shor, 1987, pp. 7-10).

Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1995) have argued that a more critical approach to knowledge can be evoked through dialogue. Both authors, through their own

dialogue, strongly agree that dialogue itself is an epistemological act which implies a curiosity about the world that is linked to ongoing individual and social learning and knowing (pp. 202-206). This understanding of knowledge emanates from the fundamental belief that human beings cannot make sense of the world in individual terms; we require communication, engagement, and interaction with others and their ideas. “The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not ‘monological,’ not something each accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical” (Taylor, 1991b, p. 33). Charles Taylor (1991a) has shown that our placement in social spaces is dependent on our willingness to understand the interactive nature of human experience and that identity is in part shaped by our personal experience with dialogue (p. 311).

Mikhail Bakhtin’s interest in dialogue was, in part, to make sense of the “otherness” involved in various forms of social discourse. Bakhtin clearly believed that our consciousness is heightened through dialogic interactions with others, and this causes us to realize “that we can know ourselves only through interaction with others” (Honeycutt, 1994, pp. 6-7). Knowledge, or its acquisition, must then stem from this dialogical relationship. This implies that understanding and knowledge are created by a multiplicity of voices engaged in dialogue in public spaces.

#### Conversation and Dialogue

In “Closing the Gap Between Research and Practice: Conversation as a Mode of Doing Research,” Carson (1986) suggests that conversation is a research approach that could be used by teachers and theorists. This article explores four studies used to demonstrate the potential that this mode of research holds for hermeneutic reflection. Carson (1986) writes that



theorists and inquirers do not begin their thinking and research from scratch.

Persons interested in such issues partake in a continuing and evolving conversation on curriculum theory and classroom practice which has begun long before their arrival and which now continues with their participation. (p. 75)

This mode of research is guided by the belief that conversation and hermeneutics are closely related. Carson (1986) concludes that “conversational research makes possible a deeper understanding of the reality of our situations as educators” (p. 84).

The connection between this understanding of conversation and hermeneutic reflection is important. Hermeneutics claims that objective knowledge through research is impossible because of prejudices that all people have. We can only hope to come to a greater understanding and appreciation of a topic by interpreting it in context, be it written or spoken. Gadamer (1975) is a strong supporter of learning through conversation and dialogue and sees the value in hermeneutic inquiry when “the questioner becomes the one who is questioned and the hermeneutic occurrence is realized in the dialectic of the question” (p. 429). Gadamer emphasizes the value and importance of conducting research with others through conversation and dialogue in that it creates an opportunity for people to share their knowledge and achieve mutual understandings.

I used dialogue as a method of inquiry into the writing of the student involved in this study. I did this so that I could engage with him on issues surrounding his writing through lengthy dialogue. To conduct a formal interview would not have been appropriate in this context because I was not interested in uncovering the “truth” about his thoughts on writing. I wanted to dialogue with him about his writing and feel free to approach the topic in ways most comfortable for him. The process involved three

meetings over a six-week period. The student shared selected pieces of his writing with me, and the conversation went from there. I was interested in knowing the sources of inspiration for his writings, understanding his intended or hidden messages, dialoguing about the relationship that the writings had to Kainai history, culture, and traditions, and articulating an understanding of this student's voice in the larger picture of contemporary Aboriginal culture. I audiotaped these meetings because I wanted to use the recordings to inform the narrative accounts that I wrote after each meeting. I have used some of this tape-recorded material as well as samples and excerpts from the texts shared with me by the student in this thesis.

#### Review of the Literature

The Blood Reserve is home to approximately 9,000 members of the Blood Tribe. The Bloods are members of the Blackfoot Confederacy, an alliance of tribes that once controlled territory stretching from the North Saskatchewan River in the north to the Yellowstone River to the south. The Bloods, who call themselves Kainai, signed Treaty 7 with the Canadian government in 1877. The formal educational experience of the Kainai people began soon after in the form of missionary, and residential schools. The Blood Tribe Board of Education was created in 1988, and in that same year the Kainai people gained control of the education system on the Blood Reserve.

I want to focus on the Kainai educational context not only because it is the community in which I work, but also because I believe that any investigation of issues of Aboriginal education needs to be site and culture specific. The danger of a pan-Indian approach is that it can lead to overgeneralization. For example, Galliland (1995), in his book *Teaching the Native American*, attempts to identify problems experienced by

Aboriginal students across North America, and offers suggestions for educators on limiting or avoiding these problems. However, the book is very general, and the author stereotypes the behavior and attributes characteristic of Aboriginal students. This approach to Aboriginal education invokes the notion of “Aboriginal incapacity” (McConaghy, 2000) in that the author assumes that he can represent people who (supposedly) lack the ability to represent themselves (p. 67). My point is that any investigation that only considers the ‘Native’ in Aboriginal education runs the risk of misinterpreting the local context and challenges each Aboriginal community faces across Canada and around the world. I focused specifically on the Kainai community as a way to honour and understand the unique character of the educational experience on the Blood Reserve.

Eber Hampton (1995) argues that the lack of a clear definition of Indian education has hampered research efforts and classroom practices (p. 11). For his research, Hampton (1995) interviewed nine Native American graduate students from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The interviews had an “exploratory and hypothesis-generating purpose” (p. 11). The nine interviewees were asked to discuss their views on Indian education with the author in a process of “active listening and co-participation” that was taped and transcribed (p. 12). Hampton (1995) made the decision to use a dialogical method after finding that an interview schedule and prepared questions made both himself and his subjects uncomfortable (p. 12). After conducting the interviews, Hampton (1995) identified themes, coded statements made by his subjects, and categorized them by topic. The result was a pattern or organizing principle for Indian education, a “six directions” medicine wheel (Hampton, 1995, p. 17).

At first glance, this research seems to present an exciting new interpretation and direction for Aboriginal education. However, there are some problems with the study. First of all, the interviewees were a select group of highly educated Native Americans, all of whom were enrolled in an institution far away from their home communities. The opinions of nine privileged graduate students formed the model for American Indian education. A more comprehensive exploration of Aboriginal education requires the opinions of, at least, other major stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and elders—to be considered an insightful portrayal of the communities involved. Second, the study does not provide the reader with any examples of interview data. Since the author used that data to create his categories and themes that form the basis of the medicine wheel pattern he created, the reader needs access to the interviews to verify the validity of the categories formed. Third, the medicine wheel pattern itself is quite general and theoretical in its design. Its practical application to Aboriginal education organizations and classrooms of Aboriginal students is unclear.

For this study, I dialogued with both an elder and a student and gathered their educational experiences and understandings. The goal was to provide an understanding of how both young and old view the role of Kainai traditions in education and how their perspectives affect my understanding of Aboriginal education on the Blood Reserve. This study is site and community specific and strives to show how the texts collected can be applied to various educational settings on the Blood Reserve. This is not to suggest that any efforts to address Aboriginal education generally are irrelevant. Rather, I am arguing that any attempts at a definition of Aboriginal education must start with the local and

specific views of Aboriginal people from their various communities set within a larger socio-cultural framework.

Local views of Aboriginal education are what drove Christina Mader (1998) to conduct her study of a Bush Cree community in northern Alberta. The author, after hearing for years that school has no meaning for Aboriginal youth, designed this inquiry to find out what does matter to the people who live in this community. To do this, Mader (1998) used a narrative approach that was supplemented with interview data, notes from storytelling sessions, photographs, and observations of ordinary tasks (p. 174). The subjects of this inquiry are really the community as a whole, but Mader focuses on the teachings of four women who help her probe deeper into the values and perspectives of this community. Three of these women are traditional educators, and the fourth is a nun who has been working in the community for over thirty years (pp. 175-183). This study is unique in that the author documents what these people believe is important to know. Mader attempts to reflect on what the Bush Cree taught her. Also, the Bush Cree community reviewed the data with the understanding that their input and corrections, as well as their approval, were integral to this research (p. 173). The author concludes that non-Aboriginal teachers should attempt to interact with the Aboriginal communities they work in, as she did, to experience, as she did, how “people learn/teach young and old,” and come to deeply respect the daily interactions of people as they live their lives (p. 186). The author’s belief is that non-Aboriginal teachers, as newcomers to Aboriginal communities, could learn as much as they teach, and this would make their teaching much more enjoyable and successful. “It is what *Reverence for the Ordinary* is all about” (p. 186).

Mader's work is a thoughtful example of a local and culture-specific study of one Aboriginal community. It provides specific examples of cultural attitudes and communication modes that can be directly applied to the classroom, as well as, to teacher education programs. In this sense, "Reverence for the Ordinary" is the Bush Cree community's definition of Aboriginal education. This thesis considers the texts of the elder and student in addressing the question of which knowledge is of most worth, but in the context of the Kainai community. Thus, like Mader (1998), I plan to incorporate the specific views of community members into a comprehensive understanding of Aboriginal education and curriculum based on the perspectives of the Kainai community.

Many studies of Aboriginal education use elders to articulate an epistemological, pedagogical, or philosophical position. Hjartarson (1995) conducted a study incorporating the views of ten elders from the Algonquin, Cree, and Ojibway Nations on the issue of traditional Aboriginal education. The stated purpose of the study was to define traditional Aboriginal education. The author used audiotaped individual interviews as well as "group consensus-building dialogue" sessions with the elders (Hjartarson, 1995, abstract). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using "verbal protocol techniques," which helped identify themes in the interviews and dialogue sessions (Hjartarson, 1995, abstract). Hjartarson (1995) concludes that the elders view both the purpose and process of Aboriginal education as rooted in the concept of the medicine wheel.

Stiegelbauer (1992) conducted a similar study in which she interviewed elders who were part of an Advisory Council to the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto who advised on issues concerning traditions, the learning process, and the role of the

individual in community development. The data collected for this paper included written documents and records from Centre meetings, as well as, transcripts from interviews and general talks facilitated by the elders (p. 2). Stiegelbauer, with the help of the elders, used this data to construct a “path of life” model, as well as, another version of the medicine wheel (pp. 59). Her conclusion is that Aboriginal education should focus on the role of the individual in the community, and she suggests that the models created out of this study can help Aboriginal students understand their own roles more clearly (pp. 14-16).

Linda Akan (1999) asked the question: What do Native students and educators need to know about Native education? Rather than consulting groups of elders, Akan chose to focus her research on the advice offered by one respected elder from her home reserve in southern Saskatchewan. The elder’s answer to her question was given in Saulteaux, and Akan translated the taped statement into English while trying to preserve intended rhythms and meanings of the original Saulteaux text. This translation process, completed in consultation with the elder, resulted in a poetic transcription where the English translation was placed beside the original Saulteaux words (pp. 19-28). Akan offers an interpretation of this text by breaking it into sections based on themes or main points, and by making comments on the literal and inferred meanings of the words (pp. 28-33). This study concludes that Aboriginal education is an act of walking (experiencing), as well as, a willingness to talk or engage in “careful thought about oneself in a world with other human beings” (p. 37). The elder was himself an example of someone who walks and talks in this way. By “walking” in the culture and sharing those ideas with others, he offers a model of someone who “walks and talks” for his

community. This is the model that Akan believes will help create a clearer understanding of Aboriginal education for all involved.

As the above studies illustrate, consulting elders on educational issues is a common approach to research in Aboriginal education. Aboriginal cultures value the wisdom of the elders and frequently draw on their knowledge and experience when making decisions or planning projects. The elders can offer direction, and advice, or refresh perspectives that too often focus on primarily European-based approaches. Akan (1999), Stiegelbauer (1992), and Hjartarson (1995) consult the elders in their studies because it is the most accepted approach to take when dealing with Aboriginal communities. My position is that study on this topic needs to include the experiences of Aboriginal students with education. While the wisdom of the elders is important to any study involving Aboriginal people, the views of the students themselves, especially in the context of postmodern education in a postmodern world, also need to be considered. I have come to realize that Aboriginal youth find themselves in a very ambiguous position in the contemporary world. They are influenced by the traditional culture and knowledge of their community, but they are also attracted to mainstream popular culture. I believe that this feeling of being caught in-between is the source of much of the frustration and confusion that many Aboriginal youth feel today. If one of the purposes of Aboriginal education is to help Aboriginal youth “walk and talk” properly in the world today, then it must not only include the views of the elders, but also the youth who are living in-between (Akan, 1999). Any answer to the question of what is important for Aboriginal people to know must keep this in mind.



In sum, the inspiration for this thesis comes from the need to fill the gap between the generality of Hampton's study (1995) and the specificity of Mader's (1998). These authors offer interpretations of Aboriginal education from differing perspectives and research approaches. I believe my study offers insight into the specific educational issues of the Kainai community but also deals with the general challenges confronting Aboriginal communities today. This will create unity of the general and specific issues involved in exploring Aboriginal education. It is useful to consult with elders, as Akan (1999), Stiegelbauer (1992), and Hjartarson (1995) have shown, but Aboriginal educators today must also closely consider the unique ambiguity of being an Aboriginal person today, especially a young person. This study aims to help educators better understand what motivates Aboriginal youth today and how traditional culture and knowledge can be used to meet their educational needs. Perhaps combining Kainai traditions with the postmodern world of Aboriginal youth will serve to create a middle ground or third way for Aboriginal education in the future.

#### Autobiography

Gadamer (1975) argues that one way to develop a new interpretation of a situation is to write our own stories. Through these stories, we visit our memories, as well as, our interpretations of those memories, in order to develop new interpretations based on understanding enhanced by dialogue and reflections. Gadamer (1975) calls this process the hermeneutic circle (pp. 236-237). An important part of the hermeneutic circle are our own stories. Mark Zuss (1999) makes a strong connection between autobiography, the act of teaching, and reflective practice:

In making sense of the worlds that we inhabit as students, teachers, parents, and researchers, autobiographical narratives provide one aperture through which it becomes possible to develop a reflective pedagogy of encounter. Critical inquiry into our lives and educational experiences opens us to the challenge of reknowing the world in attempting to refigure the social relations of knowledge. The generation and revisioning of stories of the self are potential conduits for the critical retrieval of community values and knowledge. Working in concert with students, educators can expedite the articulation of how systems of power and constraint, both social and familiar, saturate and compose languages of self, positioning each of us. (p. 18)

This thesis is inspired by the belief that students, teachers, parents, and community leaders each contribute parts of their own life stories to the education process simply by being involved. Educational researchers need to be aware of the ways in which these life stories encounter each other in educational settings. My goal is to consider the life stories of the student through his writing and dialogues with me and place these beside the statements from the elder. Both the student and the elder, by contributing their views to this research, have offered forms of autobiographical expression to a dialogue on curriculum and education. It would make sense that I, as the intermediary and teacher, would also contribute my own autobiographical writing to this conversation. Each participant, the youth, the elder, and myself, will speak from his own experience, knowledge, and vision. As Pinar (1985) points out, autobiography can build a “space of mediation” when it is seen as related to or as part of the story of others around us (p. 217). In educational terms, what this means is that the curriculum is not composed of

subjects, but “Subjects,” and the “running of the course is the building of the self” in relation to others through reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Pinar, 1985, p. 220).

This thesis is autobiographical in that I will reflect on the impact that working with the student and elder and their texts has had on me as a person and an educator. By juxtaposing our stories, I hope to illustrate the complexity of curriculum work on the Blood Reserve. The tensions among the three stories draw attention to the complications and ambiguities of education in general, but curricular and pedagogical work on the Blood Reserve in particular.

These three stories will be presented as “autobiographical métissage” (Zuss, 1997). Métissage is a genre of literature that works to present the multiple links of our shared lives and the ambiguities involved in trying to articulate them. Literary métissage is not just autobiography or personal narratives; it is an approach for interpreting different points of view, with the goal of intermingling them to create new knowledge and understanding.

The dialogue on education that occurs at various sites on the Blood Reserve can be seen as a métissage in that the philosophical and epistemological prejudices of the elders, students, and teachers intermingle to constitute the character of the education system at this site. This thesis will interpret and communicate parts of this conversation through literary métissage. Literary métissage attempts to address issues of identity and character by working in the “interval between different culture and languages” (Lionnet, 1989, p. 1). This points to the necessity and vitality of creating hybrid curriculum with the intent of encouraging teachers, students, parents, and community leaders to live, speak, and act across the space of (what seems to be) difference.

The setting for my research would not readily be considered a place of tension over culture, identity, and curriculum. The student and elder are both Blood Tribe members, and it could be assumed that they and their stories are more similar than different. However, juxtaposing their texts shows significant generational and cultural *differences* between the two. The tension exists in trying to find the space where Kainai tradition and culture can mix creatively with the postmodern world. By creating this métissage, and placing myself and my stories into the mix, I complicate the setting, but I also identify the connections that exist in the stories of each participant in this study. This connection, presented as a métissage, will offer unique insight into a curriculum dialogue currently being conducted on the Blood Reserve.

## Chapter Two The History of Education on the Blood Reserve

During my second year of teaching at Kainai High School, I invited an elder to visit my classroom. This decision was risky for several reasons. First, I had little experience with traditional knowledge and elders and worried that I might make an error in protocol that would embarrass the students and myself. Second, I couldn't fully trust the students to behave respectfully. Many of these particular students were difficult to manage and often in trouble, in and out of school. Third, I was not confident that I could effectively integrate the presentation from the elder with the content and topics I was teaching in class. I wanted to direct the elder's presentation so that what he said connected with what the students had been learning in class. My anxiety over the visit from the elder overshadowed all the good that could come from it.

When word spread throughout the school that an elder was coming to present, a few teachers asked if their classes could join us. Eventually, close to fifty students were crowded into the library where the meeting with the elder would take place. The involvement of several teachers, some of them Blood Tribe members, and the addition of more students, reduced the pressure on me. If anything went wrong, I reasoned, the onus would no longer be solely on me. I relaxed and sat back to observe all that was to happen with the elder, the students, and the presentation.

That day, I saw clearly that Blood Tribe elders are still highly respected by the people in their community. I also learned that traditional Blackfoot social relationships and teaching practices still exist in various forms. Most of the students seemed quite comfortable to be in the presence of an elder. Although there were some disruptions and disturbances, there seemed to be little, if any, confusion over protocol, customs, or

behavioural expectations. Most of the students seemed to find the calm and patient mannerisms of this particular elder comforting. More impressive to me, however, was the ability of the elder to keep our attention for the ninety minutes of his presentation. He spoke on a variety of topics, but most of his discussion focused on legends and stories (several of which he told), and the many lessons that they can teach us. He integrated these legends and stories with relevant tidbits of Blackfoot history. Of course, the legends, stories, and aspects of Blackfoot history were interesting to hear, but a more significant characteristic of his presentation was the way in which he communicated this information. The elder was a gifted storyteller and interacted well with the students. He asked them questions and welcomed any questions asked of him. I had the feeling that I was watching and listening to a master teacher at work.

When the presentation was over, I had the opportunity to speak to the elder privately. I learned that the legends and stories, as well as his storytelling skills, had been passed down to him by his grandfather. He told me that it was the traditional way of teaching and telling stories. The elder went on to state his belief that many of the social problems on the Blood Reserve, including alcohol and drug abuse, could be overcome if traditional styles of education, including age-group societies for young people, were reestablished and emphasized as they once were.<sup>1</sup>

During this one short visit with one particular elder, I had learned that most of my assumptions regarding elders and their effectiveness in the classroom setting were inaccurate. I also learned that the young people on the Blood Reserve, including those students present for the elder's presentation, were familiar with the traditional setting created by the elder. The assumptions that I had made regarding the students, their

behaviour, and their response to the presence of an elder were based on my experiences with them in the school setting. Apparently, the community offered these students exposure to other forms of education that they sometimes found more to their liking. As a beginning teacher working in an unfamiliar setting, I felt that I was unprepared to insightfully interpret the interaction between the elder and the students that I had witnessed that day. What were the social and historical forces that had played a role in creating this unique educational situation?

In order to interpret this experience and appreciate the unique character of the present education system on the Blood Reserve, an examination of the history of education among the Blood people is necessary. It would be erroneous to claim that the current system has little connection to the experiences with education from the past. The influences of traditional approaches to education along with the impacts of government and church-controlled residential schools need to be viewed as integral to an insightful and thorough comprehension of the current Kainai Board of Education. This is because the students, parents, teachers, elders, and administrators involved with the education system carry with them vestiges of this history that they contribute whenever and however they participate in a curriculum dialogue on the Blood Reserve. This chapter will provide a brief summary of the history and character of education among the Blood people from traditional times to the present day. The purpose is to provide the reader with an historical context for this study. It is also to create a profile of some of the characteristics of the current education system that exist on the Blood Reserve.

All societies require some form of education for their people to survive

and prosper. Education, regardless of the context or culture concerned, has as a primary goal the successful socialization of citizens. Each society has expectations of its people and an idea of the best way to live. The people are then educated to adopt these values and live in ways that will be most beneficial to the society as a whole. Successful socialization, then, means that citizens are educated so that they will understand “who they are, who their people are, and how they relate to other peoples and to the physical world about them” (Miller, 1996, p. 15). How these goals are realized depends largely upon the values of the particular society.

The Aboriginal peoples of North America shared certain values, and this allows some generalizations to be made about the kinds of approaches to education that were used in traditional times. The values that were most prominent include a respect for all beings, sharing, generosity, helping others, spiritual awareness, bravery, courage, and humour. These values were developed in traditional Aboriginal settings “characterized by subsistence economies, in-context learning . . . and ample opportunities for students to observe adult role models who exemplified the knowledge, skills, and values being taught” (Hampton, 1995, p. 8). A necessary part of this approach to education was that the adults would help others grow in spirit and knowledge by passing on what they had learned. Teaching was considered the duty of the wise just as learning was an obligation of the young and inexperienced (Johnston, 1976, p. 69). Thus, the wisest and most experienced people in Aboriginal societies, the elders, were given the most prominent role as teachers. An indirect approach to teaching in which the learner was expected to “look, listen and learn” was most often employed (Miller, 1996, p. 16). Boys learned to become men and girls learned to become women by imitation and modelling gender-



specific adult behaviours through playing and games. "Games and amusement were, in fact, techniques for vocational training in Aboriginal society" (p. 20). Education was considered to be a natural part of life in that the learning occurred in the process of doing something.

Of course, this learning process was most often guided by elders. This was done to ensure that the education of the young was not random and incomplete, but instead directed towards specific social and cultural goals. To this end, it was common for elders to tell stories, anecdotes of tribal history, or legends to children during the regular course of daily activities as a way to pass on moral or experiential lessons. As Johnston (1976) observes, these stories were both simple and complex; they were forms of entertainment, but they also taught morals, philosophy, and invited the listeners to consider the metaphysical in the world (pp. 69-70).

Linked to the elders was another important characteristic of traditional Aboriginal education: the ethic of non-interference (Ross, 1992, p. 12). Simply stated, the belief was that ordering children around or controlling them was not the best way to raise them. Children were viewed as independent beings that needed to discover the world in their own way, without coercion, for them to learn effectively. Therefore, no one should try to boss a child around because they must learn things on their own and in their own way. Elders would offer information and would give advice when asked, but the responsibility of decision-making was imposed on children at an early age (English-Currie, 1990, p. 48). Children were expected to study entirely on their own by listening and watching carefully all that they heard and saw, and then model through imitation all they had learned through play and games (Ross, 1992, p. 16). This approach to education fostered

the development of pattern-thought or the ability to pay close attention to details and patterns as a way to accurately make predictions or recall essential information (pp. 74-75). For traditional Aboriginal people, the ideas of an obligation to learn and to teach combined with the pattern-thought process created an education geared towards trying out the roles and duties identified as desirable. In these ways, young people honed the skills that they would need as adults.

The young people of the Blood Tribe were traditionally educated using approaches very similar to those mentioned. However, it is important to note that the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy also had distinct ways of educating their children specific to their unique way of life. The autonomy and distinctiveness of the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy was maintained through the preservation of close cultural, political, and familial ties among the three Blackfoot tribes: the Kainai or Blood, the *Piikani* or Peigan, and the *Siksika* or Northern Blackfoot. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the period during which Blackfoot power and influence reached its zenith, these tribes controlled a vast expanse of territory on the northern plains east of the Rocky Mountains (Dempsey, 1980, p. 7). During this era, the Blackfoot way of life was characterized, in part, by a heavy reliance on the buffalo, warfare with neighbouring tribes, and a strict adherence to traditional gender-based roles and duties.

For the Blackfoot man, the central economic activity was hunting the buffalo. To be a man was to be a hunter. Thus, by the time a boy reached the age of ten, he was encouraged to accompany the men of the tribe on the hunt (Ewers, 1976, p. 80). Mounted on their favorite colts, the boys would chase after the men and imitate their actions and techniques as they hunted. Sometimes the boys would even practice their hunting skills

on buffalo calves that were left behind by a stampeded herd (Ewers, 1985, p. 159). However, despite the emphasis on skill development that they would need as adults, the boys were also taught a fundamental social value through this process. Generosity was modelled and reinforced by hunters who would give buffalo meat to the poor, aged, or sick (p. 163). Blackfoot society condemned stinginess and rewarded the generous with social status and political influence (Dempsey, 1980, p. 71).

Of course, the same generosity was not extended to many of the neighbouring tribes with which the Blackfoot competed for control of prized hunting grounds and territory. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy were widely feared for the aggressiveness and ruthlessness with which they defended their territory from intruders (Ewers, 1976, p. 125). It should not be surprising, then, that a major part of the education of young Blackfoot men involved preparing them to be courageous and skillful warriors and horse raiders. From a very young age, boys were told detailed stories of the war exploits of their elders. Often, these stories would involve an actual acting out of the entire event and demonstrations showing how certain things were done (Dempsey, 1988, p. 7). When they got older, Blackfoot boys played games, wrestled, and often planned and staged war-like raids during which they would steal from the drying racks of meat (Mountain Horse, 1989, p. 10). Eventually, the boys would take their apprenticeships as warriors a step further by actually accompanying warriors on raids into enemy territory. Red Crow, the renowned warrior chief of the Kainai people, first went to war in his early teens, and acted as a servant, lookout, and careful observer of the skilled actions of his elders (Dempsey, 1980, p. 17). Experienced men would take great care to point out to the boys "how the raids should be conducted and why they

employed the tactics” that they did (Ewers, 1985, p. 190). This self-directed style of education produced resourceful, knowledgeable, courageous, and determined young men who knew well their role as defenders of their people and sought the honour and prestige it would bring them. Any young man who did not develop the skills required for hunting and warfare was treated with disdain and ridiculed for not fulfilling his role as a hunter and warrior.

The specific duties performed by the men and women of traditional Blackfoot tribes were kept rigidly separate and distinct so that the social pressure to conform would be too intense to ignore. Conformity was necessary for the success of the tribe. Girls, just like the boys, were educated to develop skills and knowledge in the performance of specific duties and roles. In traditional Blackfoot society, women were responsible for preparing food, picking berries, digging roots, collecting firewood, the set up and take down of teepees, making clothing, and numerous other tasks except those directly related to hunting, warfare, and the education of boys (Ewers, 1976, p. 102). At an early age, girls began to play in ways that enabled them to practice the skills and crafts associated with these duties so that they would become accomplished in them before they were married. For example, in imitation of the daily activities performed by women, Blackfoot girls practiced moving camp through the use of miniature teepees, and toy horses and dolls (Ewers, 1985, p. 225). The mothers and elders fostered the development of these skills by encouraging the girls and educating them on the best methods to use. The roles and duties performed by the women, coupled with the hunting and warfare skills of the men, created a balance in traditional Blackfoot society that helped make the people prosperous and content.

The arrival of foreigners to Blackfoot territory disrupted this balance. When the herds of buffalo disappeared from the Plains, the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the people lost its life source, and many of the roles and duties that the men and women performed suddenly became inappropriate. In the fall of 1877, the Canadian government negotiated Treaty 7 with the Blackfoot tribes, and within a few years, the people found themselves confined to reserves and dependent on government handouts and rations for their survival. The once proud, independent, resilient and prosperous Blackfoot tribes adapted poorly to the "new mode of life on a reserve" and the prolonged suffering of the people, wracked by disease and poor food, clothing, and shelter, created the impression that they would soon all die off (Dempsey, 1978a, p. 24).

The provisions of the Treaty, including those for education, offered some hope for the future. Closely linked to the Treaty rights involving education were those related to the agricultural development of reserve lands and the raising of livestock. It has been argued that the leaders of the Blackfoot tribes approached the treaty process with the specific goal of securing government help in the transition to a new way of life since they knew and understood that their people could no longer rely on the buffalo for sustenance. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that some of the leaders, including Red Crow, were ready and willing to learn the skills of farming and ranching soon after settling down to reserve life (Dempsey, 1980, p. 192). These leaders recognized the benefits that Canadian society offered their people, and believed that the sharing of their land with the Canadian government and white settlers would, in return, provide them with access to education, expertise, training, and economic opportunities that would help make their people prosperous in the future (Hildebrandt, Carter, & First Rider, 1996, p. 210). Thus,

education and the successful adaptation to a new way of life were viewed as keys to future prosperity for the Blackfoot tribes.

The goals of the Aboriginal leaders were not entirely different from those of the Canadian government officials. They, too, believed that the purpose of the treaties and treaty rights was to “civilize” the Indians by replacing traditional cultural practices and beliefs with “the modes of thought and action” characteristic of Canadian citizens of that era (Kozak, 1971, p. 48). The difference was that the government considered total assimilation of the Indians to be the main goal of this process. To this end, the Canadian government passed the Indian Acts of 1876 and 1884 with the intention of assimilating, enfranchising and, eventually, facilitating the disappearance of the reserves and Treaty Indians (Milloy, 1999, p. 21). For guidance in the establishment of an education system for Indian children that would best meet these goals, the Canadian government commissioned Nicolas Flood Davin to write a report on the feasibility of establishing boarding schools for Treaty Indians. In 1879, Davin, after studying some industrial schools for American Indians, approved of the creation of such schools for Canadian Indians with the proviso that they be administered and supervised by missionaries (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986, p. 6). Thus, by the late nineteenth century, the Canadian government had the philosophical and pedagogical foundations for an education system that would assimilate Indian children by first removing them from their families and communities, and then gradually replacing Aboriginal habits and beliefs with European and Christian values and practices. The Indian residential school was designed to assimilate Indian children to mainstream society upon graduation.

Such high-minded goals and visions were far different from the experiences of the

missionaries who set up the first day schools on the Blood Reserve. St. Paul's Anglican mission was established in 1880 to serve the Bloods, and nine years later the Catholic mission buildings, with school, dwelling, and private chapel combined, were erected and operational (Kozak, 1971, p.97). By 1890, there were three day schools serving the Bloods, but none of these could be considered successful. At St. Paul's, the average attendance from 1883 to 1886 was 40%; a few years later, it dipped to 28.8% (Porter, 1993, p.30). Another major concern for government and church officials was the small proportion of Blood children that were actually attending these schools. Naturally, most of those that were of school age were not interested in attending school, and their parents permitted them to spend their days playing and interacting in traditional ways. Of those that did attend the schools, few learned anything past the very basics of the ABCs, and most seemed to be attracted to the school by the free lunches more than anything else (Porter, 1993, pp. 30-31). "The missionaries became convinced that the only way that they could ever hope to Christianize and educate the Indians was by taking them away from their home environment and keeping them in virtual bondage from the ages of about six to eighteen" (Dempsey, 1986, p. 11). This view received official government support, and by 1898 both the Anglicans and Catholics were operating residential schools on the Blood Reserve.

The residential school was an all-encompassing experiment in the resocialization of Indian children. The curriculum was not limited to the classroom, but designed to intrude on all aspects of the child's life. Classroom instruction was based largely on an Ontario model that emphasized English, geography, reading, arithmetic, history, vocal music, calisthenics, reading and writing, and, of course, religious instruction as students

progressed from Standard I to VI (Kozak, 1971, pp. 174-180). Another part was a more practical education that employed the students with regular chores and duties: the girls sewed, cooked, and cleaned, while the boys worked outdoors doing farming and agricultural chores (p. 100). Students would spend one half of their day in the classroom and the other half involved in these practical activities. Infused throughout was the teaching of ethics and morality with the fervent belief that Indian children would be best served and educated if all ties to their parents and community, as well as, cultural practices and language were severed.

The residential school system became an even more dominant characteristic of the Blood Reserve when the Canadian government made school attendance compulsory for all children between the ages of six and sixteen in 1920 (Chalmers, 1972, p. 163). To accommodate the huge influx of new students, both the Anglicans and Catholics built new residential schools on the southwestern part of the Blood Reserve. Whether they attended St. Mary's or St. Paul's, most students who attended these residential schools had similar educational experiences. However, surviving elders offer differing interpretations of the effects. Some believe that the residential schools taught discipline, hard work, and prepared people to live a good life; others deplore the neglect and abuse they suffered at the hands of the nuns, priests, and teachers and lament their loss of childhood and bonds to their parents, language, and traditional culture (Hildebrandt, Carter, & First Rider, 1996, pp. 159-160).

One indisputable result of the residential school system was that graduates were not successfully integrated into mainstream society, as the government and missionaries had hoped they would. In fact, most graduates settled on the Reserve after a few years of



working odd jobs elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for this unsuccessful integration likely have more to do with the lack of acceptance of Indian people by mainstream Canadians than anything else. However, it is also important to consider that the residential schools were unsuccessful in fully assimilating all students; many graduates simply wanted to reconnect with their families, friends, and communities. A more insidious reason could be that the residential schools graduated many young people who were damaged by the experience of living full time in the residences. As Milloy (1999) observes, the residential school experience enacted mental and physical violence on children, and the emphasis on discipline, firmness, and punishment created an isolated form of trauma that many graduates could not overcome (pp. 41- 47). The lack of success with the residential schools prompted the Canadian government to make amendments to the sections pertaining to education in the Indian Act. In 1951, the new Act gave the Minister of Indian Affairs the power to negotiate tuition agreements with provincial school jurisdictions whereby Indian children would attend provincial schools surrounding reserves (Daniels, 1973, p. 106).

This decision to educate Indian children in provincial schools marked a major shift in policy. Until 1951, the Canadian government had held a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the education of Indian children. However, by 1951, it was obvious that Indian children were not integrating into mainstream Canadian society nor were they being effectively assimilated. The fiscal realities of supporting an education system that was considered unsuccessful as well as the unwillingness of the Canadian populace to continue to accept the inadequacies of Canadian Indian policy prompted the government to attempt to assimilate in new ways: the provincial schools (Miller 1987, p. 9). On the

Blood Reserve, attendance at both St. Paul's and St. Mary's Residential Schools was discouraged. Instead, the Canadian government began to emphasize attendance at day schools, and a new elementary school was built at Standoff in 1954. This decentralizing movement on the part of the Canadian government worked so well that one-half of all Blood children of school age were attending provincial schools by 1964 (Ninatako Cultural Centre, 1984). The success of this government policy of integration was not met with much enthusiasm or support by the Indian parents who worried that their children would face the harsh realities of prejudice and discrimination in the off-reserve schools (Chalmers, 1972, pp. 294-295). However, a more major concern for Indian people was their inability to have any kind of influence over the education of their own children (pp. 318-319). These concerns, and the fears associated with them, were heightened with the government release of the White Paper in 1969.

The main goal of the White Paper was to achieve social, economic, and political equality, and to make Indian people equal partners in society with other Canadians; the basic message was that Indian people should no longer be treated differently from other Canadians, whether legally, constitutionally, or otherwise (p. 197). With respect to education, the authors of the White Paper recommended that "all services to Indian people come through the same channels and from the same government agencies as serve all other Canadians" (Daniels, 1973, p. 197). Most Indian parents and political leaders did not interpret the White Paper in this way. Many saw it as a veiled attempt by the Canadian government to back out of its Treaty obligations, and several leaders began to advocate for Indian control of Indian education (pp. 198-199). This desire for control over the education of their own children spread to the Blood Reserve. The result was a

gradual takeover of control over education from Indian Affairs until the full administration of the schools on the Blood Reserve was transferred to the Blood Tribe Education Board in 1988.

Since 1988, the official title of the Board has been changed to the more appropriate Kainai Board of Education, and the school system has seen some significant changes. There are four schools on the Blood Reserve: Kainai High School, Tatsi'kiisaapo'p Middle School, Aahsaopi Elementary School, and Saipoyi Elementary School. All of these schools are administered by members of the Blood Tribe. The Middle School and Aahsaopi are new buildings while Kainai High School has seen major renovations; all three schools are modern facilities with prominent Blackfoot cultural designs and décor. Some of the major changes to the school system since 1988 involve the teaching staff and courses offered. At Kainai High School, the teaching staff has gone from being 22% Blood Tribe members to 65% today. This change in the character of the teaching staff can be seen in the other schools on the Reserve as well.

There is a Blackfoot Immersion program for younger students, and the Blackfoot language is a regular part of the classroom experience for all students until it becomes an optional course after students complete Blackfoot 10. There has been a major effort to integrate Blackfoot history and culture into all courses offered in the schools on the Blood Reserve. Teachers are obligated by contract to develop curriculum and use cultural resources in the classroom. To this end, there is a full-time Kainai Studies coordinator to assist teachers and help with the identification of appropriate resources. For the most part, local control of education has been a successful endeavour for the Kainai Board of Education and the people of the Blood Reserve.

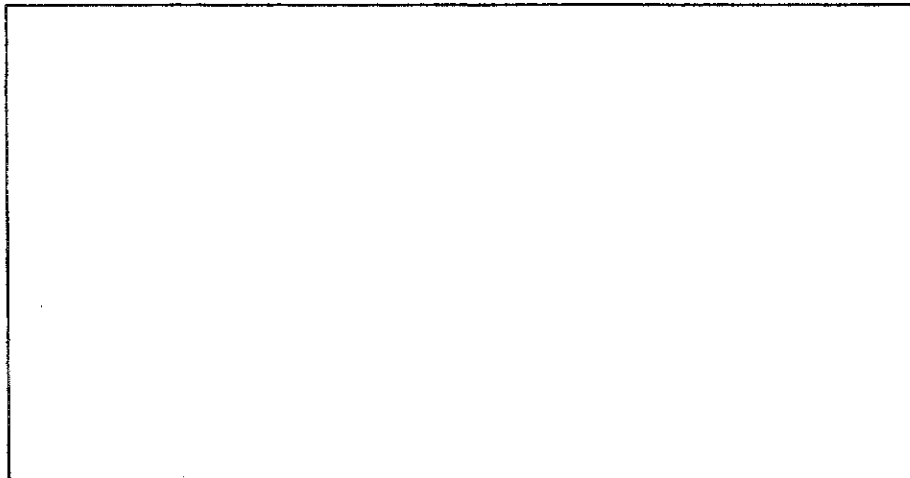
Successful teaching requires an extensive understanding of the context in which the teaching takes place. The educational setting of Kainai High School and the Blood Reserve offers significant challenges for the teacher largely because there is so much history and so many memories that influence the attitudes and behaviours of the students, their parents, and other community members. It is clear that certain aspects of traditional approaches to education have survived to the present day. This can be seen in the ways in which many young people are still given freedom to make their own choices without interference from others. As well, the elders from the community still play an important educational role in the community and occasionally in the school setting. These two examples provide brief insight into the complicated ways in which Kainai traditions mix with present-day influences to create confusing and ambiguous social and educational contexts. Mixed with these influences are the memories of the residential school experience and both the positive and negative impacts of those on the community, families, and personal life stories. This constant interplay and interaction of traditions, histories, memories, and both contemporary and future goals and intentions creates a unique kind of curriculum dialogue. As I see it, one of the main goals of this dialogue, in the Kainai context, is to reestablish a balance in the community. This is accomplished by working in the schools towards the resurrection and preservation of Blackfoot language and traditional culture, honouring and remembering personal and collective memories, and meeting the challenges of current provincial educational standards and expectations.

### Chapter Three A Tour of the Kainai Community

A curriculum dialogue on the Blood Reserve has many participants. I imagine that each person involved brings with him or her, purposely or randomly, various aspects of the unique history of the Blood Tribe. To consider the significance of a curriculum dialogue requires background on the key places, ideas, and people involved in this setting as they evolve in this thesis.

The difficulty is that such an introduction limits the reader's ability to experience and appreciate the history, culture, and contemporary concerns of the Kainai people. Unfortunately, we cannot embark on an extensive tour of the Blood Reserve together; you must rely on me to tell you what the place is like. So, I have created an imaginary photo album that offers an improvised tour of the Blood Reserve from my point of view. These, then, are the places I have seen, people I have met, and the ideas that I have been exposed to while teaching at Kainai High School and interacting with the people of the Kainai community.

You will notice that there are no actual photographs in this photo album. Rather than limiting or defining the people, places, and ideas with a single photograph or image, I choose to leave a simple blank space instead. This creates an opportunity for the reader to imagine what would appear in the box as the text is read. I imagine that, like the course of a dialogue, the images in the box would flow together as they change and eventually blend into something new. So this tour via a photo album without photos is intended to introduce some of the key aspects of a curriculum dialogue and spark the imagination on the character of education on the Blood Reserve and the potentiality for future developments in Aboriginal education at Kainai High School.

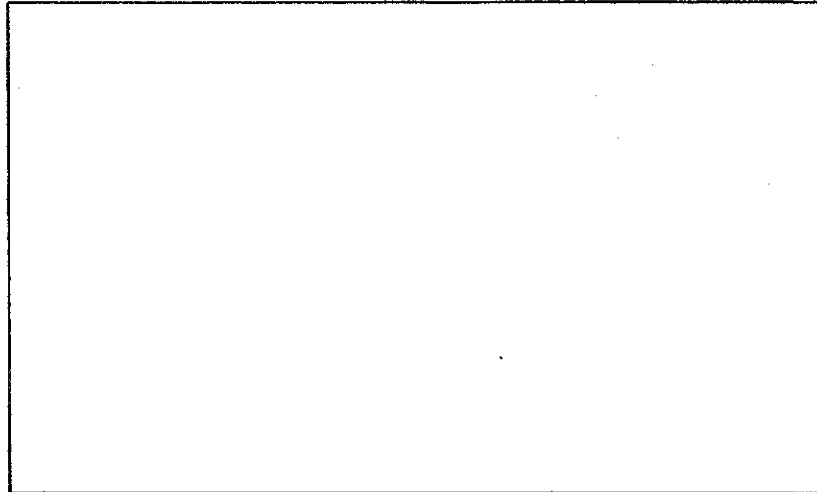


In the Blackfoot language, this site is called *Mookowanssini*. To the Blackfoot people, especially the Bloods, this site has special spiritual significance. The reason for this is that traditional Blackfoot ceremonies and practices are believed to have been passed down from the sky as gifts to the people from *Napi Naató'si*, or Creator Sun. These were the sacred bundles, the ceremonies and instructions for the people. A young girl was returned to the earth from the sky and was given the duty of sharing these gifts with her people. And these ceremonies and bundles form the basis of Blackfoot spirituality as people understand them today.

Today, Mookowanssini or the Belly Buttes are still an important landmark. The annual Sundance takes place every summer just below the Buttes, and it is a time for the Kainai people to come together as a tribe and refresh themselves on their spiritual and traditional ties to the land, to the Creator, and to each other. On the Blackfoot calendar, it is the most important event of the year. Many people believe that the survival of the traditional Sundance on the Blood Reserve is the main reason that Kainai culture has been maintained and passed on so successfully when compared to other tribes and nations in North America. The Sundance is at the heart of *Kainayssini* or the Blood way of life,

and its survival as a cultural practice has helped preserve Kainaiyssini for future generations to learn and live.

The preservation of the Sundance, however, was not achieved without a struggle. During the 1890s, Canadian government officials and an Indian agent worked to suppress the Sundance and other spiritual practices on the Blood Reserve. James Wilson, an Indian Agent at the time, tried to outlaw the Sundance because he believed it was a pagan practice that would slow the assimilation of the Bloods and make it more difficult for the missionaries and schoolteachers to successfully educate and civilize the young people of the Reserve (Dempsey, 1980, p. 242). For six years, he managed to disrupt the traditional activities of the Sundance simply by forbidding the distribution of whole beef tongues as part of the rations distributed to the Bloods. Wilson did this because he realized that whole beef tongues were a necessary part of the sacred ritual of the Sundance; the tongues were sliced and offered to Napi Naató'si as acts of faith (p. 242). Wilson's efforts to eliminate the Sundance on the Blood Reserve were finally overcome in 1900 when Red Crow pledged to slaughter all of his cattle herd in order to gain the tongues necessary to have a traditional Sundance (p. 252). Wilson's power crumbled and the Sundance ceremony has existed unhindered by government officials ever since. The preservation of the Sundance for his tribe was perhaps the most important victory Red Crow won for his people. Two months after that Sundance in 1900, the famous chief was dead, but his legacy and the Sundance continue on.



Chief Mountain or *Ninaiistako* is a very important landmark to the Blackfoot people. Its distinctive flat top shape makes it easy to spot from many locations out on the prairie, and it was surely used as a guide to help people find their way around Blackfoot territory. Many Blood people that I know regard Ninaiistako with reverence because of its connections to the history of the Blackfoot people. As a unique part of the Rocky Mountains—the backbone of the world to the Blackfoot—Chief Mountain has come to symbolize the traditional lands of the Blackfoot tribes. People returning from a trip are happy to see Ninaiistako. It reminds them that they are truly home.

Over the years, Chief Mountain has been a site used by those in search of visions or dreams. Buffalo skulls, used as pillows, have been found on top of the mountain (Schultz, 1962, p. 322). These stories, though, pale in comparison to the story of how Chief Mountain got its name.

Many years ago, a young *Aamsskáápipikani* or South Peigan warrior, whom was noted for his bravery, was made the war-chief for a large band of his people. A little while later, he fell in love with a woman who was in his tribe, and they were married. One day, the war-chief announced that he was going to gather a war party and attack the

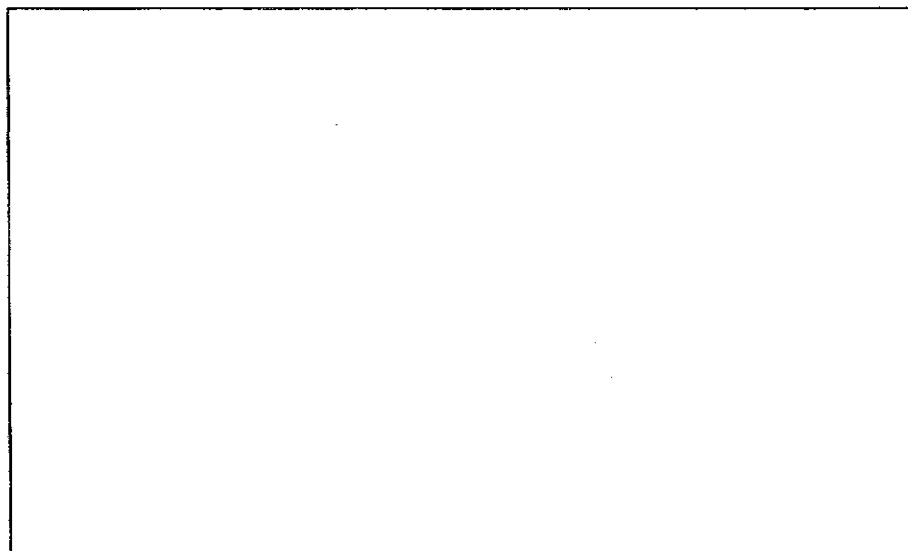


enemy. Soon, a large group of eager young warriors gathered and showed that they were willing to follow their leader. Leading a large party of men, the Chief rode out from the village.

The Aamsskáápipikani met the enemy and defeated them. But their war-chief was killed, and his followers mournfully carried the broken body back to the camp.

His wife was crazed with grief. With vacant eyes she wandered everywhere, looking for her husband and calling his name. Her friends tried to take care of her, hoping that eventually her mind would clear and she could return to normal. One day, though, they could not find her anywhere in the camp. Searching for her, they saw her high up on the side of the mountain, the tall one above their camp. She had her baby in her arms. Runners were sent after her, but from the top of the mountain she signaled that they should not try to reach her. All watched in horror as she threw her baby out over the cliff, and then she herself jumped from the mountain to the rocks far, far below.

Her people buried the woman and baby there among the rocks. They carried the body of the Chief to the place and buried him beside them. From that time on, the mountain that towers above the graves was known as Ninaiistako, "the Mountain of the Chief," or "Chief Mountain."



The town of Standoff is the main settlement on the Blood Reserve. The name of the town commemorates a confrontation between some whiskey traders and a United States Marshall named Hand who was working to stop their trade. Joseph Kipp, a well-known trader at Fort Benton, Montana, tried to sneak a wagonload of whiskey into Canada for trading purposes in 1870 (Schultz, 1973, p. 291). When stopped by U.S. Marshall Hand, Kipp and the others claimed that they were already in Canada and therefore out of the jurisdiction of the U.S. Marshall (p. 292). When they threatened him with gunfire, Marshall Hand backed off. Thus, when Kipp and the others set up their trading post in Canada, they named it Standoff in remembrance of their confrontation with the U.S. Marshall.

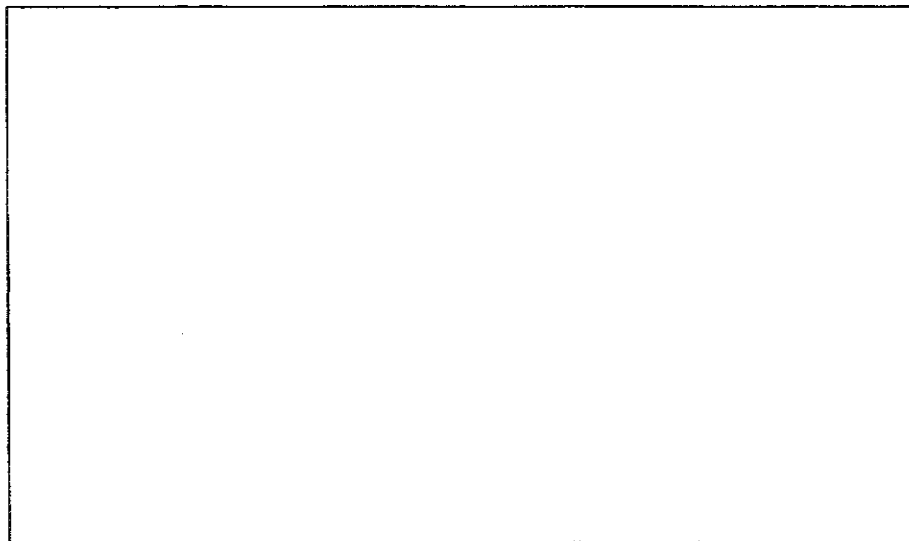
Eventually, the North West Mounted Police were sent into the area by the Canadian government to put an end the whiskey trade, make contact with the Blackfoot tribes, and prepare the region for the peaceful settlement of European migrants. Thus, in 1874 the North West Mounted Police, led by Colonel James Macleod, established Fort Macleod in the heart of the territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Three years later,

Treaty 7 was negotiated with the tribes of southern Alberta, and the Bloods eventually settled on a reserve in the Standoff area. Red Crow, a prominent Blood chief at the time, was among the first to settle in Standoff in the years following the Treaty 7 agreement (Dempsey, 1980, p. 115). His leadership in establishing a log home as well as a farming and ranching operation in the Standoff area led to the development of a large settlement at that location. The town of Standoff, as it exists today, has grown to become the administrative and economic center of the Blood Reserve.

Standoff, though, has another side to it. Many of the homes and streets in Standoff are poorly maintained. Garbage and abandoned debris litter the empty lots and yards throughout the town. Spray-painted graffiti and stray dogs are also common sights here. Although there are hundreds of people that live in Standoff, most are not very proud to admit it. High school students on the Blood Reserve often look down on their fellow students who live in Standoff as though they come from a lower class. Many of the students who live in Standoff are considered to be rough kids who run the streets at night getting into trouble. Generally, Standoff is viewed as a type of ghetto—a place of violence, crime, as well as, alcohol and drug abuse.

To me, Standoff is the place where all the problems of the Blood Reserve become evident. This points to the historical circumstances through which the Kainai people were required to live on the Reserve and expected to assimilate as quickly as possible. Instead, overmanagement and mismanagement of the affairs of the Blood people has created a situation in which the majority of the tribe lack higher education and job skills necessary to be active participants in society. Instead, they are isolated, ghettoized, and dependent members of Canadian society who see little change or hope for the future. This is the

legacy of the disappearance of the buffalo, residential schools, Indian Affairs, and the intentional disruption of the economic, spiritual, cultural, political, and linguistic rights and lifestyles of the Kainai people.



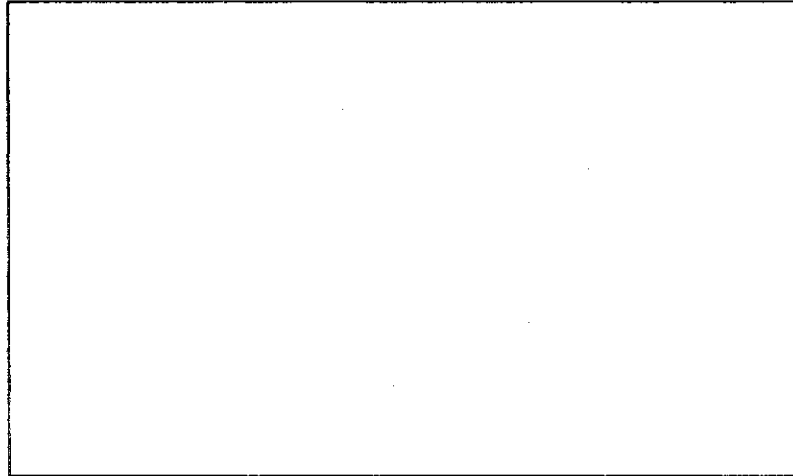
This is a picture of Red Crow Community College as it looks today. This building was the former St. Mary's Residential School and, from the outside, appears much as it did when it was built in 1926. This square, sturdy, imposing, brick structure must have seemed so out of place on the prairie when it was first built. To me, that image is powerful because it signifies much of the whole colonial and assimilationist mindset. This area was traditionally occupied by the Bloods, nomadic people who had a clear and obvious connection with the land. The land represented their lifestyle, supported the food they depended upon, and was alive with their stories and beliefs. This land was sacred to them because it was where their ancestors' bones were buried, and it was given to them by their Creator to protect, honour, and preserve for future generations. Their language, their worldview, their stories, their societies, their ceremonies, and their hopes for the future were all largely based on the intense connection to the land. Suddenly, foreigners arrived and these foreigners had a different religion, worldview, and language. But more significantly, they had a conflicting view of the land and its uses. The permanence of this structure signifies the imposition of the European systems onto the Aboriginal landscape and the concomitant disruption of all aspects of lifestyle related to the land. When you are

out on the treeless prairie landscape of the Blood Reserve, you realize how this building must have stood out, looming on the horizon, as a constant reminder of that process of forced change.

I feel sick when I look at this building. I don't like being inside it, either.

Although many Aboriginal people say that the residential school experience wasn't all bad, I cannot help but picture the faces of young children in those windows. I imagine them straining their eyes to try to see the place where their parents live or where a friend or relative lives. Crying themselves to sleep at night. Getting their hair shaved. Being beaten for speaking their language.

I find it ironic that this building is now used as a community college. Most of the students are adults who are completing high school through adult upgrading, having failed or dropped out when they were younger. It's almost like the failures of the colonial system and the education of Indians have all come back to haunt the building where it all began, like a completed circle. This building represents all that was wrong about the education of Aboriginal people in the past. However, we are still feeling the effects of those wrongs today. Aboriginal education will not be wholly successful until those involved break free from the colonial process and Eurocentric definitions of education, and create something new that is meaningful to Aboriginal people. This building, in symbolic terms, must be dismantled.



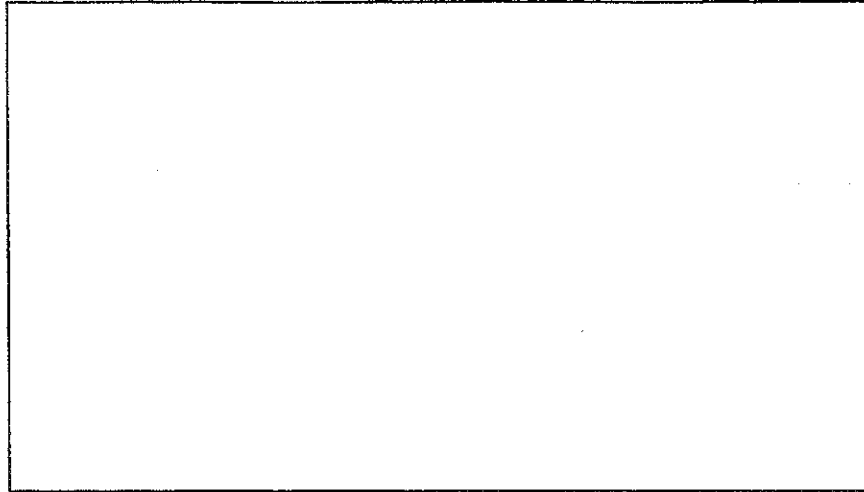
This is the newly renovated and rebuilt Kainai High School. It seems strange for me to look at this building because it still does not seem to be an actual place. It is so appealing, so modern. When I first began teaching on the Blood Reserve in 1993, the old school building was literally falling apart. The floor tiles and linoleum were broken or cracked, the carpet was stinky and stained, many windows were broken and the panes were littered with fly carcasses, the toilets were unreliable and frequently backed up, the water was undrinkable, the showers were dangerous, and the air in the hallways was often heavy with dirt and dust. And the roof leaked. While there was some teaching going on in this environment, it was not enthusiastic. Nor was much of the learning.

Imagine the joy of the staff and students when approval came through for renovations to this demoralizing place! The new Kainai High School, as seen in the photo, has been redesigned to create a more culturally appropriate and aesthetically pleasing building. The new school has a circular structure with classrooms encircling the library. The library, as the center of the building, is created in the shape of a large teepee complete with lodge poles which extend through the roof, canvas covering, and a small gas fireplace in the middle of it all. As well, the whole interior of the building has been

decorated with a variety of traditional Blackfoot designs and themes—artwork that can be seen in classroom carpets, on walls, and on hallway floors. The school is technologically advanced, as well. There are televisions in each classroom with remote-control links to a video or compact disk control panel in the library. There are computers with Internet links in every classroom. Perhaps most impressive is the Career and Technology Services lab with computer, laser, electronic, and wind tunnel technology devices in place, all openly accessible to interested students. It is a very impressive building.

Can a redesigned architecture of a school change the attitudes people on the Blood Reserve have towards education? On the surface, the new Kainai High School seems to recognize the identity and uniqueness of the Blood Tribe. But, will this exterior display of tribal pride permeate the classrooms and manifest itself in the day-to-day activities of administrators, teachers, and students of the school? It is pleasing and satisfying to have a beautiful school that so appropriately and creatively reflects the character of the indigenous people it was built to serve. But, if the classroom culture is not noticeably different from the many public high schools in the area, then what was the point of building the school in the first place?





These elders are participants in the Elder Mentor Program that was started at Kainai High School in 1999. The purpose of the Elder Mentor Program is to bring elders and students together on a regular basis. Some teachers felt that Kainai High School, as a school on the Blood Reserve dedicated to educating Kainai students in culturally appropriate ways, needed elders from the community to be more involved. Before the Elder Mentor Program was created, elders usually only came to the school if they were invited for a specific purpose or school function. It was in this limited situation that most of the students saw the elders, and rarely did the students and elders have the opportunity to interact with each other and build relationships in the school context. Thus, one of the primary goals of the Elder Mentor Program is to promote and nurture positive relationships between students and elders. If the elders can become role models, sources of inspiration, and trustworthy guides for the students, then the students will likely become more successful in the future.

The Elder Mentor Program marks a significant change in the usual educational experience offered at Kainai High School. The kinds of programs and courses offered, teaching approaches employed, and the general school culture do not make Kainai High

School much different from other schools in Alberta. Inviting the elders into the classroom as teachers, not guests, is an experimental departure into the ambiguity of Aboriginal pedagogy. Normally, community culture and school culture are regarded as separate and distinct. During the era of residential schools, Aboriginal children were purposely removed and isolated from their communities as part of the overall plan to assimilate them. Any prolonged exposure to the community, the culture, the language, and the traditions was thought to hinder the successful education of Aboriginal children. The Elder Mentor Program has been designed to try and bring these two entities, Kainai High School and the Kainai community, together.

This departure from the regular school experience is challenging for teachers, students, and elders alike. Teachers have to be willing to leave behind the security of the textbook, and the sanctity and predictability of the classroom. Students are required to participate, speak out, take chances, and act on their beliefs. This is challenging for them because during their educational careers most students have been trained to be passive recipients of knowledge. The elders are asked to be leaders in an unfamiliar and, in some cases, uncomfortable setting. Many elders have disturbing memories of their own educational experiences, and some still view school as an unfriendly place to be. For its success, this experiment relies heavily upon the willingness of all the participants to try something new, and this is risky.

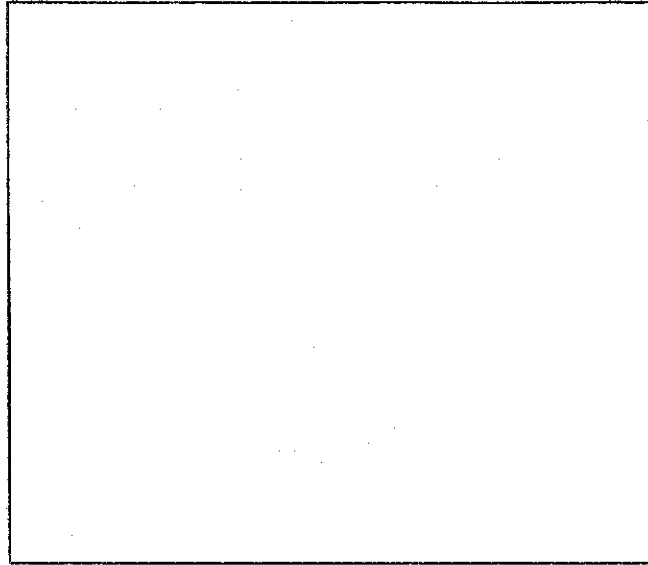
Experimental, too, are the topics chosen for the Elder Mentor Program. Initially, culturally and historically relevant topics were chosen, and the elders were asked to speak on them during the weekly meetings. This allowed for little interaction between the students and the elders. Next, the participants in the Elder Mentor Program tried activities

like berry picking, drum making, cooking, beading, and sewing. The idea was to imitate a typical traditional setting in which elders told stories to children while they went about their daily chores together. This approach had some success, but it was difficult to organize the students and elders with their projects and all the supplies they required. Lately, the Program has become field-trip based. The elders come to the school twice a week. The first meeting of the week involves a discussion focused on the place the group will visit on the field trip. Then, the whole group travels to the site chosen, and the students and elders have the opportunity to interact during the whole trip.

The most successful of these field trips was when the group travelled to the site of Heavy Runner's Camp, southeast of Shelby, Montana. In January 1870, one hundred and sixty-five Aamsskáápipikani were killed when their camp was encircled and fired upon by U.S. Army troops under Major Eugene M. Baker. After the slaughter, the bodies and teepees were piled up and set on fire (Schultz, 1962, p. 301). The elders had some stories to tell about the memories the Blackfoot people have of this horrible act. But, to the students, the ceremony of remembrance involving sweetgrass and tobacco was the most powerful part of this whole trip. After this ceremony, one member of our group received a Blackfoot name from an elder. I was told that it is a tremendous honour to receive a name at such an important place; the name takes on added meaning under these circumstances.

The educational impact of these experiments in the Elder Mentor Program are difficult to measure. However, one significant outcome has been the ways in which the elders, teachers, and students have interacted in refreshing ways. The conversations or dialogues that have occurred during the activities organized through the Elder Mentor

Program are unique in that the topics under consideration are set by the participants and not by some outside governing authority. These dialogues between teachers, students, and elders have become the curriculum for the Program. Because of this, I believe that the Elder Mentor Program has exciting possibilities for the future.



*Siipista'pinii* is an elder involved with the Elder Mentor Program. He is a very well-respected member of the Blood Tribe, mostly because of his involvement with the traditional societies and ceremonies, but also because of his qualities as a leader and role model for all. He is a member of the *Ni'taitsskaiksi* or Lone Fighters clan, has been a *Ninaimsskaan* or a Sacred Pipe Bundle owner twice, and a member of the *Iitskinayiiksi* or Buffalo Society for a period of five years. During the activities of the Elder Mentor Program, *Siipista'pinii* often leads the group in prayer and conducts the spiritual ceremonies with the help of his wife, *Tsipii'kinii*.

*Siipista'pinii* was born at the old hospital in Standoff in 1926. By the age of seven, he was already a student at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Residential School. There are two things that *Siipista'pinii* remembers about residential school the most: learning to respect religion and gaining life skills. He put those life skills to good use after he left school at age sixteen and went to work on a ranch north of Calgary. He earned a reputation as a hard working and honest ranch hand and was given sole responsibility for the care of cattle and chickens for a year before heading back home to the Blood Reserve.

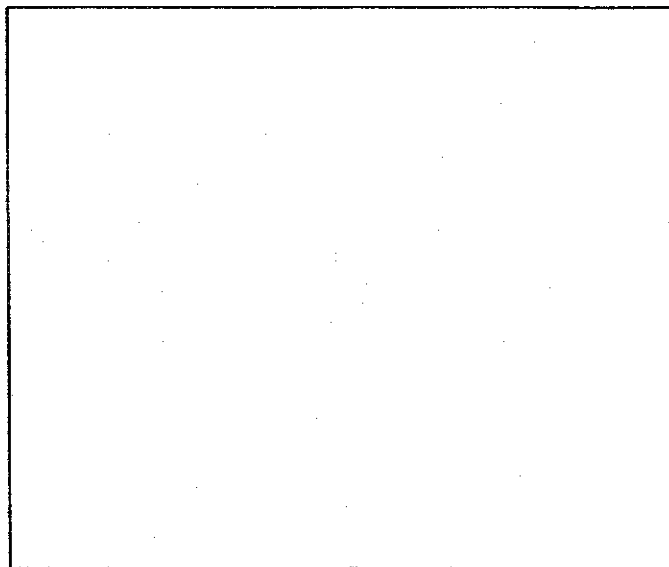
Working this job and others, Siipista'pinii was able to save enough money to start his own ranching operation that eventually grew to one-hundred head of cattle and half as many horses.

Like many elders, Siipista'pinii has encountered many challenges in his lifetime. He refers to these challenges as "unforeseen consequences" that all people encounter as they live their lives. When he speaks to the students, Siipista'pinii describes the difficult times in his life to help them realize that at some time all people have to deal with turmoil. The important thing is to respond to the problem in the appropriate way. He emphasizes the power of the individual spirit and tries to help the students understand that the way they respond to difficult times in their lives can make the difference between success and failure. A consistent message from Siipista'pinii throughout the meetings of teachers and students in the Elder Mentor Program is that each person has to be responsible for his or her own well-being. He believes in the development of the holistic person or a person balanced in emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical realms. The stories he tells reflect his own life and the struggle to be holistic, as well as, autonomous.

Siipista'pinii carries with him extensive knowledge of Kainayssini and this knowledge, coupled with his experience as a community and spiritual leader, makes him a valuable asset to the educational and pedagogical experiment of the Elder Mentor Program at Kainai High School. When he voices his concerns and shares his knowledge, the kind of teaching that occurs seems to have a holistic tone to it. Yet, there are still many students involved in the Program who fail to connect with that message. In fact, there have been several meetings involving the elders, the students, and the teachers in which most of the participants were somewhat disconnected from the discussion topic.

Many of the students give nonverbal cues that they are having trouble concentrating on the discussion. Maybe they have their minds on other things. The teachers, in turn, are often distracted from the discussion because they want to ensure that all the students are being respectful and attentive. The elders have a consistent and clear message to send that they patiently deliver, often through telling stories and relating their experiences in the Blackfoot language. Unfortunately, these need to be translated so that all the participants can understand. Clearly then, the three groups that participate in the Elder Mentor Program do not always communicate with each other in effective ways.

I believe that the future of the Elder Mentor Program depends on people like Siipista'pini. By becoming mentors and developing relationships with the students, the elders will find their own ways of communicating with the students at Kainai High School. This dialogue, both verbal and nonverbal, will form the basis of future developments in Aboriginal pedagogy on the Blood Reserve. Connecting elders, teachers and students together will help bridge the generational gap that many elders worry about when they talk about education today.



This is *Aamsskááphkitópii*. He got this name from a compelling dream that his mother had when he was fourteen years old. She dreamt that a tall and powerfully built middle-aged man was talking to her. He had long greying hair with a grey feather fastened to the hair at the back of his head. He was shirtless, and had rawhide straps tied to both his arms at the biceps. His lower body was covered with rawhide pants with fringes fashioned on the outside of each pant leg. He looked very much like a Kainai warrior from the past.

*Aamsskááphkitópii*'s mother remembers that this warrior from her dream was quite sad and, in Blackfoot, he told her that none of his people knew who he was because his son did not have a name. It also made him sad that his people did not speak Blackfoot anymore. The warrior's last words to her were, "My son's name is *Aamsskááphkitópii*."

*Aamsskááphkitópii* or American Rider is now a nineteen-year-old graduate of Kainai High School who has gained renown among his tribe and his peers for his writing and acting abilities. Much of his writing, in the form of poems, essays, and plays, focuses on the ambiguity of being young, Aboriginal, and living on a reserve. Yet, American



Rider is a relative newcomer to the Blood Reserve. He lived with his family in Lethbridge until his mother made the decision to move out to the Reserve the summer before his grade-nine year. That was the year he got his Blackfoot name.

Aamsskááphokítópii first showed his acting abilities at Kainai High School when he played the leading role in a play called *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* (Taylor, 1990). The play was a huge success, mostly because of the revisions and editing made to the script by the main actor. American Rider felt the play, written in an *Anishinaabe* setting, needed to more closely reflect the Blackfoot setting in which it was going to be performed. With the revisions, the play incorporated aspects of Blackfoot humour, culture, and language combined with modern music and choreographed dancing. Kainai High School's version of *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* was so successful that it actually went on tour to Aboriginal conferences and numerous reserves in Alberta and Montana.

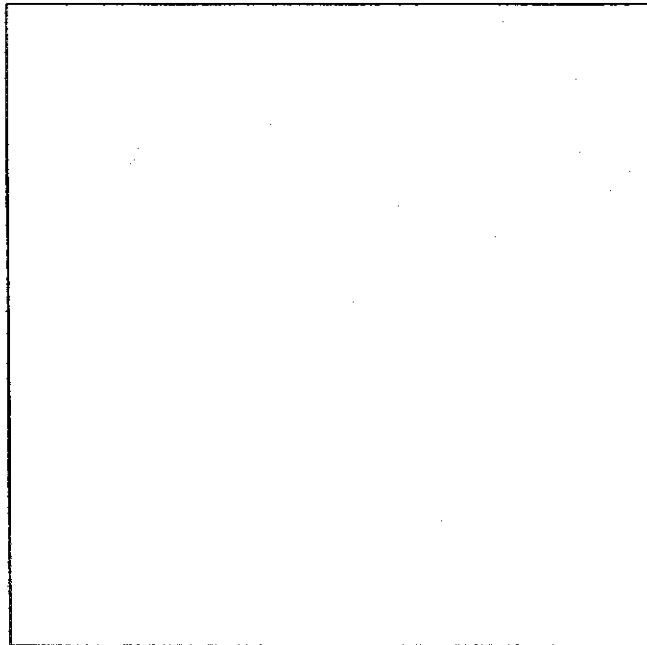
But something happened to Aamsskááphokítópii after his first years at Kainai High School. He seemed to lose his innocence, his motivation, his willingness to trust people, and his friendly nature. Instead, he became withdrawn, unhappy, hardened, and cynical. His writing reflected these changes. Increasingly, his poetry began to deal with themes related to the realities of life on the Blood Reserve—alcohol and drugs, welfare, racism, loss of identity, assimilation, and the angst and ambiguity of being a young Aboriginal person in the postmodern world. During his last year as a student at Kainai High School, Aamsskááphokítópii wrote a play called *The Good, The Bad and The Indians*. This play involves a debate and contest between Jesus Christ and Satan for control of the souls and destiny of the Indians. The plot twist occurs when Napii, the

Blackfoot trickster, arrives on the scene and challenges the supremacy of Satan.

Together, Napii and Jesus eliminate Satan.

*The Good, the Bad and the Indians* was controversial when it was performed because it deals with difficult themes in a seemingly deleterious way. Some claimed that it was anti-religious; others said it trivialized alcohol and drug abuse; still others felt that the play was reckless in the way in which it resurrected historical grievances involving racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes.

Through all of this, one thing has become clear. Aamsskááphkitópii was using his skills as a writer and his insight into life on the Blood Reserve to signify the frustration and confusion felt by him and those of his generation. His writing seems to be guided by the desire to let others know how it feels, as a young person, to become entangled in the dysfunctionalities of life on the Blood Reserve. It is also an expression of an understanding and appreciation of the world from the perspective of a young Aboriginal person that educators and others can learn from—even if they are offended by the language, content, and messages it brings with it.



I took this photo of myself in my classroom at Kainai High School. This setting has played an important role in my own personal and professional development since I started teaching at Kainai High School in 1993. My decision to accept a position teaching social studies at Kainai High School was motivated by my desire to teach in a community in which teachers were considered to be part of a larger reconceptualization or revisioning of education and curriculum. The opportunity to work with Blackfoot culture and the people of the Blood Reserve was exciting to me because I thought by developing curriculum and better teaching methods that I could contribute to the collective project of improving the quality of education offered on the Blood Reserve. I remember during that first year of teaching at Kainai High School, a student asked me to explain the reasons behind my decision to work at Kainai instead of some larger school in the city. Naïvely, I told her that my abilities as a teacher were needed by the students of the Reserve more than by the students of any city school. By mistake, I had adopted a sort of missionary

attitude towards my teaching at Kainai High School: I would teach, and the students would be better for it.

Ironically, I was the one who had the most to learn. I arrived at Kainai High School after spending most of my life in Edmonton. Even though I am Métis, and I believe that the Kainai Board of Education hired me because I am part Aboriginal, I was not at all familiar with Aboriginal culture or the complexities of life on a reserve. My exposure to Aboriginal issues was limited to the Anthropology and History courses that I had taken in university. I had never spent any significant time on any reserve. I had not even been to a pow wow.

Needless to say, I underwent culture shock the first few months that I taught at Kainai High School. Eventually, I realized that I needed to start asking for help from experienced colleagues and Blood Tribe members if I was going to last as a teacher there. So began my reeducation as a teacher. Students, elders, parents, and colleagues have all played a part in this process. This reeducation has helped me become aware of many things. One of the most intriguing, for me as a teacher, is a curriculum dialogue. This thesis is an attempt to articulate the ways and means by which I have been reeducated by the students and staff of Kainai High School, and the people of the Blood Reserve. A curriculum dialogue, the people and places involved, and what they might say or communicate is one of the more significant notions that I have become mindful of as a result of this reeducation.

Chapter Four  
Moving Through Paradigms: The Reeducation of a Teacher

*One day Iipisowaahs was watching the people from the sky when he saw two young girls off by themselves admiring him; "if that star were a handsome man I'd marry it." Iipisowaahs had overheard these girls talking about him, so he caught them alone and took that girl up to the sky with him. His father was the Sun and his mother was the Moon; they didn't know what had happened, but they found out that he had a wife. So they stayed together for a long time, but he always made a point—when they went out into the field to dig for turnip—he always had these old ladies take care of her watching her every move. And he told her, "There's a big turnip out there that I don't want you touching. There's no reason for you to know why you're not supposed to, I'm telling you don't do it." By that time, she had gotten over the grief of losing her family on earth. This one day, she was determined to find out why she wasn't supposed to pick that turnip. So, as usual, they all sat down for lunch. She finally told them, "I have to go out and take a leak." The old lady was going to go with her, but she said, "No, just finish your lunch and I'll be right back, don't worry about it." So, that one day she was able to get away by herself and she went straight for the turnip. She used a stick to pull it out and tugging at it, she fell and realized she had pulled that big turnip out. She saw this light coming from that hole and she looked down and saw her people. So then she started getting lonesome. She went back home. She had been crying a lot; Iipisowaahs realized that she must have done something that she shouldn't. It was a long time and she was growing even more sad. He finally thought, I'm gonna ask her. He took her aside when they got home and he said, "You pulled out that turnip, didn't you?" And he said, "Now you know*

*why I told you not to look down there, told you not to pull it out." So she just won't get over it, and eventually he went to his mother and father, the Sun and the Moon. You know, this is what happened. Then his father, the Sun, said, "Well, I didn't like the idea of you taking that girl was wrong. As any young girl will do, she was just saying silly things, but you took her literally. Now you took her up here and now she's sad she has to go through all this. Let her go, just let her go. First of all, she's been good to us and I want to be kind to her. I care for her and I think we should help her people because everybody is suffering." So, they gave her a bundle they called it naatoas 'paakiiookaa. That's the lady sponsor of the Sundance. They gave her all the societies, ceremonies, the sweats, all the instructions. They sent them back with her. She came down and performed all the things that she was supposed to do and continues to do to this day.*

*Dwayne Mistaken Chief*

The spot that the young girl descended to is the Belly Buttes. I find myself returning to this spot physically and spiritually often. I drive by the Belly Buttes every day on my way to and from Kainai High School. I admire the beauty and prominence of the unique folds of the Buttes that tower above the prairie landscape. Lately, following the suggestion of one of the runners at Kainai High School, I have begun taking some members of the cross-country running team to the Buttes for workouts once a week. It is a sacred place, and I am envious of the Kainai people for having the privilege of calling such a place a part of their own history and memories.

One of the more important lessons that I have learned through listening to the elders of the Blood Tribe is that all people have a cultural and spiritual base from which they interact with the world and others in it. People have similarities and can share their

lives in positive ways, but we all have roots in a heritage that needs to be respected and observed because it was a gift from the Creator. At times, an attempt to occupy another space is to be out of place. Much of my writing and research has been inspired by my desire to articulate my place. The Kainai people have given me many gifts and treated me with much kindness, but I need to attempt to locate a personal identity based on my family history, land, stories, and remembrances. I do not want to be a “wannabe” Indian. I need to find my space. My mixed heritage—a métissage of sorts—makes this a very difficult task.

A significant part of this difficulty stems from the desire to define identity in the first place. Michel Foucault has questioned “the value often placed upon identity, because of its affiliations with mechanisms of power and knowledge” (Pignatelli, 1993, p. 417). I am aware that my desire to investigate and define my self-identity is motivated by an either/or sort of mind set which causes me to continue to view the world in categories. For the most part, this approach to knowledge and people is based in the Western or European interpretation and organization of information that has dominated thinking for several centuries. A consideration and examination of the social, cultural, and intellectual legacy of imperialism offers significant insight on this topic. Briefly, for the purposes of my search I suggest that there are three issues to consider. First of all, I think it is important to ponder the extent to which the European world was thrown into a state of confusion and upheaval when unknown lands and unrecognizable people were located and documented in various ways. Second, this new and bountiful knowledge challenged previous European notions and understandings of the world be they geography, human life, race, culture, animal and plant life, or values. Third, the drive to intellectually

colonize the world and fit this new knowledge into a European paradigm was at least as strong, and intimately connected, to the economic and political motives more commonly analyzed when studying the topics of colonialism and imperialism (Willinsky, 1998, p. 23).

This cultural and intellectual imperialism manifested itself in the European “will to know” the world through collecting, cataloguing, classifying, and exhibiting vast amounts of information about the new world (Foucault, 1981, p. 55). As Michel Foucault has observed, the European project became the task of establishing order to the world through scientific analysis and display; thus, the “center of knowledge” became the scientific table (Willinsky, 1998, p. 27). The museum, the exhibit, the zoo, and the encyclopedia can all be seen as by-products of this way of organizing, displaying and disseminating knowledge and information. This desire and zeal to collect and put the world on display was a type of “exhibitionary pedagogy” in which the accomplishments, ascendancy, and natural superiority of Europeans were the main message (Willinsky, 1998, p. 85).

The belief that the world can be known in this way has had direct implications on the processes and purposes of education to this day. Knowledge has been considered as something to memorize or catalogue, as something definable and located in a text, rather than as constantly changing and subject to real life circumstances and experiences of individuals. Edward Said has commented that this attitude towards knowledge had led us to believe “that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes” (1978, p. 93). These attitudes and assumptions of the huge



educational effort tied so closely to the interests of Western imperialism and European nation building can be summarized by considering the words of a journalist from 1852:

No better test can be applied to determine the degree of refinement, intelligence, and education of a people than the avidity displayed by them for places of instructional amusement, where not only are shows to be seen, but ideas *acquired*, and whence visitors retire, not only more happy than they entered, but more *knowing*. (Altick, quoted in Willinsky, 1998, p. 85, emphasis added)

This process of acquiring knowledge required training to see the world in Cartesian dualisms based largely upon identifying what is similar and what is different. Foucault asserted that knowledge had originally been found in what was similar, but with the influences of the thought of Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes, knowledge was arrived at through the comparison of two or more items and identifying their differences (Willinsky, 1998, p. 27). We can only speculate on the role that imperialism played in this intellectual change in attitude. This mindset of resemblance and difference, however, enabled the Europeans to make sense of the new information coming to them as a result of this imperial process by clarifying their own identity through emphasizing the difference and distance between Europeans and 'others' (Said, 1978, p. 55).

This knowledge, based on difference, was an integral part of imperialism in that it was based on power. The power to collect, catalogue, exhibit, and textualize meant that the knowledge or information that had been collected from around the world would be evaluated and considered in European terms and assimilated to suit European social, cultural, or educational needs. This was essentially a monologue on the riches of the world and their usefulness to Europeans. Education became a monologue in the same

way—reading, reciting and memorizing what had been collected as a way of accessing this bank of privileged and preponderant knowledge. There was no need to consider the ‘other’ conversation that was part of this dialogue of imperialism, because the colonized had nothing to say that was of educational value. The educational task became one of knowing what was known about the world, in a European sense. As Edward Said has observed, these attitudes resulted in a situation in which the “will to know” found its expression as “power using knowledge to advance itself” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 51).

Cartesian binary logic lead Europeans to believe that all aspects of the world are measurable, definable, and linear. This approach to knowledge has also been the basis of Eurocentric education systems, as they were offered to a mass audience, and I know that my own thinking has been influenced by my public school experience. I am also aware that my self-image has been heavily influenced by the fact that I have never been considered wholly “white” or wholly “Indian.” I am an in-between person and I have a desire to end the feeling of ambiguity that hits me every time I am asked, “Where are you from?” by people trying to categorize me for themselves. Ending this in-betweenness through defining myself once and for all was once my primary goal.

The peril involved with this approach to inquiries about identity is that it is largely motivated by the desire to invent oneself in a context constructed and managed by external forces. In this sense, this process describes conformity, and through it I am submitting to the continued domination and repression of my own story. Foucault suggests that a more intense, imaginative, and transformative investigation of the self would involve an ongoing praxis of self-discovery during which “an ‘inner’ critical engagement of self-constituting practices as well as an ‘outer’ questioning of the

conditions within which the self is constituted” takes place (Pignatelli, 1993, pp. 418-419). This shifts the focus from being asked by others who I am to asking myself “What am I and why am I that way?”

In all likelihood one is in the past while in the present. The present is then veiled; the past is manifest and apparent, however, so transparently present that it is veiled, and one assumes oneself to be in the present when one is not. To ascertain where one is, when one is, one must locate the past. (Pinar, 1975b, p. 22)

I started out my life washing dishes. At least that is my earliest memory. We—my three older brothers, my parents, and our family dog—lived in a three-bedroom home on the south side of Edmonton in those days. As the baby of the family by over three years, I always felt strangely different from my brothers in the interests and feelings I hold towards life, other people, and identity. I think that the reason for this has something to do with my appearance. I am darker than they are. My skin is much darker, so is my hair and so are my eyes. In fact, I am so much darker than they are that my brothers used to hold their girlfriends spellbound with stories of my former life in Bangladesh and how I came to be adopted by the family.

I still find this story funny in some ways, but it is also very revealing. When your own family notices and comments on your physical appearance, it tends to have an impact on your self-image. I don't think that I have been scarred by my brothers and their trickstering in any way. But I do believe that it is part of what has caused me to feel and act differently from them. Take the dishes as an example. I can remember waking up early on weekend mornings well before anyone else in the house even thought about getting out of bed. Many children would have preferred to have watched television or

played with toys. I washed dishes. My routine was always the same: Don't turn the light on because it might wake someone, be extremely quiet, clean the gunk from the drain thoroughly, apply dish soap, and then slowly begin filling the sink with water that is so hot that you can barely put your hands in it. First cutlery was washed, next glasses, and finally plates and pots. I don't know if I did a very good job of it. I do know that I washed the dishes because I wanted to help my mother.

Mom was tired, from the effort required to attend to the needs and demands of four growing boys, and she looked it, too. Tired and probably feeling the stress of being alone with her boys most of the time. My dad is a truck driver, and back then he drove the Alaska Highway and was away from home for weeks on end. My mother was left to take care of us and all the other family-related business by herself. We never suffered as children, but I know she did as a mother and wife. Many people found it scandalous and sad that a pretty young woman from a successful, white, church-going family would marry an Indian. Several times during my childhood, my mother received anonymous phone calls from people who told her that she and her dirty, rotten Indian brats were not welcome in the neighborhood. Many said nothing good would ever come of her marriage to my dad, and there were predictions that all four of their boys would end in jail—especially with their father absent most of the time.

I think that Mom was proud of the physical appearance of her boys, especially me. Not that she loved me any more than the others, but I do believe that she saw her children as symbols of her success in raising us, in spite of all of the negative attitudes. My mother and I were drawn closer together because I was the youngest and perhaps the one most vulnerable to some bad experiences because I looked the most like dad. She

babied me, spent free time with me, cuddled me, read to me, and protected me from my older brothers. My mother was able to devote so much more time to me than to my brothers because they were all in school by the time I was three-years old. Part of the way that I returned those feelings of affection to my mother was through washing the dishes. It was the least that I could do.

Although I enjoyed the time alone with my Mom, I also longed to be like my older brothers. When they were away at school during the day, I would sneak into their bedrooms and look at their things. Hockey equipment, baseball gloves, toys and games, Halloween candy, and comic books were all free for me to investigate and sample. My brothers have always been my role models. I watched the things that they did closely so that I could imitate them later, with the hope that I would receive their approval. I spent many hours of my early life playing goal during street hockey games or acting as a football tackling dummy just so that I could play with them. I desperately wanted to be "one of the boys" and my brothers knew this and exploited it. Chores, supervised and timed by one of my brothers, were often completed in record time by me. Still, I missed them while they were away at school and looked forward to the time when they would all be home again.

I missed my dad too. Dad is a large, broad shouldered, and powerful looking man with impressive hands made strong from years of hard farm labour. When he shakes hands, his envelops most others. For me, these hands tell the story of my dad's life, a story he is reluctant to share in words. It is a story of hard work, loneliness, anger, and determination. He has been unwillingly to share the details of this story because of his inability to deal with the emotions that are attached to his memories of those days. Yet, as

children, my brothers and I became subtly aware of the highlights of dad's life story through the bits of conversation and occasional intoxicated ramblings that we overheard. As a child, I somehow knew that my dad had experienced hardship in his life, and I admired him for his bravery and courage. Because of his size, loud voice, and quick temper many people assumed that he was an overly aggressive and angry person. Yet, dad has always been extremely gentle, especially around children, and those large hands of his have cuddled and coddled many babies from many families. So, as children we did not fear our dad. Rather, my brothers and I had tremendous respect for him and his dedication, honesty, integrity, and sense of responsibility to his job and his family. If he told you that he was going to do something, he always did it.

One thing that my dad always did was bring chocolate bars home with him after being on the road for several weeks. They were usually the kind with nuts or coconut in them. Not that it mattered; the important thing was that he came home. We had an old brown polyester couch with light brown feet that sat against the wall in our living room. It was my favorite place to sit, mostly because the dog always sat there. She, like me, was waiting for dad to come home and chose the couch because it was directly opposite the front door. Sunlight would often shine directly through the window in the front door, especially in the winter months when the sun was low in the sky, and Peanut and I would warm ourselves in it while we waited patiently on the couch for the door to open. She was very tolerant with children, and I would often lay my head on her back as we waited. I would sniff the scent from the pads of her paws and feel the texture of her nose made dry from sitting in the sunlight. Often, I would gently bite her ears, growling the whole

time and hoping to get a reaction out of her. She just sat, patiently, waiting. She knew dad would be home soon.

Finally, dad would walk in the door. He had his work clothes on and wore cowboy boots on his feet. With him he carried a suitcase and his shaving kit. I remember my dad always being very neat and tidy. Even while at work, he wore clean clothes, shined boots, and kept his hair neatly combed and face clean-shaven. I was always glad when he came home because our family seemed to regroup around him. He kept the older boys in line and made sure that we all continued to help Mom around the house.

But, he also brought the chocolate bars. After greeting dad at the door, I would grab his suitcase from his hand and rustle through it as fast as I could. He always hid the chocolate bars in the suitcase somewhere, and part of our greeting ritual involved me frantically searching for them. Once I found mine and the three for my brothers, I would help him take off his boots while asking him questions about where he had been. This special time with my dad would sustain me until the next time he would come home from a long trip. I know that it sustained him too.

My dad was not raised by his parents. Madelaine Ward was seventy-years old when he was bundled up in his baby clothes and placed into her strong, well-worn, yet gentle and welcoming hands. She was born Madelaine Charland in 1867 near Lac La Biche, Alberta, not far from the settlement that the Cree call *amiskwacisakahikan*. Madelaine was born at the beginning of a very tumultuous and painful period in the history of the Métis people in Canada. In the 1860s the provinces known today as Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta were considered undeveloped and wild by European settlers and Canadian government officials. These Northwest Territories, as this

land was then called, were free of fences, houses, and towns. Land to be settled and tamed! The only trouble with this plan was that the Indian and Métis people lived and prospered in these areas. The Indians would have treaties, but what about the Métis? For various reasons, the Métis people were viewed as squatters and illegal occupiers of land that they did not own, even though they had been living on the land for several generations. The disagreement over land ownership and title between the Canadian government and the Métis people escalated into serious confrontation twice—in 1870 and 1885. Both times the Métis people fled west en masse to avoid further conflicts and to establish new settlements of their own far away from European settlers and Canadian government officials.

Madelaine Charland's parents seem to have been part of this move west by the Métis people. Her father, Louis Charland, was born in the Winnipeg area and made a living for his family by hauling freight from trading post to trading post throughout the Northwest Territories. Unfortunately, Madelaine's mother died while her children were still quite young. As a result, her father decided that he could not possibly raise all of his children on his own and he took his two daughters to a convent in St. Albert, Alberta. One of these daughters was Madelaine. She was my dad's grandmother.

In her eighties, when my dad knew her best, Madelaine Ward bore the characteristics of a Métis woman who had been raised in a convent. She worked hard around her yard and kept an extensive and very productive garden growing in the spring and summer. She had learned these skills from the nuns after they had decided that she was more suited for manual work than formal schooling. Apparently, her sister Emerance had been deemed more intelligent by the nuns, and she was taught to read and write.



Despite being illiterate, Madelaine still considered her prayer book among her most valuable possessions. The prayer book she had was printed in the Cree language using the Cree syllabic alphabet perfected by a Methodist missionary named James Evans in 1840, and would have undoubtedly come from the St. Albert mission where she and Emerance received their education (Chalmers, 1972, pp. 89-91). As well, Madelaine always wore black clothing in the Roman Catholic tradition of a widow mourning the death of her husband.

Although she was officially educated at the St. Albert mission, it was the skills that Madelaine had learned as a young Métis woman growing up in the wilderness with her family that enabled her to support her family in the years after her husband died. She was an excellent hunter and trapper. She was skilled at tanning hides and doing different varieties of beadwork. The moccasins she usually wore on her feet were made with her own hands. Madelaine knew of many herbal medicines and was often present when someone in the community was expecting a new baby. These characteristics, as well as her long braided hair and Michif language (Bakker, 1997), paint a picture in my mind of a woman who truly lived in-between two worlds. Out of necessity, she had carved a life for herself and her family which made use of the knowledge and skills she had acquired from two different settings, two different backgrounds: one Cree, the other European. It was a uniquely Métis existence.

My dad tells me that he never really considered himself different from other kids when he was growing up. There was little or no talk of cultural identity or the Métis people. People just lived their lives. But, as I look at a photograph of my dad standing behind his grandma, I see two people linked together in their struggle—a struggle to be. In

the photograph, my dad and his grandma look like people who have endured hardship in their lives. She stands with her hand on her hip in a measure of self assuredness and dignity commonly exuded by elderly people who have worked hard throughout their lives. Yet, her facial expression and her eyes express uncertainty, a look of suspicion at the photographer similar to those you can find in portrait books that show 19<sup>th</sup> century Indians posing in semi-traditional garb. Like them, she seems to have reluctantly agreed to pose for the photo, and she appears uncomfortable with the whole idea. Behind her stands my dad as a young man, maybe fourteen years old at the time. They share the same facial features—a prominent nose (hers a bit more hooked), a large brow ridge, and piercing eyes. But my dad stands in youthful contrast to the woman who raised him. His facial expression, the biting of the lower lip, betrays the feelings of a nervous young man who is unsure how to behave. His strong and mature shoulders contrast sharply with his youthful expression. This is a young man still dependent upon and obedient to his aged grandma.

One morning, when my dad was about sixteen years old, he awoke alone in the cabin that he had always shared with his grandma. She had been moved by the local doctor to the hospital in a nearby town because he had been unable to treat her illness properly. When she left, my dad knew that his grandma would never be back. With her went his only reason for staying in the cabin beside Hastings Lake. I can picture my dad getting out of bed that first morning alone and walking over to the tiny, opaque mirror that hung on the wall above the washbasin. As he washes his face, he stands up straight and catches a glimpse of himself in the reflection of that imperfect mirror. His eyes look hard into his own eyes. What was he going to do? Where was he going to go? As he went

through his things that day and began to pack his bag, he must have had a hard time deciding what to take with him and what to leave behind. As he surveyed the cabin he would have cast his eyes on the rocking chair that his grandma had sat in all those years they were together. In the evening, she would sit beside the stove in that chair, drink tea, and sew. Or, if friends or relatives came to visit, she would sit in the chair and remember the old days with her guests as they took turns telling their stories. The sound of the chair creaking as it rocked, coupled with the soft, whispering sounds of people speaking Cree and michif, is a memory that must have revisited my dad that day. Next, his eyes would have noticed the Bible laying on the table beside his grandma's bed. She had held it in her lap every day, unable to read the symbols typed on the pages, but understanding deeply the message of the book and its meaning to her. Or, maybe he stared awhile at the buckskin jacket that his grandma had made for him. As it hung on the hook beside the door he would have remembered how long it had taken her to create the colorful floral designs with beads sewn on the back and shoulders of it. What would he take with him? What would he leave behind? In the end, he took nothing with him except the bare essentials he could carry in his small bag. With that bag over his shoulder, he walked out of the cabin, hesitated, then closed the door and walked off towards the train station. Catching the train to Edmonton was the only option he felt he had.

Out of necessity, he had decided to try to live with his parents and siblings in their home on the north side of the city. He soon realized, however, that this living arrangement was not going to work for him. Alcohol was a dominant characteristic of his parents' home in those days. If there was not a party going on when my dad got home from work, at the very least there were a few drunks stumbling around the house. Music

was frequently blaring and fights were common. The rest of the time, the family was usually on edge, arguing and full of mistrust for one another. My dad was not prepared for life in such an environment and, as a result, he became angry and violent himself. The move to the city had brought my dad face to face with racism on a daily basis, and he did not know how to respond. For the first time in his life, he was being singled out as different from everyone else because of the way he looked. All the ugly stereotypes of Indian people in those days were placed on him with a vehemence that shocked him. To be categorized as just another urban Indian was unsettling for my dad because, despite looking like an Indian, he knew that he had been raised differently. He knew a better way of life. So, he was unprepared for such ill treatment. When people called him a "dirty Indian," "lazy drunk," "savage," or "wagon burner," his first response was to fight. The trouble with this was that he was a very good fighter and spent many of his weekend hours settling scores with young White men who had dared to insult him. The more he did this, the angrier he became, the worse the beatings were, and the more he drank. He realized that this destructive cycle needed to come to an end soon or else he would end up living a life that he never imagined for himself. Like his family, he would be living a life on the margins of society.

I think that my dad realized that he was becoming the kind of person—the stereotypical Indian—that all those people were telling him he was. It was at this point in his life that he made a decision that has had a profound impact on my identity and who I am today. My dad has never spoken about this critical point in his life. His memories must be too painful and lonely for him to recall in any detail. But, I know that he felt that he had two paths that he could follow. One choice was to continue to try to live with his

family, maintain his relationship with them and accept all of the drinking and fighting as part of the life of Indians in the city. He could not imagine that this route would have any benefits for him. He felt so different from his family. The other choice was separate himself from his family and their lives. This would mean living on his own, facing his problems alone, and striving to achieve a measure of success and independence that would make him self-sufficient and proud of who he was. That was the problem: how to be proud of himself and confident of his abilities when so many seemed to think that he was worthless.

#### Curtains

Drawn back and forth across a sketchy, sketching mind can

Discombobulate

The sense of self-sense

Yet we must peek at

That sweaty, wrinkled, lustered brownness

They were disappointed by our disappointment

But we must witness it

To see what we shouldn't be.

One night, when my Mom was pregnant with my oldest brother, my parents decided to go out for dinner with friends to a restaurant on the south side of Edmonton. It was the winter of 1960, and my Mom was one month away from giving birth to her first son. There was a good amount of snow on the ground, and it was quite cold that evening. It was so cold that my dad was concerned that his car would not start again if he shut off the engine. He decided to drop my Mom off at the front entrance to the restaurant first, and then he would find a place to park and figure out a way to keep the car running before heading inside to join the others. When my dad parked the car, he opened the door, got out, kneeled down right beside the car, and began to experiment with the gas

pedal by placing a piece of wood against it. Finally, when he was satisfied that the pressure of the pedal would keep the car running, he decided that it was safe for him to leave the car and make his way into the restaurant. It was at this moment that my dad felt a presence behind him. Without warning, six men converged on him and proceeded to punch and kick him without mercy until they were satisfied that they had taught him, the "dirty Indian," a lesson. They tried to make him crawl like someone who is begging for mercy, a supplicant. He wouldn't.

This experience and others like it, as well as my dad's experiences with his own family, caused him to draw a curtain across his past life that he hoped would hide the bitterness and pain of these memories from his four sons. He did not want us to be exposed to any of it. My brothers and I were not told any of these stories until we were grown men. As children, we did not see our relatives, my dad's family, more than once or twice a year even though we lived in the same city as they did. I can remember piling in the car, usually around Christmas, to make the trip across town to visit with our cousins, aunts, and my dad's parents. The adults were usually all drunk by the time we arrived, and my brothers and I had to endure long hugs, wet kisses, and tearful greetings from people we barely knew. The visit would almost always end with an argument between my Dad and one of his sisters. This usually started when someone would accuse my Dad of thinking that he was better than the rest of his relatives because he hardly ever brought his family to visit with them. My brothers and I always complained about having to go there, but my dad never tried to reprimand us for being rude or talking about people so negatively like he usually did. It was like he understood how we felt about being with that side of the family.

The affect these attitudes and experiences had on me is that I grew up knowing that I was part Aboriginal, but I did not understand how I should feel about that or what it could mean. My dad never really encouraged those kinds of questions and we, as a family, rarely spoke about these kinds of issues. My dad seems to have had the fear that his sons would suffer the same types of mistreatment as he because of the way that they looked. So the curtain, the forgetting of the past, the denial of any Aboriginal characteristics, even the way he dressed and performed at his job, were all attempts to normalize himself and his family so that we could all fade into society and avoid being singled out or discriminated against for any reason. Of course, the irony of this is that Aboriginal people are now very popular all over the world, and their way of life, values, and especially their spirituality have become legitimate and vibrant topics of conversation in many different social circles around the world. Suddenly, it is hip to be an Indian. How should we expect an aging man to react to this situation when he has spent his whole adult life creating a lifestyle built around the idea that he did not want himself or his sons to be considered and treated as Indians? He doesn't get it.

I remember my maternal grandmother, who was Scottish and German, talking to me about my future when I was in my early teens. We were in the back seat of my parents' car during a long road trip. One of the things she told me that day was that it was important for my brothers and me to be successful in our lives because we were Aboriginal. And she left it at that. Then, I caught my dad peeking at us in the rear view mirror. He quickly looked away. I was confused by all of the concern being leveled at me because it seemed that everyone but me understood what the concern was. I did not feel like an Aboriginal person at all when I was growing up, although my brothers and I did

have a vague sort of pride and solidarity with each other because of the way we looked. The rare times that someone at the playground or on the hockey rink insulted one of us because of our Aboriginal looks or background, we all took it as a personal challenge to our family. Fights almost always broke out. It was like we were defending our dad.

Still, those were isolated incidences. Most of the time I felt like everyone else in my school, on my team, or at the playground. I did not feel unique or unusual because of my looks or family background. As I got older, however, my perceptions of my appearance and my identity became disoriented. I was shaken out of my blissfully naïve state of mind by several events that occurred during my high school and university years. The first incident took place during my first year of high school. The school counselor introduced me to a Cree student from a reserve in northern Alberta who had just moved into the city. Privately, she asked me to look out for him and try to make him feel comfortable in the school. I was speechless. Why had she approached me? What made her think that he and I would have anything in common? In the end, I did nothing to help the new student, except to say hello when we passed in the hallway. I didn't know what else to say. The second incident took place a year later when a friend and I were planning our Halloween costumes for a big party. He suggested that we go as Lone Ranger and Tonto. I agreed, thinking it would be funny. But, when I applied my 'war paint' the night of the party, it clearly felt like I was doing something wrong. The third was a series of situations in which I was repeatedly mistaken for someone of another ethnic origin while I was attending university. On campus, people would occasionally approach me and speak to me in a variety of languages such as Italian, Arabic, Punjabi, Spanish, and others. All of these people had apparently judged me to be from their own ethnic group



based solely on my physical appearance. When I informed them that I didn't speak their language and that I was actually Métis, the response was invariably one of surprise. "You don't look like one," they would say.

Apparently, I was not conforming to peoples' expectation of who they thought I was. My Aboriginal blood had become more of an issue in my life than I thought it ever could or would. I struggled to derive some sort of meaning from it all. Then, as if by some grand design, an opportunity arose. By chance, I came across a job offer to teach on the Blood Reserve. I accepted a teaching position at Kainai High School without really considering the impact that the experience of teaching on a reserve would have on my awareness of my identity as a Métis person. Instead, I focused more on the potential it offered for a unique teaching experience, something outside of the city, and more in the realm of viewing education as an agent of community development rather than a government department. The position at Kainai High School was attractive to me because the school board was prepared to let me teach the subjects I wanted and gave me the freedom to develop curriculum in ways I saw fit. The community was steeped in traditional culture and history, and there was a promising sense of optimism associated with being involved in the project to establish a viable version of Aboriginal education on the Blood Reserve. This appeared to be exactly what I had been looking for.

Appearances, as we have all experienced, can be deceiving. Kainai High School mirrors the social problems on the Blood Reserve in very real, sad, and frustrating ways. I began questioning my decision to accept a teaching position at Kainai because so many things were happening that I did not understand and had little control over. Why were most of my students such poor attenders? Why were most of them late for class when

they did attend? Why were so many unable to read, write, or sit in a desk for an extended period of time? Why were so many failing so miserably, despite the fact that I agonized over every lesson that I delivered? Why was the administration so disorganized and lackadaisical about issues that seemed of primary importance to me? How could any teacher survive at Kainai more than a couple of years? In retrospect, I chalk these doubts up to the natural reaction of a beginning teacher undergoing culture shock. I did not understand the community that I was working in, and the norms of education that I was accustomed to in Canada did not really apply. Vividly, I remember being physically threatened by a rather large, angry male student. I was the cause of his anger because I had requested that the administration revoke his high-school rodeo privileges because he was always late for class. This incident was a turning point for me because I realized that I needed to sit back and observe things for a while. I had been making decisions as a teacher based on my previous experiences as a student teacher in Calgary public schools, and I realized that the assumptions I had made regarding school culture needed to be reevaluated. I wondered if there was anything in my previous experience that would help me make sense of Kainai High School.

These experiences taught me many things. Most important, they caused me to question the structure and organization of schools, and my own personal approaches to teaching and the students. Mistakenly, and perhaps reflecting my own education, I had focused my attention on course content and neglected to honour the experiences and feelings of the students I taught. I saw my role as teacher of Aboriginal students mainly from the perspective of curriculum development, and my goals have been to try to help facilitate the process by which Aboriginal history, Blackfoot language, and Blackfoot

culture can become legitimate parts of the high school social studies courses being taught at Kainai High School. Critically evaluating this process now, I realize that my efforts have been misguided and largely failed. In the past, I have accepted the mandated curriculum and recommended course textbooks and materials as necessary evils and have worked from that constrained base. The problem with that approach is that I have chosen to work within the government's definition of education and its purposes. These are Eurocentric and based on a long history of educational developments in Europe and North America. There is little, if any, recognition of Aboriginal history and culture that expresses the points of view of Aboriginal people. Much of the social studies curriculum in the elementary grades portrays Aboriginal people anthropologically, as though the ancient cultures are extinct and that the people are artifacts from the past. It could be argued that Aboriginal children exposed to this course material are made to feel that they should have been born a few centuries earlier.

The other problem with focusing on course content and curriculum development is that usually the developed course material is still delivered using the same or similar methods as before. In other words, the tendency is to teach Aboriginal history and culture using the same approaches that were used when teaching European or Canadian history and culture. The inappropriateness of this approach became strikingly clear to me every time I used it. The expectation was that the students would sit up straight and get excited whenever they were given the opportunity to study their own people. However, they seemed more concerned with the associated tasks that they would have to eventually perform. There was no joy in having the chance to study Aboriginal history and culture

because it was interpreted as just another way to 'make' them do work. I was left wondering what Aboriginal education was really supposed to be.

Reflecting and evaluating in this way led me to see some harsh realities. Sure, you can throw in a little history and culture, teach the language, have a pow wow once in a while, and call the team the Warriors, but the real business of school is done in English and according to a Eurocentric model. For Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, this Eurocentric system is oppressive because it puts Aboriginal people at the mercy of the government and the teachers and administrators of the schools. In many cases, the school environment or culture is so different from the home environment of many Aboriginal students that they feel out of place or "foreign," even in schools administered by their own people. As Freire (1970) argues, the banking system of education, so dominant in our way of thinking as teachers, creates a situation in which the teacher controls information, student success or failure, and even dictates the ways in which information will be analyzed, interpreted, or evaluated. The teacher, as an agent of the government, also delivers the curriculum thereby acting as a disseminator of untruths, half truths, and aspects of 'hidden messages' contained in those hallowed documents written by the controllers of the curriculum agenda.

By focusing on content and limiting classroom activities and learning strategies to lectures, note taking, reading, and answering questions, as well as limited discussion and group work sessions, I was contributing to the continued inadequacy of the Aboriginal school experience. But, with my own experiences growing up in Edmonton and my limited exposure to life on the Blood Reserve, I felt ill prepared to begin a reconsideration of the characteristics of Kainai High School. I knew that if I was to

become an active participant in the reconceptualization of Aboriginal education as it exists on the Blood Reserve, I needed to be reeducated first. What was the Kainai understanding of education and its purposes? I decided to start my reeducation by looking at memories from the survivors of the residential school experience. This would help me clarify the reasons that many Aboriginal people still view education, as it is currently defined and practiced, as inappropriate for them, and to help me understand what Aboriginal education should not be. For this, I decided to look to people like Narcisse Blood, a former member of Blood Tribe Chief and Council and an instructor at Red Crow Community College, for guidance:

*As a student, to be, one of my books I had in Grade Four was called My European Heritage. It had no relevance to who I was.*

*We had very upper middle class expectations of Christmas. We'd be there and we'd go through Dick and Jane stories and all that. You come back home and it's totally different. Mr. Cody, my Grade Four teacher, was telling us about, I think it was Champlain or one of those explorers. I'm pretty sure it was Champlain, it was in one of the books that we had. Champlain was getting annoyed that the Indians were not behaving, they weren't listening to him. So, apparently he was a good—he knew a lot about the stars—astronomer. So he told the Indians, according to the story or to the teacher, "If you don't behave, I'm going to take your Moon away from you." They didn't believe he had the power to. The story goes that, of course, there was a total eclipse of the Moon and the Indians were really sorry to him and they apologized. The teacher looks at us and says, "Don't worry, it wasn't your fault, you guys didn't know any*

*better." I mean, this is a Grade Four student being told these things. So, you can see how messed up the mind can be, the identity, all those things that go with it.*

As Narcisse's story shows, the process of residential school education was an attempt to colonize the minds of Aboriginal people. Their stories, their culture, their ways—categorized as primitive and uncivilized—were to be replaced by European notions and values in paternalistic fashion with damaging results. An example as told by Dwayne Mistaken Chief, a man committed to the reclaiming of Kainai cultural memories and language:

*There is a good story about - - I heard this lady - - it is a very - - it shook me up because I didn't realize that it was something that would have that much of an effect on a person. See, this child was raised - - she is an older lady now. I don't know if she is sixty-five or that, I don't think she is sixty-five, but she is around sixty or so. But she said that she was raised by her grandparents. And while she was with them, the old lady made a doll for her, and she told her, "Okay, this is your child. That is for you to take care of. You take care of it just as if it were a real child. That's your baby. You get up, whatever you have to do for the baby, you make sure. You have to clean it up, make sure it's safe. So you make sure it's safe, and you even go to the extent that when you go for a blessing, you get your face painted and that, you take your doll with you so that doll can have its face painted as well. So you just treat it like a real baby."*

*Along with that, she was taught other skills, like how to sew, how to take care of berries, so she was always hanging around picking berries. And at that time she was given a Buffalo Stone. And the old man told her - - I think it was the old man, it was either grandparent that had given her that stone that told her, "Okay, here is the stone."*

*inisskimm, they call them "Buffalo Stones." And he said, "You hang on to this. That will remind you of your being Indian, so you will never forget. So just hang on to that." There are other purposes for the inisskimm, but at that point that is what they told her. "You will never forget you are Indian as long as you hold on to this stone." And even that stone was all painted. So everything was well taken care of. There was a lot of discipline involved. There was a lot of little life blessings.*

*And then finally, I don't know if it was the Indian agents, but a representative of the boarding school said to the old people, "You know, the time has come for your daughter to go to school." It was actually the granddaughter, but they referred to her as their daughter. "She needs to go to school; she is of age now. We need to take her back to the school." But then the old people said - - well, they discussed it, and they said, "Well, this child is too young. At least give us one more year with her, and then we will let her go." So they agreed to that. They made the arrangement, and they continued with all the teachings. She still had her doll; she still had the stone.*

*And then the following year came, and then they came back for her. They sadly let her go - - I mean, let her go. And then once she got back to the school - - I can't remember if it was here or - - I am not sure if it was here or Saint Paul's. That's when the nuns and priests were running it. She came here. She had her little suitcase. You know, when they packed it, they made sure they put the rock in there and the doll. "And again, there is your reminder. You make sure you take care of these. Take good care of your baby. Your rock will also remind you that you are an Indian."*

*They got here, and then the nuns opened up all her belongings, they opened up the suitcase. They got rid of all the stuff they didn't want her to have any contact with. At*

*that point that lady, as she was telling the story, she got to that point and she said, "My baby." And then she just broke down and she started crying as if it was happening again. She just broke down and started crying and said, "My baby." That was the very first thing they threw away. She said, "To this day I have never seen my baby again." To her that wasn't a doll. It was a baby. And then she said, "And my Buffalo Stone, they threw it away too." After all these years, I don't know how many years, over 50 years, and to this day she's still affected in that way.*

The little girl who lost her doll and buffalo stone is now a grandmother. What kind of education does she want for her grandchildren? What kind of teacher does she want them to have? My guess is that she wants them to be in a place, a school, where the doll and the buffalo stone can be reclaimed and respected. This would mean a comprehensive education that recognizes the value of the Blood way of life or Kainayssini. To accomplish this requires an escape from European definitions of education, and a movement towards Blackfoot paradigms or ways of knowing.

The Blood way of life or Kainayssini is a good place to start this reeducation, this paradigm shift because Kainayssini represents the overriding ideology of traditional Kainai society. It seems, however, that the task of arriving at an all-encompassing definition or representation of the word Kainayssini, especially in English, is difficult because it can mean so many things to so many different people. Loosely defined, it can be an explanation of who the Blood people were and are, their religion, the language, the Sundance, the pride—really, all those things that make the Blood people unique as a people. Dwayne Mistaken Chief explains:



*Kainayssini is about all the things that we've lived. Things like Aatsi'moysikhan (sacred way speaking). We're familiar with this territory. We know Chief Mountain. Those are parts of us just as the religion is part of the land. It's not something that comes from somewhere else, everything emanates from the place you're at. And then it includes all the values like Kimmapiitsin (kindness). All the different things that you can mention about what we are as a people. All those things are Kainayssini.*

*Our society is in a constant state of flux, you can never nail it down, it changes: it's always changing. And all those core values that we have, that's what Kainayssini is about. Including the land, our ceremonies.*

So to understand the Blood way of life or Kainayssini we must recall all of those cultural practices and beliefs, and the values that helped form that particular view of the world. Kainayssini, then, is the foundation from which all other experiences with the Kainai people must be conceptualized. This foundation is broad and has far reaching implications and applications. Let's take, for example, the idea of education in a traditional Blackfoot sense. What did education mean or what forms did it take in traditional Kainai society? We will look at several important aspects of education including the roles played by legends, dreams, and elders. But, I choose to begin by considering possible definitions of education from traditional times. My first question is: In traditional Blood society, how were children viewed and treated? Alvine Mountain Horse, a member of the Horn Society and a Blackfoot language teacher, tries to answer this question by relating her own childhood experiences:

*When we were younger my grandmother never sat me down and said, This is what you have to do. This is how you have to be to people. We were just left alone to do*

*whatever, but if I was hurting somebody, if I was fighting with somebody, my grandmother would sit me down and say, Why did you do this? How are you gonna feel about somebody hitting you or you fighting with somebody? I mean, somebody fighting with you and then just making you miserable. She talked about these and she never really told me, she just asked me: how would you feel?*

*All these things, that, and just the way they talked to us, they didn't, maybe they were scolding us or whatever you want to call it, but they just talked to us. And it was strictly I guess mainly, how would you feel? Do you wanna be like this? But not really do you wanna be like this—this is what you are going to be and you don't wanna be those things. You really think about what they talked to you about.*

Dwayne Mistaken Chief adds this piece of cultural wisdom as explained to him:

*I think there is one lady that put it really good. In English what she would be saying is that person as that person is complete in himself. They're given everything at that point, that's their life and they decide what they are going to do with it. Nobody else can come along and say, "No, I want you to be this other way." But what you could do, and the responsible person, would be to always give advice to this person. Whether they hear you or not is not the concern, but to give it to them, constantly tell it to them. If you constantly tell it to them, they are going to be taking this in. You might not think they are, but eventually they will start to make their own decisions. Because one of the things I also found is that you can't force people to do things. As far as our culture is concerned, everybody is an individual and you are respected as that. They have to make their own decisions. You can't make them, but you can only talk to them.*

This attitude towards children still survives today among many families in the Kainai community. Parents rarely tell the children what to do. Parents will give advice and offer support, but the overriding philosophy is that ordering children around or controlling them is not the way to raise them. Children are viewed as independent beings who need to discover the world in their own way for them to learn. Therefore, no one should try to boss a child around because they must learn on their own and suffer the consequences of their bad choices and learn valuable lessons along the way.

Education, then, in this cultural context, appears to acknowledge the idea that individuals best learn about the world by experiencing it on their own terms, with the facilitation of informed guides. The informed guides or teachers in traditional Blackfoot society were, of course, the elders. As teachers, the elders had certain expectations of those that came to them for advice or "education." Dwayne Mistaken Chief:

*If I go and ask a grandparent for an opinion on something or give me instruction and advice, my job then is to sit there and listen. I have no -- I can't argue with him. I could disagree with him, but I can't argue with him or I can't tell him that I disagree. I just have to listen. 'Cause sometime in the future you might think differently, but when you start arguing, well, you are not going to hear what he has to tell you.*

Apparently, the elders presented themselves only as resource people, who could give an opinion or suggest possible solutions to a problem. Or they could pose questions themselves. But, questioning them or arguing with them was considered disrespectful because it suggested that their willingness to help or provide assistance was not appreciated. Those seeking advice or "education" were not expected to strictly follow the guidance of an elder, but an appreciation for the kindness of offering guidance was

considered essential to the process. The elders were to be respected because they were role models for young people. They represented Kainayssini in its truest form. Again, Dwayne Mistaken Chief explains:

*So, but the thing about our grandparents was they lived it. They just didn't talk about the stories, they lived it. And so for us it was a normalized thing. You know, they didn't tell us, they didn't keep talking to us—"This is a good thing; you should try this. Here is some advice that you ought to consider"—and then turn around and do something else. They lived what they told us. So, in that way it was really easy to -- it became a part of us rather than something you're being told.*

The challenge for the elders and spiritual leaders of today is to try to maintain that spirit of the elders from the past, a task that becomes increasingly complex as Aboriginal people continue down the road of assimilation and integration into mainstream society. The elders, then, must continue to act as teachers and role models and keep cultural practices alive, religious or otherwise. On the Blood Reserve, legends have provided and continue to provide a connection to the lifestyles and values of traditional times. Alvine Mountain Horse describes how these stories were taught to her:

*When we're all in bed, she had a wood stove, she never had electricity or any of that stuff. She had a wood stove, and we'd be all in bed, it'd be cold, and we'd all be keeping warm and then she'd start telling us a story. She told us a lot of legends. We'd start asking questions, "Well why did they do this? Why did they do that?" She'll just keep telling her story and then next thing nobody's asking any questions, she doesn't hear anything, we're all asleep.*

In that kind of pleasant and comforting atmosphere, the stories of the Kainai people have been told, retold, and the messages in the stories themselves interpreted and understood. The stories can be legends with strong links to the spiritual aspects of Kainayssini, as in the legend of the Morning Star Man, or they can also be humorous, as in the case of *Napii* legends which attempt to explain the world, why things are the way they are, while appreciating the role the Trickster played in all of it. Alvine Mountain Horse tells the story of *Napii* and the Dogs:

*There was dogs that were dancing, but whenever they are dancing they hang up their tails, they take their tails off and hang them up. And Napii came in and told them he wanted to join so he joined and then he thought I'm gonna play a trick on these dogs and gonna switch all the tails. Napii's trick, he was such a trickster then he did something where they all had to rush out of this hall fast. So they knew where their tails, they just all went over and put them on. Then they realized, this ain't my tail. So that's why today you see dogs walking around sniffing each other, they're still trying to find their tails.*

Legends like these represent the memories of the Blood people. The elders play an integral role in preserving these memories. As such, they are a powerful and educational connection to traditional times. They often reflect the values and world view of the tribe and, as oral history, can help people in the modern world gain insight into the connections between the culture, the land, and the values.

This kind of experience can also occur through dreams. In Blackfoot culture, dreams can be a powerful medium for learning and experiencing. Often, dreams can be interpreted, analyzed, or acted upon by elders who hear descriptions of dreams from those seeking advice or guidance. Alvine Mountain Horse had one such experience:

*My husband and I were supposed to do this ceremony at the Sundance and we never went through with it. I dreamt about it; the grandfather told me, "We're still waiting for you. You tell your husband to go get his pipe and come and we'll go through the ceremony." That was my dream and that was so clear, someone told me through my dream, "We're waiting for you." So we went to get an elder to go get everything ready. Then he went to the person in my dream and he said, "Yeah I've been waiting for them. I was thinking they weren't gonna go through with it."*

Thus, Kainayssini education can mean many things: we have only looked at a few. Understanding the stories from the past, appreciating their teachings, respecting elders as representatives of those cultural values, and seeking their guidance and advice for things like dreams—all of these things mesh and interconnect the person with the culture. Meanwhile, there is an understanding of the necessity for each individual person to find his or her own path to these connections, a recognition of the individuality of life experiences and comprehension. Still, traditional Blackfoot society must have had constraints and people must have been expected to conform to certain modes of behavior that personified the values of the society. And the education people received back then must have promoted the development of these values. So, what were these values? What qualities or characteristics were considered essential to the development of a good person in traditional Blackfoot society?

To truly understand a culture, a society, and its values, you must understand its language. Since my comprehension of Blackfoot is limited, the conversations I have had with people were all in English, with a few Blackfoot words here and there. The problem with this approach is that I have asked people to explain Blackfoot cultural concepts in

English, and this limits, of course, the depth of my understanding. This all depends on the ability of people to translate their Blackfoot cultural knowledge into English, and this process is rarely accurate. English words cannot accurately explain Blackfoot cultural concepts nor can exact word translations be communicated. Narcisse Blood explains:

*In our language, no word exists by itself. Like a dictionary, here's a word, here's the one word. In our language, it's always in the context of how it's used.*

However, to make some progress in this project, English translations will have to suffice. From the conversations I have had with people from the Blood Reserve regarding the topic of essential qualities of a traditional Blackfoot person, four dominant characteristics have emerged. With their limited English translations, these were: Ainakowa (respect), Isspomotsisinni (sharing), Kimmapipitsin (kindness), and Aatsi'moyihskan (sacred way speaking). Before we begin the task of attempting to define or comprehend these concepts in more detail, we should consider the philosophy of life connected to these words. Dwayne Mistaken Chief:

*When I was looking at the four words, it's all a matter of giving up these things. You know, this desk is not that important, my boots aren't that important, my hat, I got a bunch of hats, but they're not that important. It's all a matter of who I am and what part I play in the bigger picture. So, I am not an individual, these words aren't individual words, they all have to do with something else. Those four words and payment go back to Aatsi'moyisikhan and how to achieve that harmony, that state of sacredness. When you understand these concepts, those payments, then you begin to understand that they're not about economics; they're not about money payments; they're not about material goods. It's part of that trying to achieve that ideal state.*

Understanding these concepts, the values implicit in them, and the lifestyle decisions they promote and exhibiting these four characteristics are required for a person to achieve an ideal state, in a Blackfoot cultural context. Narcisse Blood on Ainakowa:

*Ainakowa—I think the closest translation of that is respect. Respect life, especially yours. Respect your body, respect your thoughts. If you can do that you can respect others. If you can do that you can respect other things. Ainakiip, you don't waste is another thing. Don't be wasteful.*

We can infer that waste means that something is not being respected, be it food, clothing, other people, animals, plants, even the air. In this way, everything has a purpose. If you fail to respect that purpose, then you fail to see the world as a whole. Concerning people, respect was gained by living according to the values contained in Ainakowa. Elders gain and deserve respect because they live their lives according to the values that way. That is how tribal leaders are developed. Narcisse Blood elaborates:

*So, aiiakii could be a lot of things and it comes to those kinds of things. To take care of what you have. When you have respect for others there's far more rewards than there are when you don't.*

The reward for living a life of respect is that your life will be full of knowledge and learning about how the world is and how it should be viewed. A life without respect will shorten or limit life experiences.

An essential part of showing respect for others is by helping them, Isspomotsisinni. This ethic of helping reflects the interdependent nature and community strength of traditional Blackfoot society. Dwayne Mistaken Chief:



*What they're saying is, might my children take care of me when I'm an old person just as I took care of them. It's in everybody's prayers that somebody takes care of them so they're really dependent on a lot of people not just their relatives.*

*But then more recently somebody said that was the case for some people but that was the punishment for not helping others. So, if you didn't help anybody early in life, when you got old when the time came that other people are supposed to take care of you and there's nobody there for you. So, that was the punishment for not helping.*

*Basically it's really your duty to help someone else if you have in excess of what you need. That's the way I've always approached it. The other thing is, if a person is like that, things just work out for them.*

*It's not a matter of payment, it's a matter of giving up, giving up of yourself, so now you're dancers. We're part of this big dance and we're just taking part in it. We're not a person separate from the rest of everything; we're a part of that dance, we gotta play our part.*

Narcisse Blood adds to the understanding of Isspomotsisinni by describing the Sundance and the tributes paid to Napi Naató'si or Creator Sun:

*But there's people who appreciate that. You go up to the Sundance when people are putting up camp, you could arrive there with your poles and in no time there could be three, four people around helping you. Or, I go up with my crew, my brother and others, and as soon as we're finished, "Let's go help the others." It's something that needs to be done. When we hold an Okan, that Okan, that lodge that that woman sponsors for Napi Naató'si can only happen with everybody's involvement. The Horn Society has their role, the Maoto'kiiksi have their role in it, the Ninaimsskaan help out, the Brave Dogs help*

*out, and the community all helps out. Yeah, it's only successful if everybody helps out. 'Cause everybody has to get the branches and put them around. Or when you put up the center pole everybody comes in to make sure it comes up. It's a beautiful example of Isspomotsisinni.*

In the Blackfoot language, the concepts of Isspomotsisinni and Kimmapiitsin or sharing are intimately connected. Kimmapiitsin or sharing seems to be considered as another way of helping, as in helping others by sharing knowledge, or food. Alvine Mountain Horse:

*Well, to me it always goes back to the religion. People that have an involvement with our religion, you really feel Kimmapiitsin. The respect, and about the prayer, praying, and they really like to share. We had a lot of people come to my grandma's house. We'd be home and the next thing somebody'd be coming with food, or somebody went berry picking, somebody went hunting, they would always come and bring something to my grandmother's house.*

*But, because my grandmother was so kind and caring she used to doctor people. In her caring ways, those I see as a good person. And there's a lot of those people who don't place money values on things or they'll just give. Not that, she received a lot, and she gave a lot. Those kind of people, I think those are good characteristics.*

People can also help each other by sharing the workload as in the example of the Sundance, or by sharing in grief. Narcisse Blood speaks of the unity of his community and Kimmapiitsin:

*So, to me that's part of Kimmapiitsin, that sense of community. Sure we have problems in our community, but when grief, when disaster strikes, that's one thing about*

*the Blood people that emerges, people are there. And I've been at the receiving end of that. Again, that's something we can't lose again. You could live in a community and just be names, you stay away from each other.*

Tied to all of these actions and ideals of respect, kindness, and sharing is Aatsi'moyihskan or behaving in a sacred manner. In the words of Narcisse Blood:

*Aatsi'moyihska –I think from what I'm going to say it's the very heart and soul of who we are. I think it was Adam Delaney that once said, What if we were to meet our Creator and our Creator said, I gave people of the world gifts and I gave them gifts like the language. I gave the Europeaners my only son because they needed the most help. I gave the Blood Indians or Kainaiwa, I gave them the language. In my caring for you one of my gifts was the language, bundles, the Sundance. I gave the Cree their ways; I gave the Sioux their ways; I gave the Europeaners their ways, their religion. And as a Blood Indian one of the questions, Weren't those gifts good enough? Why do you have to imitate others? What was wrong with the gifts I gave you?*

*And that's where I think anthropologists really went bad. There's this story that was once told about this one study about this last nomadic tribe of Eskimos that lived in igloos. One anthropologist went up there and came back with his findings, he said these people are very spiritual, had a lot of harmony, there was a lot of love, a lot of sharing and so forth. His colleague looked at it and said, I don't believe that, and went to the same group and came back with a completely different conclusion. There was a lot of violence, there was a lot of oppression, anger, and so forth, fighting. These two anthropologists argued and never agreed. But, they overlooked the obvious, and that was that they were both right. They were all those things. So, when we start talking about*

*Aatsi'moysikhan, where does one end and the other begin if you are looking at it from the language of English? That's where there's misinterpretation. It's a way of life; it's a way where everything has a right, there's a reason why they are here. That's such an intimate knowledge of the animals, how we use them, they are contained in a lot of our bundles, a lot of our ceremonies. Not that they were pets because pets was not something we used a lot because they were not put there for us, they were put there to be who they are, except for maybe horses and dogs, we domesticated. But the rest, let the eagles be eagles, not as pets that we show off, because that's not what they were there for. Mother earth, we give thanks, this is what feeds us. The sun is the source of life and lo and behold the scientists realized the power of those rays for growth. We always knew that. But it's a constant acknowledgment of those where we pray, welcome when you step on the first snow, that we survived the winter. Isstoyiimsstaawa, the Cold Weather Maker, some got their power from this entity or force, being. Or the thunder. As soon as you start saying those in English you lose the language aspect of those. It's a constant renewal and way of life. It's hard to dissect that they're in these components. As soon as the Sundance breaks you start preparing for the next one. It's not, oh well it's over; we'll worry about it the week before. Or when one of the bundles is opened, thunder pipes, they start looking forward to the first sound of thunder next spring. Everybody successfully opens those and those that make vows. Or when you go pick berries, or when you supply the meat. Animals, berries, the roots, were things that you give thanks to, we needed those to survive. You humble yourself daily, ihtsipaitapiyopa (giver of life), keep taking care of us.*

So, Aatsi'moysikhan and behaving in a sacred manner means living a good life through sharing, respecting, and helping. And really, that's the point. I noticed that the

people who have helped me understand these Blackfoot concepts had a considerable amount of difficulty differentiating them from one another. These concepts and values are seen as an integrated whole. By sharing, by helping, by giving, by behaving in a sacred manner, and by respecting people pull together, create community, and move closer to the center of the circle. People are transformed by the actions of Ainakowa, Kimmapipitsin, Isspomotsisinni, and Aatsi'moysikhan because they cannot experience these concepts and qualities on their own; they need others to achieve these states. So, these four concepts create balance in the universe, in the community, and in the person. They must be constantly acted upon to maintain centredness and balance. This requires movement and relations with people, animals, and the world.

My mind wanders back to the Belly Buttes. The ceremonies and traditions of the Sundance seem to be the cultural embodiment of the four traditional Blackfoot values considered in this chapter. The Sundance, the story of Iipisowaahs, and the Belly Buttes are all part of the cultural history of the Kainai people. To truly understand this story requires a better comprehension of Blackfoot cultural values and attitudes. To begin to be reeducated, as I have been, requires a closer look at history and culture as well as a willingness to consider the ways in which history and culture are connected. To put it in more practical terms, I have begun this investigation to better understand the actions, attitudes, and behaviors of the students I teach at Kainai High School. The individual and collective histories and cultural memories of the Blood people play a tremendously significant role in the character of the education system on the Blood Reserve. I imagine that each student at Kainai High School comes to school with an imaginary backpack full of these histories and memories. The students cannot unload this weight, and the teaching

staff cannot ignore the affect that carrying these imaginary backpacks can have on each student.

Just like my students, I carry my own backpack full of personal history and memories. The project to reeducate myself has forced me to take an accounting of these and articulate them in the form of the life history that has been presented in this chapter. Teaching at Kainai High School has created such a great disruption of my self image as a teacher and as a person that I have to closely consider who I am before I can make sense of the impact that the Blood culture and history is having on me. Situating myself, and recognizing that my own story has a role to play in a curriculum dialogue has caused me to pay closer attention to the subtleties and nuances of the life histories offered by some of the key people involved in education on the Blood Reserve. Their stories, and mine, have been the curriculum of my reeducation.

Chapter Five  
Doing Métissage:  
Stereotypes, Identity, and the Influences of the (Post)colonial Discourse

The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under  
one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.  
(Arendt, 1958, p.58)

I am not you—  
but you will not  
give me a chance  
will not let me be me . . .

You are unfair, unwise,  
foolish to think  
that I can be you,  
talk, act  
and think like you.

God made me *me*  
He made you *you*  
For God's sake  
Let me be me.

(Dempster, quoted in Marnham, 1981, p. 143)

Maybe I tell you the one about Eric the Lucky and the Vikings play hockey for  
the Old-timers, find us Indians in Newfoundland, she says.

Maybe I tell you the one about Christopher Cartier looking for something good to  
eat. Find us Indians in a restaurant in Montreal.

Maybe I tell you the one about Jacques Columbus come along that river, Indians  
waiting for him. We all wave and say, here we are, here we are.

Everyone knows those stories, I says. White man stories. Baby stories you got in  
your mouth.

No, no, no, no, says the Coyote. I read these ones in that old book.

Ho, I says. You are trying to bite my toes. Everyone knows who found us Indians.  
Eric the Lucky and that Christopher Cartier and the Jacques Columbus come along later.  
Those ones get lost. Float about. Walk around. Get mixed up. Ho, ho, ho, ho, those ones  
cry, we are lost. So we got to find them. Help them out. Feed them. Show them around.

Boy, I says. Bad mistake that one.

You are very wise, grandmother, says the Coyote, bring her eyes down. Like she  
is sleepy. Maybe you know who discovered Indians.

Sure, I says. Everyone knows that. It was Coyote. She was the one.

(King, 1990a, p. 96)

Every society has its own perceptions of truth. Foucault calls these “regimes of truth,” because to him these types of discourses<sup>3</sup> represent what a society accepts, sanctions, values, and uses to make universal judgments on what is considered right or wrong to them (Giroux, 1988, p. 219). The three writers quoted above write from different parts of the world about truth and voice: Arendt from Germany and America, Dempster from West Africa, and King from Aboriginal North America. Each point of view, each writer’s perspective can be considered as originating from her or his own unique socio-historical space or reality. This “heteroglossia” of discourses enriches our understanding of ideas in that it creates the space required to hear a multiplicity of voices that could contribute to any given conversation (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 428). This intersection of worldviews and contexts occurs in dialogue and puts both speakers and listeners on the boundaries—the public space in-between their own understanding and the understanding of others. To engage in dialogue implies that those involved are on a common quest, goal, a shared kind of “inter-est” or “in-between” which binds people together in action and speech (Arendt, 1958, p. 182). Dialogue is naturally located and developed in a public space. As Hannah Arendt (1958) wrote, public space is a place in which people come together to speak, to engage in dialogue, to share their stories, and to struggle together to create and strengthen social relations (pp. 50-58).

A beautiful metaphor for this sort of relationship in-between people comes from the traditions of Australian Aborigines. To tell a story, to create the world according to traditional Aborigine beliefs requires, in part, a songline. A songline is a trail of words, melodies, songs, and footprints that were left behind by ancient ancestors as they travelled the country and narrated the stories of creation (Chatwin, 1987). The



contemporary significance of the songlines is that members of Aboriginal communities can follow these ancient paths today, re-visit creation, and hear the songs and stories of the past. Naturally, these songlines cross and intersect each other across the whole continent of Australia. These ancient dialogues involving humans, nature, and spirits can thus be imagined as immortal voices which sing the songs and tell the socio-historical stories which help to create the character and identity of Australia and the Aborigines. This plurality of voices defines the communities of the Aborigines.

Can our communities and schools come to be defined in similar ways? Our 'songlines' are our own stories, our own perspectives and understandings that we all bring to and present during dialogue. The common product of this dialogue is the understanding which all of us gain through the sharing and active intersection of our 'songs.' In this way, dialogue can be considered a heteroglossic act. Of course, the metaphor is stretched somewhat since the Australian Aborigine exists in a society and context markedly different from Canadian society. This type of cultural difference makes the task of spurring meaningful dialogue across borders very challenging. Educators, however, have a unique opportunity and responsibility to meet this challenge. Education, when considered as a "conversation of different voices," can come to be seen as an invitation to hear and recognize the voices of others through "continuous and authentic personal encounters" which heighten and expand our sense of community (Greene, 1993, p. 13). "It is all too clear that very few people today conceive of themselves as engaged in a quest along with others who have different faiths and different perspectives on the world" (Greene, 1988, p. 114). It seems that most people have not been guided to see the creation of this sort of public space as an important part of their own understanding. To

undergo a re-vision of our understandings of education requires a new orientation towards knowledge, identity, cultural difference, community, and democracy. This would mean finding a new location, not personal space nor public space, but a third space of opportunity and imagination.

What is the “Third Space” (Bhabha, 1990)? In sum, it is an ambiguous, confusing, and conflictual position to search out when confronted with issues of social and cultural difference. Bhabha (1990) has argued that any approach to cultural knowledge must keep in mind that all cultures should be viewed and understood as related to each other in some way as hybrids (pp. 210-211). To understand cultural hybrids, however, we have to recognize that the original two ideas or cultures from which the hybrid stems have been displaced by a “Third Space” of new authority structures, new political initiatives, and new ways of thinking about the world (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211). The “Third Space” represents a whole new area of meaning, understanding, and representation. As such, a proper treatment of this kind of “cultural hybridity” requires a realization that “new sites are constantly being opened up, and if you keep referring those new sites to old principles, then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and productively and creatively” (p. 216). This suggests that we are unable to recognize new sites of cultural hybridity largely because we often use outdated or inappropriate cultural norms, values, and practices to interpret multicultural and heteroglossic experiences.

Glissant (1989), in his seminal work *Caribbean Discourse*, analyzes the cultural hybridity of the people of the Caribbean and asserts that it is an expression of the sense of displacement, dislocation, and lack of collective memory experienced as a result of the history of slavery and colonialism. The intermixing of people from all over the world in

the Caribbean region has caused, almost out of necessity, a reconciliation and an interrelatedness between the values of literate societies and repressed oral traditions (pp. 248-249). The result has been the growth and nurturing of a particular kind of *métissage* or cultural "Creolization" praxis and process that expresses an ongoing *rapprochement* between cultures and people usually essentialized and considered to be at odds (pp. 140-141). The critical potentiality of *métissage* is that it can act as a metaphor for the fluid mixture of race, language, culture, and gender that constitutes (post)colonial experience and identity (Zuss, 1997, p. 166). Creating texts of *métissage* implies an attempt to describe the braided and polysemic character of our lives, experiences, histories, and memories that are all, contemporaneously, personal as well as collective. The mutable and hybrid nature of acts of *métissage* allows writers and readers to creatively reflect upon the relationships that exist between the social, cultural, and historical *milieus* and personal experiences of individuals living in (post)colonial societies. By weaving multiple and composite identities, literary *métissage* facilitates the articulation of

new visions of ourselves, new concepts that allow us to think *otherwise*, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and the very condition of possibility of thought, of 'clarity,' in all of Western philosophy. *Métissage* is such a concept and practice: it is a site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages. (Lionnet, 1989, p. 6)

In this sense, facilitators of *métissage* can, at times, be viewed as being engaged in forms of trickstering<sup>4</sup> in the ways that they can playfully and creatively produce genres of literature and expression that run counter to dominant forms of discourse, and

mischievously nudge us towards a third space composed of new ways of seeing and doing things. The Trickster is often considered to be a dynamic entity that embodies “human ambivalence and social ambiguity” and foments a “spirit of disorder” in his/her role as “the enemy of boundaries” (Hurley, 1991, pp. 69-75).

Trickstering has a certain resonance in this thesis when the concept and strategy of *métissage* is applied to a curriculum dialogue that involves the people of the Blood Reserve and Kainai High School. The legacy of colonialism and Canadian government policy on the Blood Reserve is an education system that is a delicate mix of Blackfoot traditions and values, residential school experiences and memories, the individual and collective interests and concerns of students, and provincial curriculum guidelines combined with an ongoing worry over continued assimilation and increased marginalization of Kainai culture and the Blackfoot language. The struggle to create an education system that embodies the true spirit of the Kainai people has been a major goal of the Kainai Board of Education since 1988. However, the combined influences of the social, historical, cultural, and traditional histories and memories of the Kainai people often seem to be in direct conflict with the Eurocentric orientations of education systems in Canada today. At times these two worldviews seem to be irreconcilable opposites that breed dysfunction when they mix in an education system. Others have argued that colonization has instead created a confusing mixture of worldviews in the minds and consciousness of Aboriginal peoples:

They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview. Their consciousness became a random puzzle, a jigsaw puzzle that each person has to attempt to understand. Many collective views of the world

competed for control of their behaviour, and since none was dominant modern Aboriginal people had to make choices or guesses about everything. Aboriginal consciousness became a site of overlapping, contentious, fragmented, competing desires and values.

...No one has a pure worldview that is 100 percent Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again. (Little Bear, 2000, pp. 84-85)

The jaggedness of these worldviews, and the clashes that result when they collide, seem to be fertile ground for *métissage*.

The specific culture of Kainai High School is at issue in this thesis. The worldviews of the elder, student, and teacher are juxtaposed here in an attempt to show the ways in which individual and collective desires, values, memories, hopes, and fears both compete and coalesce into braided expressions of identity and culture. The teachers, students, and elders meet regularly in the setting of Kainai High School, yet there is a common assumption that each group is largely separate and isolated from the others. To acknowledge that each group influences the others and that the interaction between them in educational settings is a form of *métissage* and curriculum dialogue requires new interpretations and an awakening to the opportunities offered within a thoughtful integration and braiding of worldviews. This braiding is already occurring at Kainai High School. This thesis was inspired by the desire to bring it to light through an interpretation of the significance of the textual dialogue presented here.

What follows is a curriculum dialogue presented in the form of métissage. The dialogue has been organized into three sections; each section contains a piece of writing or an excerpt from an interview with the elder or the student, as well as, writing from me. The selections have been grouped according to the connections that they may have as well as the conflicts that they exemplify. The words and writings of the student Aamsskáápoḥkitópii will be presented first in each section with **bold** letters. Next, the words of the elder Siipista'pinii will be presented in *italics*. My writing will be presented last in each section and printed in regular font. An interpretation will follow each set of texts.

## I

**We're not much different from other people. We all speak English; we all wear the same clothes now; we like driving cars; we like having pretty houses. That's where we get our little identity crisis. What the hell makes an Indian today – if we don't smoke pipes, or if we don't have long braids? What the hell's supposed to be an Indian today? I wasn't raised in a boarding school so I can't go get government compensation. Never lived in a teepee. I don't even own a teepee.**

**I wanted to make being an Indian cool. Make it cool to be an Indian. For like younger kids sitting watching a play about Indians, they want to see cool Indians. They don't need to seek spirituality or peace pipe ceremonies and shit like that. That's not reality anymore.**

*These elders - - when I was young I had an older brother that dances and he had this family that was adopting him. They were pretty well off. Anyways, the dance started and the circle at the middle, it's round like this. That's where the drummers are. They had an entrance on the east side. They come in and sit down. The elders are seated on the south side of that. Further on, on the west side there's a stage where they have the chief and council. They all sit on that stage. To me, it seemed like they had respect for chief and council. There was one time during the dance, everybody took part. To me, that was fun for them. My brother, his name was Lawrence, but his other name was John, he'd say, when you finish dancing he'd say, "Matomaaniwaaksi . . . ." They're not telling the truth. That means they want to dance some more. And they start dancing again and they have a lot of fun. They don't get paid for doing that. They go there to have fun and carry on our tradition.*

*And I see the elders just sitting there. They dance once in a while, these guys on the south side of that. All of a sudden there was silence. Just silence. One of the elders got up. No, one of the elders started teasing another elder. Joking around with the other elders. A lot of teasing on that. About a lot of things. This elder, started with one elder, started teasing this one elder, and instead of this elder retaliating to what went on from the other elder—there was a lot of laughter after he was finished. This elder started teasing another person, challenging another person too. After he was finished there was a lot of laughter. Then it just kept going like that until all of them.*

*And I kept seeing this elder, the main one, looking like this at everybody participating. So, he's a leader. Somebody has to lead off and these are followers. And I noticed because I do a lot of observation. And he's a good role model. This is what you*



*should be doing. In the future—he got up and went on this side, real slow. He started to sing a song of praise for all his friends. Song of praise for all of them around the circle. The dance hall was just packed full. Went around, all of a sudden, at the east side, he seen this young boy. Oh, I'd say he's about five years old. And he had his legs like that, sitting on the floor just looking up at the elder. He stopped. Told the audience, "I'm pleased that you gave us the opportunity to do what we want to do, the elders. That shows that you have respect for us. But we did our song of praise for the elders. This is our way of life. Anytime, anywhere, you sing a song of praise for the ones that you think. Don't be shy because right now you'll see some guys are shy. They have to get paid in order to get up and . . . I don't have to get paid. I just get up and sing a song of praise any place."*

*Said this guy, "This young boy, look at this young boy. He listened. He knows what I'm saying. He understands Blackfoot. He speaks Blackfoot. All of us speak Blackfoot and understand Blackfoot. There is a generation in the future that will be - - they won't hear each other. Communication is gonna get out of place. They won't know what they're saying. Some elder would get up and sing a song of praise and younger generation would still be talking away. They won't speak our language anymore. He'd be saying, 'Tsa waani oma niitsitapikoan?' What's that Indian talking about?"*

*We hear it now. That's why - - the old man made a prediction that time and it's close to seventy years ago. I heard it. I witnessed it. And it's like that now.*

The Belly Buttes hovered on the horizon as an enduring illusion that day. Something that I just could not see quite clearly enough to feel satisfied. Maybe it was the waves of heat swelling off the prairie that summer day, but I just couldn't seem to clearly focus my eyes on the Buttes while I was driving to the site of the Sundance on the Blood Reserve. I tried to distract myself by looking hard at the vision of teepees that I saw just beneath the buttes of the Belly River in southwestern Alberta. I needed a distraction because I was nervous. I had never been to a Sundance, and I had been invited to attend this sacred and ancient gathering by members of the Blood Tribe, whom I had come to know as a teacher at Kainai High School on the Reserve. I had accepted their invitation because I wanted to show them that I really was an Indian and could and would appreciate the whole process. In reality, I knew nothing about Aboriginal spirituality and ceremonies, but I wanted to pretend that I did because I wanted to be viewed and accepted as "Indian" by my friends. As I approached the site I decided to observe the Sundance ceremonies from afar to try and understand their significance. Naïvely, I thought that I would "get it," in anthropological terms, if I remained detached and simply observed the setting, the people, the proceedings, and the reactions of the participants. I now know that the Sun-Napi Naató'si to the Blackfoot people—did not send the sacred ceremonies down to earth for my enjoyment, entertainment, or analysis. Their purpose is much more significant and vital.

Still, I made my way to the Sundance and approached the teepees cautiously. I did not know where my friends were camped. I did not know how to behave. I did not know what was supposed to happen. I cautiously approached a few teepees and quickly peeked inside in hopes of seeing someone I recognized. No one. My wife and I must have

wandered aimlessly around the circle of teepees for about an hour, hanging around and still hoping to see a familiar face. No luck. Finally, feeling embarrassed and completely out of place, we left. I never told any of my friends that I had been there.

The legend of Iipisowaahs, or the Morning Star Man, provides an explanation of how and why the ceremonies and societies were created as they were and represents an intimate connection to the spirit world and ancestors. This legend symbolizes the deep and powerful relationships that exist between the land, the people, the ceremonies, the history of the Blood people, and the values that have provided and will continue to provide guidance to the Blood Tribe. The Sundance ceremony could never be moved to another place. It must be conducted on the land—at the very spot—where it has always been held. That is the way Napi Naató'si intended things to be.

I now know that I was drawn to that place because I was searching for something that could help me deal with feeling “like one who looks in the mirror and sees a blur over part of his own face” (Bruchac, 1993, p. 244). I wanted to identify myself with something because I felt like my identity had been lost to time and the elements, like a flag tattered by strong winds. But identity is more resilient than that. It continues to recreate itself in ways that cannot be predicted.

### Setting the Stage: Interpreting the Métissage

Western metaphysics has a long history of structuring reality in terms of dichotomies and binary oppositions. These binary pairs are not generally regarded, however, as representing two equal terms, for while the first term is usually defined positively, the second is customarily defined negatively as the absence of the first. (Barcham, 2000, p. 147)

Aboriginal education, as a contemporary field of study, generates uncertainty and confusion among those associated with it. What is Aboriginal education? How is it distinct or different from 'regular' education? What does Aboriginal education attempt to accomplish? Is Aboriginal education exclusive to Aboriginal people or can others be involved? Should Aboriginal education be directly connected to Aboriginal traditions and languages? *Where* should Aboriginal education be taught? *How* should Aboriginal education be taught? I wish to suggest that part of the ambiguity associated with the field of Aboriginal education stems from the disinterest of most practitioners to effectively and carefully consider these questions. I am not suggesting that these questions need to be answered definitively and fully in order to see progress. Instead, I wish to point out that Aboriginal education has developed out of a desire for a separate and distinct education system. This was a rejection of the mainstream education system much more than it was the hope for the creation of a new, imaginative, and somehow 'cultural' educational movement. The questions listed above are difficult to answer because the majority of people involved in Aboriginal education are only working towards something *different* from mainstream education. Precisely what those differences are, or what they could be, seems unimportant to most. The dichotomization of reality, as pointed out above by

Barcham, has so penetrated the consciousness of our thinking that even Aboriginal educators tend to define their field of study in terms of the *absence* of mainstream or Eurocentric notions of education.

Many people living in societies like Canada, including myself, suffer from a similar kind of colonial hangover, and this malaise is particularly striking among people of Aboriginal descent across Canada. The term *postcolonialism* has been used to describe this phenomenon, but my experience causes me to wonder if it is really accurate to refer to the 'post' when considering issues of colonialism. One need only look at the life stories of some Aboriginal people for evidence of the ongoing spatial and ideological diaspora generated by the forces of colonialism (McLeod, 1998, p. 52). Or consider this observation from Slemon, quoted in Calliou (1998), who explains that the "foundational principle . . . [in] the field of postcolonial criticism is at heart a simple binarism: the binarism of Europe and its Others, of colonizer and colonized, of the West and the Rest, of the vocal and the silent" (p. 30). This binarism, similar to the dichotomization of reality discussed above, operates on the notion of difference and often perpetuates a limited view of the world and the role of individuals in it. With this in mind, it is useful to ask a question: How does binarism influence the contemporary world of Aboriginal education and culture?

Fanon (1967) made the insightful observation that colonial subjects have been largely "overdetermined from without" (p. 116). This means that the process of colonialism, through various social, cultural, and political forces, has suppressed the identification of the character of the colonized in favour of the colonizer's version of events and people, and consequently the colonized have been defined in European terms.

This orientation towards the colonized derives from the European belief that knowledge diffuses out from the cultural center of Europe and that any person with roots in the periphery was thus rendered a “savage” and marginalized as such (Battiste, 1998, p. 22). “The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha, 1986, p. 154). The colonized have not been considered capable of generating anything beyond an anthropological form of culture that emphasizes trinkets, food, and spirituality—exotically *different*, but still inferior and incapable when compared to European forms of knowledge and culture. The survival of the pseudonym *Indian*, a term used to indicate comradeship among Aboriginal people today but viewed as politically incorrect by mainstream society, is an example of the kind of ambivalence associated with colonialism and binarism. While The Indian has been a European invention, “a colonial enactment,” used to dominate and suppress real tribes with real names, Aboriginal people continue to use the term as a form of protest against the perceived attempt to revise history and decide how they will be named or unnamed (Vizenor, 1994a, p. 11).

The reason for this protest by Aboriginal people is related to the feeling that their ways of knowing, traditions, and memories have been considered a “white man’s artifact” only worthy of a textbook or museum (Fanon, 1967, p. 14). These acts of othering have found currency in recent movies that depict historical and fictional instances of Aboriginal and European interaction: *Dances With Wolves*, *Black Robe*, and *The Mission*. Each of these films can be considered nostalgic in the ways in which Aboriginal people are depicted as “noble savages” soon to be slaughtered or overrun by the insensitive and

all-to-greedy Europeans. What is striking about these three films is that each story seems to be inspired by a new-age rewriting and recoding of history that strives to depict Aboriginal people in (presumably) more appropriate ways. Yet, the irony is that the story is told through the various strong-willed European men that are the main characters of each film. Once again the story originates from and remains entrenched in a Eurocentric perspective despite significant efforts to portray Aboriginal people in more sympathetic and culturally appropriate ways. The grand narrative<sup>5</sup> of colonialism is difficult to escape.

A few years ago, I was invited to address a group of students enrolled in an introductory course in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge on the topic of "Native" Education. I was intrigued by the possibility of influencing future teachers with a message questioning stereotypes, promoting historical understanding, and encouraging an awareness of social realities on reserves. To this end, I invited five students from Kainai High School to present with me. I reasoned that the students would add interesting perspectives to the presentation through telling their stories as students in both public and reserve schools. What happened instead is that the students from Kainai High School were repeatedly questioned on their culture and values. The future teachers were most concerned with how Aboriginal people, as represented by the five students, were culturally and socially *different* and how this would affect the ways that they should be taught. I interpret this response as a sort of misguided concern that has been conditioned by the pervasive discourse on colonialism and culturalism that infuses Canadian society. This discourse, contributed to by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, emphasizes difference, cultural exclusivity, and the existence of an essential identity. Eventually, the tension surrounding the presentation was reduced when one

student explained that he and his friends were really not much different from other students that the future teachers may encounter; they are interested in the same things and had similar goals. However, this statement also brought the discussion to an abrupt halt. Unfortunately, the classroom full of future teachers found this to be a confusing and unsatisfactory response, mainly because it raises questions similar to those posed at the beginning of this section: What is Aboriginal education? How is it different from 'regular' education? If Aboriginal students are not uniquely different from 'other' students, then what is the purpose of Aboriginal education?

I believe that a meaningful, extensive, and ongoing dialogue on questions like those posed above is necessary to bypass the social and cultural binarisms that cloud our thinking and impede progress and creative approaches on these issues. The *métissage* of text presents such a dialogue and how it might sound, look, or feel as text juxtaposed on paper. But before an interpretation of that *métissage* is undertaken, it is important to recall that this idea was inspired by questions which arose from a negativity of experience, or the feeling that Aboriginal education in general and Kainai High School in particular were not as I assumed them to be (Carson, 1986, p. 75). According to Gadamer (1975), the realization that a situation is not as we expected inspires questions:

It is clear that the structure of the question is implicit in all experience. We cannot have experiences without asking questions. The recognition that an object is different and not as we first thought obviously involves the question of whether it was this or that. The openness that is part of the experience is, from a logical point of view, precisely the openness of being this or that. It has the structure of a question. (p. 325)



The hermeneutical priority of the question emphasized by Gadamer addresses the experience of “being in the world” with others because when we ask questions, we inevitably instigate and sustain conversations with others regarding the individual and collective experiences of being-in-the-world (Chambers, 1987, pp. 23-24). This conversation is dialogical in that it is an exchange that works progressively towards interpretation and understanding. To interpret and understand text requires an awareness of our situatedness in tradition, our horizon, and how this horizon has the potential to fuse with the situatedness of the text, as well as, with the horizons of others with whom we may engage in dialogue with at various sites (Chambers, 1987, p. 23). “The interpreter is, therefore, first aware of a distance between the text and his own horizons which leads, in the process of understanding, to a new comprehensive horizon transcending the initial question and prejudices” (Bleichner, 1980, pp. 112-113). The fusing of horizons and the subsequent achievement of the hermeneutical horizon is brought about when the interpreter recognizes the horizon of the question from which sense of the text is derived (Gadamer, 1975, p. 333). Thus, the hermeneutical priority of the question reminds us that the interpreter of a text “can understand a text only when...[she has]...understood the question to which it is an answer” (p. 333).

Following Gadamer, then, I will begin to work with the texts that constitute the *métissage* presented in the previous section by first identifying the questions to which each group of texts is an answer. The interpretations that follow each set of texts will proceed from these questions. These questions will help me understand the ways in which the student, the elder, and the teacher have expressed their own horizons and prejudices through the texts. By grouping the texts and reading them against one another, I have, in

a sense, facilitated the fusion of these horizons and attempted to create a comprehensive horizon that I have called a curriculum dialogue.

## I

**How do life experiences and memories (re)shape the identities of Aboriginal people?**

Each of us experiences and remembers an event or encounter in a personalized way. This is not to say that such experiences and memories cannot be collective. They are both personal and collective in the sense that our individual memories of our experiences are influenced by the stories others tell of the same or similar events and encounters. Often, these stories then become integrated with our personal memories to create new stories and remembrances. How people choose to express their memories of and feelings for these experiences and encounters, however, depends on the life experiences of each person. This is one reason that, especially between people of different generations, tensions exist over memory and experience. If emphasis is placed on the past and 'the good old days,' then what promise does the future hold? If success in the present and future requires innovation and creativity, does that make the past irrelevant? Thomas Berry, in Suzuki (1997), addresses this ambiguity:

It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story. (p. 9)

Although Berry is directing his words mainly towards environmental concerns, his explanation is useful in this context because it helps articulate the reciprocal nature of the interplay in-between the personal and the collective in stories and storytelling. People live their stories, and when their stories are told a collective memory and story emerges that helps us make sense of the world. "To tell a story is to link, in the moments of

telling, the past to the present and the present to the past. From this ongoing dialectic emerges the possibility of a future” (MacLeod, 1998, p. 53).

Berry’s quote, however, suggests that this process of storying is not always so smooth. He describes a cleavage between the old and the new that has bred dysfunction and dissatisfaction. With reference to the métissage, it is clear that tension exists in-between the memories and experiences of the student, the elder, and the teacher. The student, Aamsskááphkitópii, expresses the frustration and angst that arises when young people are confronted with stereotypical enactments of who they are and how they should behave. The elder Siipista’pinií relates a memory, an experience from his childhood. The story is infused with traditional Blackfoot values and worldviews combined with the strength and pedagogical power associated with oral history and the telling of a story. As the teacher, I express my personal confusion and ambivalence about my seeming lack of cultural identity as a descendant of mixed blood and Aboriginal families with a disjointed (hi)story of displacement, alienation, and diaspora. Although all three of us embody personalized versions of Aboriginality, and our life experiences and memories are unique, we also consider ourselves Aboriginal people in a collective sense.

In his statement, Aamsskááphkitópii asks the question, “What the hell’s supposed to be an Indian today?” Clearly, he is expressing frustration over the limitations of essentialist definitions and (mis)conceptions of Aboriginal identity. As Restoule (2000) observes:

...“Aboriginal identity” can be constrictive and colonizing.... *Identity* implies fixedness; that the “things” that make one Indian remain the same and should be the same as those things associated with Indianness by the Europeans at the time

of historical “first” contact. Identity places power in the observer who observes Aboriginal people from the outside and defines them, giving them an identity. (p. 103)

Thus, the concept of identity has a pluralizing effect as the characteristics of individuals are often oppressed by, and subsumed under, stereotypical notions of the collective derived from the continuing discourse. This “mark of the plural” sentences individuals to an anonymous existence in which a blanket identity creates the illusion that such characterizations apply to all members of that group (Memmi, 1967, p. 85). This places the burden of (post)colonial interaction squarely on the shoulders of any individual who tries to break free from these stereotypes. Fanon’s (1967) triple person, someone who is responsible for self, race, and ancestors all at the same time, is a (post)colonial creation (p. 112).

The way in which Aamsskááphkitópii flows from the collective “We” to the individual “I” to the detached “They” shows his awareness of the triple person. The “We” considers an apparent collective identity for Aboriginal people, in general, and the Kainai people, in particular. He considers the historical lifestyles of his ancestors and makes reference to common stereotypes of Aboriginal people—pipe smoking, braids, teepees, and dysfunctionality as a result of residential schools—and makes clear his disconnection from these. Those statements are contrasted with his understanding of the collective values and lifestyles of his people today. Finally, he makes an attempt to bridge into the future by expressing his understanding of the interests and needs of Aboriginal young people (“They”) today. What a “cool” Indian might be like is not explained, yet Aamsskááphkitópii does make it clear that such a person would not be spiritual or

cultural in stereotypical ways. Instead, a “cool” Indian would reflect a contemporary worldview that is in tune with being Aboriginal today. Through these statements, Aamsskááphkitópii shows an awareness of history and the significance of stereotypes in the creation of his world. The ‘triple person’ structure of this text shows the influence and pervasiveness of the (post)colonial discourse.

The discourse of (post)colonialism illuminates the tension in-between the language of domination that describes subjects as though they were frozen in time—using synecdochic language focused on issues of identity and race—and the countervailing language of change, adaptation, and difference using diachronic language focusing on hybridity (Bhabha, 1997, p. 153). The text from Aamsskááphkitópii is an interesting example of the interplay in-between these components of (post)colonial discourse in that he uses synchronic and diachronic language in the same statement. He is questioning not only his identity, but also the ways in which questions of identity are raised and posed. His text has the effect of simultaneously evoking and erasing the stereotypical images and conceptions of Aboriginality that are a significant part of the (post)colonial discourse (Bhabha, 1994, p. 48). Bhabha (1994) noted a phenomenon that Fanon termed “cultural mummification” that describes the constraining and dominating effects of stereotypes that eventually “leads to a mummification of individual thinking” (pp. 77-78). A culture or cultural group subjected to the forces of (post)colonialism becomes mired in the images, structures, and desires of the dominant group, and the escape from these influences requires new ways of thinking. “The force of colonial and postcolonial discourse as a theoretical and cultural intervention in our contemporary moment represents the urgent

need to contest singularities of difference and to articulate diverse 'subjects' of differentiation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 74).

Aamsskááphkitópii seems to be attempting to articulate this same "urgent need" in his statement. He speaks of his desire to create new ways of being Aboriginal, new ways of seeing Aboriginality that undermine age-old stereotypes, and to promote and recognize the diversity of experiences and identities that characterize Aboriginality today. He seeks this through his writing, his poetry and his plays. For Aamsskááphkitópii, a "cool" Indian is a person who works against the dominant (post)colonial discourses and challenges entrenched stereotypes by offering new visions and creations of culture. Such a vision, however, is somewhat problematic because Aamsskááphkitópii seems to reject values and practices that form the traditional foundation of Kainai culture as elders understand it. Does the creation of something new, a new version of a familiar story, necessarily involve a negation or absence of established traditions?

When we tell a story we speak of the past and "in narrating the past we understand ourselves to be the implied subject generated by the narrative" (Kerby, 1991, quoted in Vizenor, 1994a, p. 62). The elder, Siipista'pini, provides a narrative account of a childhood memory. This story links the values and traditions of the past to the present context of Aboriginality through his recollection of a prophesy and its implications for today. As previously noted, the dialectical relationship in-between the past and present generates a sense of hope and possibility for the future, but it also reminds us "of the historicity that is part of all understanding" of our present circumstances and future hopes and plans (Gadamer, 1975, p. 333). Aboriginality is deeply imbued with the remnants and wreckages of ancient and more recent historical events and remembrances.

Siipista'pinii's memory accentuates the ongoing assimilation of his people and concomitant loss of culture and identity. In this sense, story and remembrance acknowledges and appreciates the wisdom and life experiences of those who have lived before. To remember well means to be mindful of the histories that shape our lives.

Thus, Aboriginal elders encourage us to remember well by telling us their stories. Elders can be described as "postindian" in that their survival and vitality as Aboriginal people belies the (post)colonial discourse of domination and assimilation (Vizenor, 1994a). They have outlived the notion of the "Indian." As postindians, elders confirm the survival and presence of their people, and (re)shape notions of Aboriginal identity through the telling of their stories, memories, and visions (Vizenor, 1994b, p. 176). The story told by Siipista'pinii is an act of "survivance" (Grim, 2000, p. 44). He recognizes that his duty as a Kainai elder is to retell the stories of his life as a way to foster the ongoing dialogue in-between tradition and new situations, as well as, the ideas such exchanges may generate. In this way, Siipista'pinii is not a passive informant, sharing a memory from his childhood as a way to pass the time; rather, his story has real pedagogical worth. Pedagogy, in this context, is not merely the science of teaching, but the philosophy and epistemology that elders use to provide guidance, instruction, and cultural insight (Hodgson-Smith, 2000, p. 158). I have heard Siipista'pinii retell this particular story several times, mostly to students participating in the Elder Mentor Program at Kainai High School. That he retold it to me while I was conducting research with him suggests that Siipista'pinii considers this story and its teachings very significant and indispensable to his efforts as an elder on the Blood Reserve.



Although I have heard this story told many times, I have not heard Siipista'pinii interpret it. For this reason, I am reluctant to presume that I have the right to proclaim its teachings. However, I will say that the telling of this story, as part of the oral traditions of Aboriginal people, has the effect of vitalizing and personalizing identity, culture, and memory. The students often hear tribal members voice their fears that Blackfoot culture and language will soon be lost if they, the younger generations, do not embrace and respect them. Certainly, Siipista'pinii has similar fears. But, he tells the story rather than lecturing as a way to engage the students in their history as tribal members. This is a form of conscientization, as described by Freire (1976), in that it confronts the students with the reality of the Blackfoot people in historical terms, and encourages them to make an "historical commitment... [and] take the role of agents, makers and remakers of the world" (p. 244).

Siipista'pinii's story, then, is a call for action that echoes across history. By not explaining the point of his story, the elder compels the listeners to engage with history and discover it for themselves. Although the point may seem obvious—loss of language weakens the links between people and their history and cultural memories—Siipista'pinii relates this memory to detail the leadership role of elders and the intricacies of the Blackfoot way of life. That these practices and worldviews may be lost is a palpable fear on the Blood Reserve. Yet, Siipista'pinii generates hope, not fear. The story shows that the child who heard the elder became an elder who retells the story to the children today. This circle will continue, identities will be (re)shaped, and Aboriginal people will continue to remember the life experiences and stories of those that have gone before.

“The stories we tell, the narratives that give coherence and meaning to our lives, set the terms within which we are able to formulate the possibilities of existence” (Simon, 1992, p. 60). To live a meaningful life, in an Aboriginal sense, requires knowledge of and connections to origins, relations, and the place(s) that the ancestors have called home. Siipista’pini knows of such things. I, on the other hand, have spent much of my adult life trying to resurrect and (re)shape an Aboriginal identity. My decision to go to the Sundance eight years ago was motivated by a desire to bear witness to an ancient gathering that exemplifies and amplifies such origins, relations, and places. My memory, while emphasizing the feeling of being out of place, also contests essentialized definitions of Aboriginality. That I was somewhat out of place at the Sundance is true, but that does not necessarily mean that I am without origins, relations, or places. My trouble was in recovering them from obscurity. Locating life history implies leaving home first as a way to see, with new eyes, the place that you come from.

“Where are you from?” The question is always asked with a tone of familiarity and *camaraderie* that distracts me and leaves me not wanting to answer. “I’m from Edmonton,” I reluctantly reply, and then I wait for the painful response that I know is coming. This response is rarely verbal. Mostly, I get nonverbal responses—looks of confusion, wonderment, the slow nodding of the head. These responses give one message: “I thought this guy was an Indian, but I guess he’s not....”

When Aboriginal people meet each other for the first time, “Where are you from?” is the most common question. The question seeks identity through location of your roots, your family, your ancestors, your relations, your home, your place, your tribe, your reserve. When a person says they are “from” a particular reserve, then there seems

to be a certain comfort, a common understanding that makes Aboriginal people with similar backgrounds, histories, and memories feel a unique kind of solidarity. Although one may be Cree and the other Blackfoot, they seem to identify with each other through their location, a particular reserve, which suggests similar experiences and worldviews.

I don't come from a reserve, nor do any of my immediate relatives. I don't have a *place* in the Aboriginal sense of traditional territory or sacred land. I may have distant relatives on reserves, but my immediate family lost contact with them long ago. This was not a problem until I started teaching at Kainai High School. There, and in other Aboriginal settings, being Aboriginal requires knowledge of your ancestors and their location as signified by a particular reserve.

I descend from "liminality" (McMaster, 1995, p. 80) or a border space. But I don't think that my family chose that *place*; rather, it was chosen for them through the various events of colonialism that could be called *acts of displacement*. It is important to remember that place does not only refer to landscape, but also includes "a complex interaction of language, history, and environment" mingled with "a sense of displacement" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1999, p. 291). Displacement, then, operates by weakening the connections people hold to the land of their ancestors, but also language(s) and stories. The spatial and ideological diaspora of many Aboriginal families has alienated them from their stories and their people, and loosened the links connecting one generation to the next (McLeod, 1998, p. 52).

I became aware of my family tree's ambiguous genealogies only recently. Occupying a liminal space somewhere on the borders between reserve, city, and (unofficial) Métis settlement, my relatives seem to have avoided the reported benefits and

pratfalls that come with official government Indian Status and recognition as Aboriginal people (McMaster, 1995, pp. 76-77). As with McLeod (2000), the narrative irony that arises when Aboriginal people insist on a pure “national” identity, and a specific place called “home” has not been lost on me:

The search for foundational genealogies is ironic given the fluid nature of Bands before the Reserve system. It seems as though many Indigenous people in Canada have internalized the ideas that have been imposed by the Indian Act and the mainstream society. (p. 447)

Jimmy Durham, an artist whose work has been called “illegitimate” because he claims descent from a tribe without federal recognition, critiques the politics of identity and place further by attacking coded legal and cultural definitions of Aboriginal identity and place, and using parody:

I hereby swear to the truth of the following statement: I am a full-blood contemporary artist, of the sub-group (or clan) called sculptors. I am not an American Indian, nor have I ever seen or sworn loyalty to India. I am not a Native ‘American,’ nor do I feel that ‘America’ has any right to name me or un-name me. I have previously stated that I should be considered a mixed-blood; that is, I claim to be a male but in fact only one of my parents was male. (McMaster, 1995, p. 79)

The “myth of authenticity” and the linking of the notion of (pure) identity with (exclusive) place denies the existence and vitality of re-created stories, identities, and strategic placements (Griffiths, 1999, pp. 237-241).

Yet new stories and places have been created. Here is one such re-creation.

My ancestors were late in signing an adhesion to the conditions of Treaty 6<sup>6</sup>. In August of 1877, Chief Papastayo agreed to the terms of Treaty 6 at Fort Edmonton on behalf of his band of about 241 followers. Papastayo selected an area for their Reserve approximately four miles south of the North Saskatchewan River, directly across the river from the original site of Fort Edmonton. Soon after making this decision, trouble started. A large and vocal group of settlers and citizens of the Edmonton area did not want the Papaschase Indian Band Reserve No. 136 to be anywhere near the growing settlement of Edmonton. They argued that the Reserve would impede the growth and development of the town and deny the settlers access to valuable resources and fertile land. A newspaper of the time, The Edmonton Bulletin, advocated that the Papaschase Band “be sent back to the country they originally came from” (Maurice, 2001, p. 4).

In the end, the settlers got their wish. The members of the Papaschase Band, forced to wait while their Treaty rights hung in limbo, were left destitute and hungry for several years after the signing of Treaty 6 and the disappearance of the buffalo. Eventually, the members either took Métis scrip<sup>7</sup> thus forfeiting their Treaty status or simply moved to other reserves in the Edmonton area. On November 19, 1888, three adult males who were living on the Enoch Reserve surrendered the rights of the Papaschase Band to Reserve No. 136.

My parents' home is located on the very land that was surrendered that day. I grew up in that part of the city of Edmonton, went to school, ran in the parks, rode my bike on the streets, threw rocks in the river, played hockey, shoveled snow, kissed girls, walked my dog, went to the movie theatre, visited my grandparents, shopped at the farmers' market, studied at the University of Alberta (which, ironically, has a Papaschase

Room in its Faculty Club), and no one ever said a word about it. No one knew about it. How do these things get swept under the carpet so completely? How do people's lives get erased from collective memory so easily?

The current leaders of the re-established Papaschase Band have filed court documents outlining their case against the Canadian government in which they seek compensation for the wrongful removal of Treaty and land rights. My dad, his family, and our relatives are considered Papaschase members, and we stand to benefit from any court decisions that favour the Papaschase case. In all likelihood, they will win some form of compensation. This raises the possibility that my family and I could receive some form of "official" recognition as Indians with membership in the Papaschase Band. Finally, I could answer the question that has been plaguing me for so many years with a clear and definite answer:

"Where are you from?"

"Papaschase."

"Where's that?"

"Edmonton."

This (hi)story is a significant part of this interpretation of the métissage because I think it reminds us that identities are continually being recreated. That I have uncovered, in part, some of my origins, my relations, my place(s) does not mean that my identity has now been discovered, and that my inquiry is over. Nor does it mean that, since I have located a "past of my own," it will no longer be necessary for me to participate in Blackfoot ceremonies and customs like the Sundance. What it does mean is that I have begun a process of identifying as an Aboriginal person rather than pursuing constrictive

conceptions of identity arising from (post)colonial discourse. Identifying denotes “a process of being and becoming what one is in the [historical] moment” that “one identifies as an Aboriginal person and in the contextual place where one identifies” (Restoule, 2000, p. 103). This emphasis on identifying self through historical place and placement resonates with Goodson’s (1998) belief that teachers’ life stories must be developed into life histories if they are to have value as political, social, cultural, collective, and contextual texts. It is worthwhile to quote Goodson (1998) at length:

To locate our ongoing narrative requires sources that develop our social history and social geography of circumstances and in many instances collaboration with others to provide contextual and intertextual commentary. Alongside *narration*, therefore, we need *location* and *collaboration*. . . . Collaboration and location allow us to get a finer sense of the emergent process of self-building and storytelling and allow us to provide a social context of the time and space in which the story is located. (p. 11, emphasis in original)

To “locate” and “collaborate” our narratives requires an awareness of the interconnectedness of our stories. The interaction and juxtaposition of memories and life experiences that constitute this métissage facilitate an intertextual encounter that situates all three histories in the realm of shared social experiences. Alone, my memories and experiences as a teacher seem parochial without the consideration of the influences of the elder and student as well as the historical, social, and political forces that have brought us together at Kainai High School. Spurred on by this interactive process of (hi)story telling, the individual and collective (re)shaping of our identities is a salient feature of the curriculum dialogue on the Blood Reserve.

## II

That Two-29<sup>8</sup> Shit

Let's all do that two twenty-nine  
Spare no expense, I'm doing just fine  
Off to the dealers, give me a beer  
Hey little lady, daddy's right here  
Ain't nobody's birthday, no pow wow tonight  
It's two-29, and I'm feeling alright.

My Indian Reservation Life

Take a blade of grass  
And drop it on the lawn  
Now go try and find it  
Where has it gone?

This place, this reservation. It's small when you compare it to the outside world, but people can get lost here forever. Since I have been living in Standoff I see these guys walking down the street, or Moses Lake, everywhere I am, they have been here their whole entire lives. It's like they don't even exist.

I could just give up on school if I wanted to. Could just give up on everything and go hang out in Standoff every day. That's what I see my cousins doing, that's all they do, just hang around everyday, sit around. It would be hard for me to exist like that. To not be going in a certain direction. It's like a loss of hope. My Indian Reservation Life.



*Individuality comes first. You come first. You have to deal with yourself as an individual. Self awareness. What's wrong with me? Am I in good health? Physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally. If all of these are at par, if I do a little prayer each day in any way—that's our choice—we have to look after our spirit. If we neglect our spirit, a student strays away, they're off balance because our spirit needs spiritual food. When we pray any way then we are giving it spiritual food.*

*That's why when I talk about being a holistic person, these students don't care. They seem like they don't want to listen to being a holistic person. That's individuality. That's important. If a student or person has that holistic attitude in life then they can do anything that they want to strive for. They can achieve it. I know it. It's important.*

*The elders. I'd sit down with an elder and he's gonna tell me: "Iiyika'kimaat! Kaamsowaiistsiiniki." If you don't use your listening, if you don't use your ears, you hurt yourself. Better help yourself by listening. He's gonna be telling a lot of things. And he's gonna tell me, after he's gonna finish talking, he's gonna ask me, "Paraphrase what I have just told you." So I paraphrase. When I finish talking, he's not gonna come back and tell me another question. Initiative. The elder would sit, "Okki, amoyi ahkootsiitapiiyoop." We'll use the circle. Here we'll visualize. We'll visualize what I'm gonna be doing in the future. I'm gonna think about how I'm gonna go about it. Then there's gonna be movement. Then we'll see it. That's initiative. "Sapataniip ni kiitsipoowasin iis sapahtaaniip." We didn't just talk about it. We're being initiative.*

*I learned it from the elder. That's why I use the circle.*

“How do you know that’s true? Have you been there?” said the young man with the red hair and freckles. His question was more like a challenge, and he and I both knew it. As I frantically searched my brain for the right answer, and my discomfort became evident, a sneer crossed his face as he sat up straight in his desk. As he did that he also began looking around the room at the other students, perhaps seeking approval for his accomplishment. I noticed that some of the students I had developed friendships with had expressions of disappointment on their faces. I felt foolish.

This incident occurred during my first round of student teaching at a large Calgary high school in December 1991. The class that I was teaching was Social Studies 20 and the topic was Global Interdependence. We had been spending much of our class time examining quality of life issues in the developing world, and this was a favorite topic of mine because I was quite familiar with the themes and materials. I had a personal interest in developmental issues and the related political, historical, and economic causes, and felt competent. On this particular day, I was guiding the class through a review of themes we had covered on birth control issues in the developing world. I was describing to the class a poster that was produced by the Nigerian government and plastered all over the place in an effort to encourage the use of birth control. The poster received a negative reaction from many people, and I was explaining to the class the reaction that the regular person on the street had to the poster.

Then, he sprung the question on me. I was unprepared; I had not anticipated such a question. To me, that question struck at the root of my personal dilemma as a teacher: How can I “teach” with conviction about such things if I have no direct experience with these issues? The student with the red hair was right. How did I know? After all, I had

been ranting to them about the unreliability of textbook information. I had been imploring them to read critically and form their own judgments. Yet, here I was passing information on to them that I had briefly read about in some magazine some time in the past. I struggled to answer the question because I immediately realized that I was caught. In a sense, I had given the students the impression that I was very knowledgeable of development issues, but in reality I knew very little. How could I? I had never been to the developing world.

I remember going home and unloading all of this on my wife. Soon after, we applied to several international development agencies and began considering possible places to go. I was stuck on Africa and insisted that we request postings in any fairly safe African country that used English as an official language. After speaking with several people, Kenya became our number one choice. The day the letter of acceptance arrived at our home, I remember thinking that we were getting ready to embark on a very important phase of our lives. I can remember saying to myself: "It's time for a real education!"

I am happy to report that Kenya was a very welcoming place once we became familiar with the ways things are done there, and how people communicate with each other. We went on a tour of Kenya and parts of Tanzania, and learned the specific history and political economy of each region. We were given lessons in Kiswahili, the lingua franca of East Africa. But more importantly, we began to recognize and avoid situations that were or could become dangerous for us. After about two months of exposure and adjustment to the culture, language, and lifestyle of average Kenyans, I was offered the opportunity to teach at a school located in a massive slum in Nairobi's Mathare Valley. I

would be teaching English and a course called Geography, History, and Civics to Form Six and Seven students who were from ages 12 to 15.

I am a teacher who believes that the best way to connect with students and to help them connect themselves with course materials is to draw from their personal experiences. As I walked into the crammed classroom on my first day, the overwhelming task of creating something meaningful for these kids hit me smack in the face. Of course they were giddy that a “mzungu” or foreigner was going to be teaching them, and they felt honoured, but what was I going to do to live up to the hype? I had been around the slum over the past few weeks and saw how they lived. Shanties constructed of discarded material, dirt floors, raw sewage in the ditches and gullies, coal burning gikos to cook on, huge piles of garbage in the open spaces, a river that had become a thick, putrid moving mass of garbage, disease, and filth, and crowds of people. Electricity was not available nor was there any plumbing, heating, or sewage. When it rained (which it does quite regularly in Nairobi), the streets and walkways became pits of mud, and the sewage and garbage ran down the hill with the rainwater through people’s homes. What was *I* was going to teach *them*?

Eventually, however, we did manage to set into a routine that seemed to work quite nicely. We would begin each class with any questions they had for me regarding the developed world. Sometimes these questions would digress into lengthy lectures. Then, I would usually try to relate the topic to what the related situation was in Kenya or other parts of Africa, and then make a weak segue to the topic we were studying. The imposition of the colonial system of education still strongly existed in the minds of the teachers and students in this school and, at times, undermined the effectiveness of this

exercise. All of the students, clad in threadbare British style school uniforms, had been trained to sit in silence either listening to the teacher or working on their own. Anyone who stepped out of the confines of these expectations was usually reprimanded, sometimes severely. Each class had a captain, normally the largest and most obedient male student, who had the job of helping the teacher keep everyone in line, thereby limiting any expressions of individuality or dissension. Imagine, then, me trying to promote discussion in such an atmosphere. Most were reluctant to say anything to me, and usually the captain would ask brief questions that seemed to have been generated by the group as a whole some time earlier. I got the impression that the captain was only asking these questions out of a sense of duty; they were asked to please the teacher. I did make some progress this way, but it was limited. I do have fond memories of the sound of laughter in the classroom near the end of my stint at the school.

There were numerous other problems I encountered while teaching in the Mathare Valley. The issue of language was a difficult one. Most of the students understood spoken English fairly well, but not the way I spoke it. I took to using my growing knowledge of Kiswahili in the class to supplement, but that created problems too. Resources were limited and one had to try to think creatively in order to try something new. Ignoring the textbooks was problematic as well because the students were required to purchase them, and this was a substantial part of their meager family income. Homework was not really an option either because most students had jobs to do for their families after school, and would not really have free time until the evening. It was not possible, however, for most to do homework in the evening because they did not have enough light in their homes to see what they were doing.

The main problem I had while teaching was the tension I felt from other teachers. They were all Kenyans and seemed to be threatened or concerned by my presence at the school. They may have thought I was a spy, would make them look bad, disrupt the control they had over the students, or cause them to lose their jobs. I had witnessed several beatings of students and made it known that I strongly disagreed with the treatment given to the students by most of the teachers. I even wrote a report on my observations and recommendations, and submitted it to the Director of the school. He was very enthusiastic about it, but I think he was just trying to placate me until I left. The atmosphere of fear and repression was so strong among the students that they would dread even the approach of a teacher. I often think of one young man whom seemed to enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of the classes I taught. After class one day, several of his classmates (including the captain) approached me and told me that I must beat him. There was an urgency in their voices that alarmed me and made me wonder what would happen to that cheerful student when I left.

So, what had I learned? There is an image in my mind of barefooted children playing amongst piles of garbage while goats grazed on whatever remained edible in the piles. I have tried to imagine what those children, now nine years older, are doing. What are their hopes, their fears? I hold on to that image because it helps me stay focused on the truly important in life. Fundamental aspects of our lives here in Canada are dreams that those friends of mine in Mathare have. I have the responsibility of making other people aware of what it is really like to live in a slum in the developing world. As a teacher, I have the unique opportunity to do this, and this has been a major focus of my activities in high school social studies. Those people in Nairobi taught me the strength of

the human spirit, the genuine kindness of that spirit, and the respect I should have for the life that I lead. I also came to understand the terrible oppression that most people in the world live under and the negative consequences of this on the life of the common woman, man, or child struggling to make sense of it all. With a sense of grim satisfaction, I felt ready to face that redhead (or his successor) with conviction.

## II

**In what ways do our responses to challenges and obstacles reflect our life experiences and influences?**

As a group of Natives walks along, an elder shares a Coyote story. The Trickster is summoned to Ottawa by the government. The Prime Minister thanks him for coming and asks for his assistance in solving their Indian problem. Coyote, always eager to help, replies, "Sure, what's the problem?" (Weaver, 1997, p.154)

Thomas King gave a presentation called "Indians in America: Culture, Photography, and the Vicissitudes of Postcolonial Studies" at the University of Lethbridge in 2001. The presentation was unique in that King used a slide show to illustrate and accentuate aspects of the story he told of travelling around the United States looking for Native American artists to photograph. For me, the central problem that arose from the presentation was how to depict Native American artists in their home environments while also recognizing their sources of inspiration. Through various humorous twists in the story we learned that this was very difficult to do. At the request of Thomas King, many of the artists donned Lone Ranger masks for their photos, presumably to demonstrate the elusiveness of depicting the unique character of each artist. The mask wearing also playfully re-created dated television characters like The Lone Ranger and Tonto in (post)colonial settings. The uncertainties of the (post)colonial were evident throughout the presentation, but were poignantly expressed by King's fictional friend, Hartley Good Weather, when he repeatedly asked, "Is this a problem culture can solve?"

Culture is surely one of the most complicated words in the English language (Aoki, 1996, p. 404). Despite its ineffability, many people refer to culture as a thing, as



something substantive that can be articulated and statically maintained. In Aboriginal circles, culture is often described as something from the past that must be somehow preserved in its present (or former) condition or it will be lost. I believe that King is encouraging us to remember that culture is a process rather than a thing, a concept implying action by people and an ongoing coming-to-terms with the influences, structures, and life experiences that constitute our lives (Aoki, 1996, 20n). The various obstacles or ambiguities that come to light in King's story point to the confusion and ambivalence of being Aboriginal in a (post)colonial world. That culture could solve such problems suggests that King wants us to see culture as an active agent that is an expression of positive human adaptation to changing circumstances. This does not mean that the past is irrelevant; rather, the past helps us interpret the present and generate hope for the future. Thus, the culture of a nation (such as the Kainai Nation) is not

a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which the people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. (Fanon, 1966, p. 188)

Seen in this way, the action of doing culture works to unite the past, present, and future through the actions of individuals who together create and re-create collective notions and expressions of national culture. Culture can help solve problems when people reflect on their life experiences, and what has influenced those experiences, and use these to help them make decisions and take actions in their lives.

When we reflect on our life experiences, we often use narratives to relate these stories and experiences to others. Narratives play a central role in the process of reflecting on one's own life experiences because in telling them, we are required to take inventory of our memories and influences. This process, in turn, generates an "ongoing autobiographical activity" of narrated life experiences that we can consult before we make decisions or take actions (Wetherell, 1991, p. 93). The coherence of narratives is provided through the integration of three interrelated concepts of time and life experiences: *value* or the worth "we attach to the present," *purpose* or the "sense of future possibility and aspirations," and *meaning* or "memory and [our] interpretation of the past" (p. 93). In this way, narrative memory is continually developed through the constant interplay and interaction in-between the past, present, and future. From this sort of diachronic conversation emerges an appreciation and awareness of the unsettled conception of culture that is always a manifestation of the past, as well as, an expression of future possibilities (Macleod, 2000, p. 451).

What do we mean, then, by Aboriginal culture? Following Fanon (1966), I believe that Aboriginal culture is made up of the life experiences, memories, and influences of Aboriginal people, and the multifarious ways that they choose to describe and interpret their existence, and ongoing re-creation, in multiple forms and genres. Both young and old, reserve and urban, full and mixed-blood, and all of the variations and permutations on the borders in-between and outside of these extremes contribute to our understanding and interpretations of Aboriginal culture. Like identity, culture needs to be viewed as an active process of becoming through an awareness and interpretation of the effects of social transformation, change, adaptation, (im)balance, and (dis)harmony

(Barcham, 2000, p. 138). This is a form of cultural synthesis as described by Freire (1970) in that this process serves to confront culture and facilitate transformation and renewal (pp. 180-186).

So, our experiences with, and understandings of, culture(s) provides a kind of framework that helps make sense of the social, political, economic, and historical environments encountered as we live our lives. This is a form of world naming, as described by Freire (1970), which suggests an extensive and personalized reflection on the realities of being human and living in the world that enables us to read the world:

[Human beings] *are* because they *are* in a situation.... Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very conditions of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be 'in a situation'... *Intervention* in reality—historical awareness itself... results from the *conscientizacao*<sup>9</sup> of the situation. (Freire, 1970, pp. 100-101, emphasis in original)

Aamsskáápohtópii displays a unique kind of historical awareness by writing poems about welfare dependency and Indian reservation life. The title “That Two-29 Shit” refers to the amount of money (\$229.00) that single, childless adults receive in welfare payments from the Province of Alberta each month. That poem—juxtaposed with the other poem called “My Indian Reservation Life,” and the text of his comments—is evidence of Aamsskáápohtópii’s awareness of the historicity and situationality of the Kainai people, as well as, an attempt to portray the realities of living in the particular places and spaces that he has occupied. From another point of view, the elder Siipista’pinii seems to be offering a strategy or approach to reality that people could use to escape from the rather depressing and seemingly hopeless scenarios described by Aamsskáápohtópii. The

elder explains the importance of the circle and uses it to describe ways that individuals can alter or challenge their realities through listening, planning, and taking initiatives. Mixed with these two texts is my own story of acting to change or improve my own awareness as an educator through travelling to Kenya and teaching at a school in the Mathare Valley slum. Each set of texts, from the student, the elder, and the teacher, describes situationality and an awareness of the historical, sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and subjective realities that shape our lives. Whether or not we can challenge and transform those realities, and how that might be accomplished, is the point of contention that links these texts.

They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men [and women] live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. (Fanon, 1966, p. 32)

Fanon was describing a town inhabited by “natives” somewhere in Africa, but the description applies to most colonial and (post)colonial settings around the world. Societies like Canada are unique in the world since settlers, mostly from Europe, migrated in large numbers to actively displace the original inhabitants. The advent of the Reserve system, conceptualized first with the negotiation of treaties in eastern Canada, limited the ability of Aboriginal people to disrupt the peaceful takeover of their lands by immigrant farmers (Buckley, 1992, pp. 32-34). The dilemma of the reserve, and hence the “native town,” is that it has become a homeland—a special place shared by relatives

and friends—and a preserve of distinct cultural traits and practices, and paradoxically, a government-created and -administered pocket of isolation often wracked by social and economic despair. Whether viewed as good or bad, or both, it seems clear that the “isolation of the reserve is the very essence of its being” (Buckley, 1992, p. 11).

This sort of ambivalence is evident in the poem entitled “My Indian Reservation Life.” In this poem, Aamsskááphokítópii signals a sense of loss of, perhaps, a better life in the past. The aspects of life from the past that are being yearned for or silently memorialized in this poem are unclear, but the poem does give the impression that life on the Kainai Reserve used to be better, used to reflect a closer connection to traditional Blackfoot culture, and consequently fostered a unified sense of community togetherness. What has caused this loss is also unclear, but the poet’s comments, with the focus on people getting “lost here forever” as though “they don’t even exist,” point to the social, economic, political, cultural, and historical forces that have brought about this change: government control, dependency, and welfare. The isolation of Aboriginal people on reserves could not have continued on for so long without the active consent and support of the Canadian government.

McConaghy (2000) sees “Indigenous incapacity” as a determining factor in the development and institutionalization of Aboriginal government relations and a (post)colonial discourse. Indigenous incapacity suggests that Aboriginal people are, because of their unfortunate biological and cultural characteristics, unable or unwilling to work, become educated, conform to mainstream standards, or adapt to change without government-directed assistance that requires coercion and assimilation. Dyck (1991) calls

this “coercive tutelage,” that is a form of restraint or care for the good of those being tutored (p. 24). Dyck articulates the uniquely Canadian understanding of the term:

What is unusual about the particular form of tutelage experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada... [is that it]... has been based neither upon a contractual agreement nor a negotiated understanding but upon the power of one side to regulate the behaviour of the other in accordance with a set of unilaterally selected purposes... the form of tutelage that has held Indians captive for so long has not merely been a temporary stage in the life cycle but a permanent condition.  
(p. 24)

This quote draws attention to the specific ways in which the lives of Aboriginal people in Canada have been influenced by the economic, social, political, and legal controls exercised by the Canadian government over reserves since the treaties were negotiated. This means that the economic underdevelopment of reserves and the low socio-economic living conditions of Aboriginal people living on reserves have been caused by the very fact that the political economy of Canada has developed through the exclusion and exploitation of Aboriginal people, their lands, and their resource base (Jarvenpa, 1992, p. 127). Among Aboriginal people, there are many stories chronicling the restrictions of the Indian Act<sup>10</sup>, but the overall effect has been the legal handicapping of Aboriginal people in their ability to improve the economic, social, and political systems on reserves. A former Indian Agent on the Blood Reserve, Robert Wilson (1921), has written a book that documents how officials working for the Department of Indian Affairs in the years after World War One systematically and purposefully destroyed the farming and ranching enterprises of the people of the Bloods. After similar failures of farming and ranching

initiatives on reserves across Canada, many Aboriginal people were forced to work off the reserve, with the permission of the Indian agent, for farmers and ranchers at minimum wage or less (Buckley, 1992, pp. 53-58). After World War Two, mechanization and improved technology lessened the demand for wage labourers, and these changes left many Aboriginal people unemployed. "The people would have to find new ways to support themselves, but, already handicapped by poor education<sup>11</sup>, they were rapidly becoming more so as education and skill levels in the mainstream labour force moved steadily upwards" (p. 71). Social assistance, or the welfare system, was thus introduced on reserves in Canada and made widely available, thereby enhancing dependency on the government and the control exercised by government officials. "Social assistance reinforced feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness that had been building since the treaties" (p. 78).

Aamsskááphkitópii knows very little of this specific history. Yet, his poetry illustrates an intimate understanding of what has happened to his people over the years. The mood of welfare recipients in the few days after they receive their cheques in his poem "That Two-29 Shit" both resists government intervention and celebrates that resistance. The day that the welfare cheques arrive is an important event on the Blood Reserve because many individuals and families finally have some money to spend. Children and young adults are often absent from school, and some might remain absent until all the money is spent. Aamsskááphkitópii describes the typical reaction of young adult men to their cheques. That they would chose to spend their welfare money on partying, despite its links to serious social problems, protests the idea that the Canadian government thinks that such a meager sum of money is any form economic development

or opportunity. As a social studies teacher, I have often explained to my students the relationship between tax collection and social services, and many of them find it humorous that average working Canadians are paying for them to party. Many express the view that the money is due to them as payment for the takeover of their ancestral lands for very little actual cost, but tremendous economic benefit, to the citizens of Canada. Aamsskááphkitópii, through this poem, shows the despair of dependency associated with social assistance on reserves, but he also captures the irony of Aboriginal people using the money, intended to lessen the burden of grinding poverty, to party. This is a collective nose-thumbing at the Canadian government, and average Canadians, whom they blame for the poor living conditions they have experienced their whole lives. The poem suggests that Aamsskááphkitópii has an awareness of the self-destructive nature of this protest; by spending the money in such wasteful ways, Aboriginal people are really only hurting themselves. However, as people with very little political, social, or economic influence, this is perhaps the only form of resistance left. After all, what could be more depressing than waiting for a government cheque to arrive?

An added layer of the poem "That Two-29 Shit" is the impact of social assistance on Aboriginal families and the decreased ability of a man to take care of, and provide for his family (Buckley, 1992, pp. 78-79). Prior to the introduction of social assistance on reserves, families were poor, but worked together doing whatever jobs they could to earn income and sustain themselves. Many Kainai families tell stories of picking sugar beets in Taber or travelling to Washington state to pick apples during this era. "These activities had given them a certain autonomy and preserved their self-respect" (p. 78). With social assistance, dependency was reinforced, families fell apart, and men became increasingly



disenchanted and emasculated. Now, men<sup>12</sup> on reserves live their entire lives without ever working for wages or earning some sort of income. This accounts for Aamsskáápohtópii's description of people who "just hang around everyday," have given up on their lives, and lost hope in the future. Yet, Aamsskáápohtópii separates himself from the people he describes by stating that it would be hard for him "to exist like that." Reading that statement draws my attention to the poem "My Indian Reservation Life" because, in it, the poet asks where that life has gone? The irony is that that life, just like the "blade of grass," can be found right where it was left. There is an opportunity to recover and rediscover the vestiges of life on the reserves that are beneficial, character building, and full of hope. Most often, exposure to these comes through involvement and participation in community development, ceremonies and societies, and the schools. Of course, the elders often play a prominent role in such efforts and activities.

The text from Siipista'pinii is a fine example of the kind of guidance available from the elders of the Blood Reserve. The tradition of elders teaching values through the telling of ancient stories and life experiences is age-old, and offers direction to the listener without insisting on a specific course of action; each person must follow his or her own path (Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2001, pp. 31-32). The elder, Siipista'pinii, provides guidance to but also gives insight into, the struggles and frustrations of, many Aboriginal young people today. His story contrasts their ways of thinking with those imparted to him by elders and employed by him since his younger days. In agreement with Siipista'pinii, Regnier (1994) has written that the root cause of the social and cultural disharmony and disenchantment on reserves is the abnegation of Aboriginal

metaphysics and the teachings of the elders from the everyday lives of Aboriginal people. “They are alienated from community as community itself disintegrates, and they find themselves in a world of random occurrences without order and meaning” (p. 136). Siipista’pini grew up in another era, and his influences and life experiences are in stark contrast to those of most of the students at Kainai High School. His exposure to the elders, language, and ceremonies as a youth, as well as, his experiences with work off the Reserve have given him significant exposure to Kainayssini and the opportunity to put to use the life lessons these have taught him. He has seen the circle put into action and has benefited from its uses.

Regnier (1994) refers to the “sacred circle” as an intrinsic part of Aboriginal ways of knowing, spirituality, and metaphysics. Using the sacred circle as symbol and metaphor, he articulates a theory of process pedagogy:

Process pedagogy, constructed fundamentally upon reality as process, views human experience as part of the whole movement of reality rather than isolated from it and others in it... In contrast to the self as isolated in continuing, separate, successive moments in time, self is the reiterative cycle of encounter, adjustment, and resolution... [The] teachings of the Sacred Circle... are accounts of reality passed from generation to generation through legends, storytelling, and participation in rituals and ceremonies... Process pedagogy within the Sacred Circle view is based upon the movement of life to wholeness, connectedness, and balance. (pp. 131-134)

What Regnier describes in theory, Siipista’pini explains through story and the sharing of his memories and life experiences. They are different modes of communication with a

similar message: the circle and the use of process pedagogy help individuals maintain holistic balance, initiate positive action, visualize future goals, and achieve those goals. Siipista'pinii's statement expresses an awareness of the "off balance" deposition of many students who "don't care" or "don't want to listen to being a holistic person." Yet, rather than lecturing the students on their failures and misunderstandings, the elder uses process pedagogy. During planning meetings of the Elder Mentor Program at Kainai High School, Siipista'pinii has repeatedly declined to set the "curriculum" for the Program. Instead he reminds the teaching staff that the students must ultimately decide what they want to learn and remember. Through his refusal, he teaches the teachers about teaching, and ensures that his involvement with the students contrasts with their regular school experience where teachers set the agenda, and is in agreement with his views of Blackfoot epistemology and pedagogy. The Elder Mentor Program, as directed by Siipista'pinii, can thus be seen as an example of the Kainai version of process pedagogy. As an example of this approach, I recall speaking to Siipista'pinii about some students in my classes who expressed a fear that they would do something wrong if they were to participate in ceremonies or observances. I explained that these students were interested in learning more about some of the rules and customs associated with such things before they participated in them so that they would not embarrass themselves. Without hesitation, Siipista'pinii told me that the students were getting ahead of themselves if they expected to get "prior" information. He made it clear that learning about such things comes in the process of participating and doing. In other words, young people have to take the initiative to learn about Kainai customs and ceremonies by making a commitment to the process itself.

The process by which I went to teach in Kenya is an intriguing example of the universality of process pedagogy. Just as Siipista'pini advises, I took the initiative to visualize what I wanted to do, then I planned on how my goal could be achieved, I took the necessary steps, and my goal was achieved. I went through this process, as many people from many walks of life do, without the direct guidance of an elder or advisor. Initially, I felt that the end result, teaching in the Mathare Valley, was more important than the process I went through to get there. Now, I know that the entire experience of arranging to go to Kenya, being there, and coming home again was infused with personal and professional lessons of identity, (post)coloniality, conscientization, and praxis. Making sense of what has been learned and working to apply it to my classroom practices and professional development has been an ongoing process for me since I returned from Kenya and began teaching at Kainai High School. This is a reflexive process that reframes my "personal practical knowledge" by reconstructing the past with an eye to intentions for the future, as a way to deal with the demands of the present situation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 1).

The personal process of reconstructing the past has caused me to come to terms with my affinity for teaching in communities suffering from the effects of (post)colonialism. Even though most of my life experiences, influences, and memories stem from the twenty-four years that I lived in Edmonton, I chose to remove myself from that setting, or a similar context, once I became a teacher. That I seek to teach in such places suggests that I have an appreciation for the struggles of displaced and disenfranchised people as well as an interest in helping to revitalize the communities that they inhabit. How this propensity developed and why I seek out such places are two of

the unanswered questions in my life. One thing that I do know, however, is that my experiences in Kenya, and my development as a teacher in the Mathare Valley, have had a profound impact on my identity as a teacher and, concomitantly, my identity as an Aboriginal person. What I learned in Kenya prepared me to teach at Kainai High School and interact with the Kainai community in rewarding and personally enriching ways.

In Kenya, I received an intimate and sobering education about the social, political, economic, and historical legacies of British colonial rule. I made friends with young men who had very little hope of employment that would enable them to support comfortably themselves and their families, even though most had completed secondary school. I visited people in shanty homes who struggled daily to survive surrounded by garbage and sewage, but found time to volunteer and develop programs for youth. I remember cowering on a bus while street vendors rioted, burned vehicles, and looted in downtown Nairobi. I recall the strange feeling of being called “white” by my African friends and trying to explain how “Red” Indians (their term) were different from the Indians from India. I remember the disconcertedness of being called to the front of a very long line at a bank by a teller who thought I was more important than the other patrons simply because my skin was a lighter colour than theirs. These experiences and remembrances intensified my historical awareness and fostered my sense of social responsibility. Education is politics (Shor & Pari, 1999). The political education I received in Kenya on the (post)colonial condition began a process of conscientization that enabled me to decry Aboriginal issues in Canada in unexpected ways (Freire, 1976).

Perhaps, it is ironic that an Aboriginal person discovered his connections to Aboriginality in Kenya. Yet, I believe that my experiences in Kenya have helped me

critically examine the social, political, economic, and historical circumstances that constitute the Blood Reserve. This, in turn, has caused a personal exploration of my own connections to Aboriginality and an ongoing investigation of my own life, family (hi)story, origins, and places, and the recovery of stories and familial connections to people, spaces, and places that would have otherwise remained concealed. The distance travelled is far, yet these are the landscapes of my professional experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) explain the notion of “professional knowledge landscapes” for educators:

It allows us to talk about spaces, place, and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships. Understanding professional knowledge as comprising a landscape calls for a notion of professional knowledge as composed of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places, and things. (p. 2)

Acknowledging these landscapes, and the memories and influences associated with them, has been a vivifying part of writing this thesis. Teacher knowledge is formed and expressed in certain contexts. The coalescing of contexts and the intermingling of experiences creates confusion for educators that can only be worked out through praxis. Reminders of the big picture—the social, political, historical, and economic realities of a situation—may give teachers the wherewithal to comprehend the experiences and influences of those living in those conditions, and to take action which makes a difference to the people occupying such landscapes.

## III

The Good, the Bad, and the Indians is a satirical, more honest look at a new found struggle among our people's youth. The question that now plagues us is, who are we? Long past are the days of the tipi, and boarding schools are a generation ago. It's a subconscious identity crisis, perhaps a longing for a new stereotype rather than the big-nosed, long-haired, mean ol' Indian stereotype known before. This play is written, produced, performed, and intended for Native youth, as most adults are too easily offended. And just for their sake, I'll explain what my characters represent as I am not a heathen, nor am I sacrilegious. Jesus, in the play, represents morality and proper virtues at the heart of every human being. Unfortunately, much of the entertainment today seems to lack these qualities, as today's pop culture generation doesn't seem to enjoy good, wholesome, proper entertainment; this program is no exception as Jesus is absent for much of the play. Satan, on the other hand, represents our social issues, identity crisis, civil disobedience, hate, and tribal council embezzlement, rampant among our reservations. His major role in the play is largely due to ignorance and immaturity, please forgive me. Napii is the spirit behind our pride, which eventually drives us to sport our Cleveland Indian caps, or our Indian Motorcycle sweaters. Hence, Napii lives to help us pursue our ultimate goal of global dominance. And lastly, to all my non-Native audience members: lighten up, it was just a joke.

**MUSIC**

*Jesus enters.*

**MUSIC END**

**Jesus:** My it sure is wonderful to be back on earth. And this body, amazing! I could sing, jump, run, smile, I could do anything. And look at this beautiful land, it's breathtaking! All these fascinating plants and animals to enjoy, that magnificent fresh air. I could just go crazy!

*Jesus looks around the stage in awe.*

**MUSIC**

*Satan enters.*

**MUSIC END**

**Jesus:** Hey, what's going on? What are you doing here Satan?

**Satan:** I'm here to ask you that exact same question, Jesus. You see, I was just about to kick back on a forty and a couple of fat J's when I heard through the grapevine that Jesus Christ, goddamn it, is back on earth. And my it sure is pitiful to be back on this dirt pile. And this body, shit. I have to walk, talk, look around, I can't do anything. Look at his pissy land! It's a dump. All these dirty, smelly plants and animals, that polluted air. I could just go crazy!

**Jesus:** Anyways . . .

**Satan:** Anyways, I wasn't having such a bad day until you stuck your ugly face in my business, on this perfectly ruined Injun reservation.

**Jesus:** Your business?

**Satan:** Yes, the wagon-burners, the savages, the prairie- niggers, the Injuns, my business!

**Jesus:** You know, you shouldn't be so vulgar. They're Native Americans. And they are not your business. These are the people of the lord, calling for their savior. A beautiful race destined for greatness.

**Satan:** Are you speaking of the same alcoholic, drug-addicted, womanizing, thieves, murderers, and hate mongers that I am? I do believe you to be a liar. And doesn't your precious little bible state that thou shalt not lie!? Oh tell me



Jesus, save me, speak to me in tongues and say you ain't lying. Give it to me straight, oh holy one, are you trying to lie!?

Jesus: No, I am not lying. The Native Americans are a good people, just in bad circumstances. And I am here to reveal and break those circumstances.

Satan: Open your eyes, Jesus. I am those circumstances! And I am their savior. When they gotta laugh they go have a beer, smoke a little weed. When they gotta cry they go have another beer, smoke a little more weed. I have saved them time and time again. Look around you, churches everywhere. What makes you think they're gonna listen to some white guy in a dress now?

Jesus: I know they will listen. I also know that I am here to stop you now.

Satan: Stop me? What makes you think that I can be stopped? I am the beginning, the end, the climax of all evil! What's your name?

Jesus: Aw, c'mon, you know what my - -

Satan: I doesn't matter what your name is! Lick-my-ass!

Jesus: Now you're just getting to be a show-off. I'm sure we could work something out.

Satan: Like what?

Jesus: How about I get the Native Americans while you get the Caucasian people?

Satan: The what? Don't make me laugh, Jesus.

Jesus: What's wrong with that?

Satan: Shut up, don't be pulling my middle leg. I got plans, big plans. Soon enough these savages will be worshipping my big red ass. I am notorious, infamous, rebellious, I am the hate that has ruined these reservations and I will be the hate that ruins this world.

Jesus: Don't get ahead of yourself. You must get past the almighty Jesus!

Satan: Shut up, Jesus.

*Satan grabs Jesus and tosses him off stage. He peers over the ledge just to be sure, then begins laughing.*

Satan: (laughing) Who's gonna save these drunks now?

**MUSIC**

*Napii enters with bodyguard Tsako. Satan steps towards Napii, but Tsako gets in his face.*

**MUSIC END**

**Satan:** Who the hell are you?

**Napii:** What? Excuse me Tsako (gently pushes him aside). What?

**Satan:** Are you hard of hearing, boy? Who are you clowns?

**Napii:** We're the wagon-burners, the savages, the prairie niggers, we're the big bad Indians, bitch! What are you supposed to be? Some kind of super hero or something?

**Satan:** I am the beginning, the end, the climax of all evil! What's your name?

**Napii:** Shut up, weirdo. Tsako, kick his ass.

**MUSIC**

*Fight Scene. Satan vs. Tsako  
Tsako gets tossed off the stage.*

**MUSIC END**

**Napii:** You killed him.

**Satan:** You started it.

**Napii:** You killed him?

**Satan:** Are you gonna tell me who you are, or do you want to join your big bad Indian buddy?

**Napii:** Wait, you can't kill an Indian. Survivors, that's what we are.

**Satan:** Well what did I just do?

**Napii:** All you did was oppress my buddy Tsako. And if oppression hasn't killed us off in the last five hundred years, what makes you think it can do it now? We're from the back roads of the reservation, Indian cars, and Indian duration. You think you're bad? Shit, I'm straight outta Standoff, crazy motherfu@%\* called Napii!

**Satan:** So what, are you the chief?

**Napii:** I ain't no chief, I told you, they call me Napii.

**Satan:** Well Napii, I don't like you. How about I give you a bottle of hairspray and you leave. Go have a powwow, or whatever you savages do.

**Napii:** I'm not leaving. You see, Tsako and I were about to sit down to a nice piece of frybread and a hot bowl of stew, when I over heard my cousins gossiping about the Devil and Jesus fighting over my people. I'll tell you this now, we ain't gonna let a couple of fairy tales run our lives.

**Satan:** Fairy tales! Where do you get off calling the prince of darkness a fairy tale!?

**Napii:** Stories, characters, figments of some priest's imagination, fairy tales!

*In January the sixteenth, 1981, around eight o'clock.*

*In those days I'd been materialistic.*

*It's good to listen to our younger children. If a younger child wants to tell you something, there's a message coming. A person - - a child could be a saint, could be an angel yet.*

*The turnoff was a short distance across the river when we came back from Lethbridge. Our boy that died, Derek, was just a kid then. He told me, "Dad, drive me into town and I'll buy a few more things." I told him, "Let us drive home first, I'll do my chores. After I finish my chores, then I'll drive you into town."*

*Maybe ten minutes after that, head-on collision. I had a death experience. My spirit took off on me, left my body. I just seen the light come out, come on.*

*I was way over on this side. Those kids were drinking. There was sixteen-year-olds. They ran into me on my side. That's where I got this. My hand was crushed and this here was crushed. It was shock that took place after that. It's natural.*

*I must have been gone less than five minutes. That's why - - that's why I'm still - - my brain went through that. After that, that's when I had that experience of shock. All of the things I - - after I came out of the hospital about six months after I got home. I learned to take risks; I learned not to be afraid of the unknown. So peaceful. No pain. Feeling of no return. I will hear everything that's going on down here. I heard my boy praying beside my body. Helping me to get back to this earth. I believe that prayer was heard. It's important for the students that they have this faith in something.*

Bill and Joe are great runners. There is a photograph of them together, arms around each other, after they ran a cross-country race in Cutbank, Montana, when they were in Grade Seven. They look happy and proud, sporting happy and carefree looks typical of young athletes who love to compete and do well.

I can't really explain how they got so fast. Cross-country coaches normally have a role to play in the development of their best runners. They expect to work long hours developing endurance, introducing speed drills, imploring their athletes to run hills again and again in preparation for the next big race. Bill and Joe just showed up at the high school one day and asked if they could run. As coaches, we like to encourage younger runners, but we usually don't expect much interest and commitment from them. They trained a small amount, yet both of them always finished in the top ten of any race they entered. Joe even won a few races in Montana against school kids his age. The future of cross-country running at Kainai High School seemed very promising indeed. I couldn't wait to watch them compete at the high school level.

But then, things got complicated for both of them. Bill, who lived in Moses Lake with his grandparents, started sniffing gas. And it turned into an addiction. He was removed from his home after he was discovered sniffing gas in the Kainai High School washroom. He became the responsibility of social services and underwent drug abuse counselling and rehabilitation. During the period that Bill was having these troubles, Joe simply quit coming to school. No one, not even his friends or relatives, seemed to know where he was. "I heard he moved to Calgary," said one student. I wondered if I would ever see Bill or Joe again.

I was relieved to see both of them come to school in September 2001. Bill didn't look the same. The sniffing had affected him in some obvious and damaging ways, mentally, emotionally, and physically. His spirit was much diminished. He was withdrawn, much less responsive, and students avoided him because they thought he was unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Joe was the same as always—joking, restless, and anxious to start racing. When I asked him where he had been and why he had missed so much school, he shrugged and mentioned something about being “married.”

Bill and Joe both had excellent school attendance during the cross-country season. They trained hard for the month-and-a-half leading up to the South Zone and Provincial Championships. As though they were inseparable, both were South Zone Champions in their age categories and both finished fourth in the Provincials, and their performances led Kainai High School to a fifth consecutive Provincial Cross Country Championship. As they received their medals and the team hoisted the banner, I was approached by two running coaches from Calgary who wanted to know more about Bill and Joe. They were surprised and impressed by their performances, congratulated me for coaching them so well, and asked what their future plans were. The coaches were amazed to hear that the two runners had only been training for just over a month; most of the elite high school runners in Alberta train year round. It was becoming obvious that Bill and Joe were specially talented and gifted athletes. During the awards ceremony, I thought of the photograph taken of the two of them together when they were younger. Could these two stick together and continue to amaze people with their running talents?

Things fell apart soon after the cross-country season ended. Bill was caught sniffing and using drugs. He lost his temper and did some damage to the home of his

foster parent. He has since been removed from it and is currently living in a hotel with various social-service supervisors. Joe has been found guilty of various crimes and is currently serving time in the Young Offenders Centre. The hotel that Bill is living in is close to the Young Offenders Center, and he visits Joe once in a while.

I expect both Bill and Joe to be back in school and ready to run come September. However, one question plagues me: What will they do when they can't race anymore?

### III

#### **How are the influences of the (post)colonial discourse expressed in the Kainai community?**

Among the Kainai people, the story of *Tsako*, or Charcoal, is remembered with a complex mixture of fear and admiration. To some, *Tsako* was a crazy and dangerous man who threatened the lives of family, tribal members, and enemies alike during a two-month period in 1896. For others, his story is recalled with respect and admiration for the bravery and courage he showed, as well as, his adherence to the ancient Kainai tradition of ending his life with dignity and pride (Dempsey, 1978b, p. 28).

*Tsako* killed a tribal member named Medicine Pipe Stem, who was having an affair with his wife. This caused an intense manhunt for *Tsako*, directed by Major Sam Steele of the North West Mounted Police from his headquarters in Fort Macleod. The search involved several detachments in the surrounding area, as well as, numerous Kainai and Piikani scouts. *Tsako* confused and eluded them all for several weeks, despite many close calls and exchanges of gunfire. During one such incident—in which he was being chased on horseback by two North West Mounted Police, an interpreter, and three Blackfoot scouts—*Tsako* shot and killed Sergeant W. B. Wilde and escaped (p. 142). Eventually, *Tsako* was betrayed by members of his own family. The North West Mounted Police captured, arrested, and tried *Tsako*, and then they hung him from a scaffold that had been built in a corral near the barracks at Fort Macleod on March 16, 1897.

The preceding paragraph provides highlights of the main events of *Tsako*'s story. However, the specific details and aftermath of those events are still much in contention. Descendants of *Tsako* disagree with Dempsey's (1978b) account which describes



Tsako's character, motivations, and the events that took place during the fall of 1896. Even though Dempsey consulted many different Kainai and Piikani elders before writing *Charcoal's World*, many complain that, as an outsider, he did not have the ability or knowledge to write the story without misrepresenting what really happened. Not only is the task of translating from Blackfoot to English especially difficult and often inaccurate, both linguistically and culturally, but many also complain that there is a tendency to romanticize such stories to suit the needs of the author. I have been told that Tsako was a good man who just did what he had to do. But, I have also been told that Tsako's family suffered persecution and mistreatment from the North West Mounted Police and Canadian government officials as well as the Kainai people for a long time after Tsako was hung. These things have largely been forgotten.

I live with my family in Fort Macleod, the place where Tsako was hung. In this small town, there is a re-creation of the Fort that is a popular museum visited by thousands of tourists each year. Each summer, high school students are hired to conduct the North West Mounted Police musical ride for the tourists, many of whom travel to Fort Macleod just to witness the musical ride and tour the museum. In the summer, when all the tourists crowd around the Fort to watch the show, my four-year-old son loves to ride his bike there to enjoy the musical ride along with everyone else. We stand on the grass and lean against the fence, our fingers hooked on the links while we watch the horses take the riders through their paces. One day last year, when we were getting ready for bed, my son stated, with some hesitation, that he did not want to be an Indian anymore. Naturally, I was concerned and asked him what the problem was. "Indians always lose," was his response.

The legends, stories, histories and anecdotes of a colonial culture offer the subject a primordial Either/Or. *Either* [s]he is fixed in the consciousness of the body as solely negating activity *or* as a new kind of man [sic], a new genus. What is denied the colonial subject, both as colonizer and colonized, is that form of negation which gives access to the recognition of difference. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 75)

What have been the relationships between colonizer and colonized? How have understandings of these relationships influenced the ways in which people in former colonial societies interact, communicate, and express life experiences and memories? The example of Tsako and the setting of Fort Macleod can be considered a case study of the prevalent and ubiquitous varieties of (post)colonial discourses heard in many different sites around the world. In the same way that I struggle to hear Tsako's story in my own settings, other people in other parts of the world work to remember similar stories of repression, resistance, struggle, defiance, and opposition that have been suppressed, replaced, or misrepresented. As pointed out by Bhabha above, the (post)colonial moment occurs constantly in the ways that such stories, memories, and life experiences, whether from colonizer or colonized, interact with each other and influence the ways in which we communicate, behave, and perceive of ourselves and others. Tsako's story is a perfect example of this. Clearly, there was a clash between the traditional Kainai value system and the rule of law imposed by the Government of Canada. The course of action Tsako took and the response of the Canadian government through the North West Mounted Police can be seen as a form of discourse through which each group communicated, verbally and nonverbally, their particular subjective perceptions of reality. "A *discourse*

represents the ways in which reality is perceived through and shaped by historically and socially constructed ways of making sense, that is language, complex signs, and practices that order and sustain particular forms of social existence” (Leistyna, Woodrum & Sherblom, 1996, p. 336). In societies influenced by colonialism, perceptions of reality are often directly connected to the particular version of history considered most accurate and truthful, and thus most authoritative. (Post)colonial discourse, then, is the exchange between individuals in a formerly colonized society expressing their perceptions of reality, appropriate behaviour, versions of history, and values using heard and unheard, seen and unseen, written and unwritten methods of communication. This exchange always causes clashes, interactions, oppositions, responses, and conflicts, as well as, forms of cooperation and amelioration that often generate new types of knowledge and understanding. These influences come together to comprise the (post)colonial discourse.

(Post)colonial discourse is written with brackets as a way to symbolize and acknowledge the long-term and ongoing influences and impacts of the colonial process. To use postcolonial suggests that the influences of the colonial have been reduced; they have not. To use the single word ‘colonial’ implies that the discourse originates somewhere in the past and has not been brought up to date. Thus, the written concept of (post)colonial reminds that there is a past, present, and future character to such discourses; modes of communication; and social, political, economic, cultural, and historical experiences. It is not a concept denoting a period of time, “that is, the period of history *after* colonialism,” but instead refers to a notion of working against, beyond, and within colonial constructs to foment and promote something new, a third space of opportunity and re-creation” (McConaghy, 2000, p. 268-269).

Several (post)colonial theorists have had lengthy debates on the nature and purposes of discourse. Homi Bhabha (1994) has argued that an “important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness” (p. 66). Bhabha believes that the concept of fixity—as it relates to race, history, and culture—creates colonial stereotypes of both the colonizer and colonized which often play a prominent role in (post)colonial discourses. He criticizes the attention paid to the stereotype by colonial discourse theorists who tend to focus their efforts on “the ready recognition of images as positive or negative,” and argues that, instead, an understanding of the “*processes of subjectification*” that bring about and propagate stereotypical forms of discourse would better help us understand and interpret “the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs colonial identification subject” (p. 67, emphasis in original). To this end, Bhabha promotes a theory of colonial ambivalence to the mixed messages, forms of authority, and confused notions of identity and place that constitute (post)colonial discourses. In the effort to make sense of this ambivalent space, colonial subjects engage in acts of hybridization in which aspects of dominant and suppressed notions of identity, difference, culture, place, and discourse mix, subvert, and displace dominant norms and conceptions. According to Bhabha (1999), this process is important to recognize and interpret because of the change in focus it promotes:

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent oppression of native traditions, then an important change in perspective occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a

form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (p. 35, emphasis in original)

(Post)colonial discourse, then, is not a process pitting colonizer against colonized in a struggle to either oppress or to be heard. Rather, Bhabha sees this discourse as a coming together in the space in-between these two extremes, fostered by ambivalence, and working to generate hybrid forms of expression, interpretation, and understanding. This hybridity acts as a catalyst for intervention in-between conflictual (post)colonial relationships by articulating new conceptions of reality which subvert and contest commonly held notions, prejudices, stereotypes, and assumptions.

Spivak (1999) has questioned the ability of the oppressed to participate in (post)colonial discourses as Bhabha suggests. While recognizing and applauding the efforts of academics to include the views of marginalized people in historical accounts, Spivak wonders about the appropriateness and authenticity of constructing a speaking position for the oppressed (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1999, p. 8). She also contests the notion that the oppressed can speak and know their conditions in ways that can be investigated, categorized, measured, and identified by academics and intellectuals, because to do so is to essentialize and fictionalize colonial response and insurgency (Spivak, 1999, p. 27). Spivak argues that to impose intellectual analysis on (post)colonial discourse and the kinds of responses from the oppressed implies a form of “epistemic violence” that further silences colonial subjects (p. 24). “For her, one cannot construct a category of the ‘subaltern’ that has an effective ‘voice’ clearly and *unproblematically*

audible above the persistent and multiple echoes of its inevitable heterogeneity”  
(Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1999, p. 8, emphasis in original).

Benita Parry (1999) has criticized both Bhabha and Spivak for promoting (post)colonial theories which ignore the historical, political, social, and economic realities and struggles of oppressed and colonized people around the world. Her criticism of Spivak focuses on the contention that the colonized had no part in the (post)colonial discourse and that their responses were always determined and controlled by colonial forces:

[Spivak's] theorem on imperialism's epistemic violence extends to positing the native, male or female, as an historically-muted subject. The story of colonialism that she constructs is of an interactive process where the European agent in consolidating the imperialist Sovereign Self, induces the native to collude in its own subject(ed) formation as other and voiceless. [She]... gives no speaking part to the colonized, effectively writing out the evidence of native agency... (Parry, 1999, p. 37)

Parry's argument is that to dismiss the struggles of oppressed people by considering all forms of expression from such people as somehow co-opted and controlled by colonial forces is to blot out and ignore a significant and vital part of the (post)colonial discourse. Similarly, Parry's critique of Bhabha's theory of hybridity focuses on his lack of attention to the weight of the discourse provided by the oppressed. Parry (1999) argues that Bhabha's emphasis on the hybrid outcomes of (post)colonial discourse obscures the life and death struggles between opposing forces at various sites around the world, and discounts "the counter-discourses which every liberation movement records," promotes,

and disseminates as forms of protest, resistance, and subversion (p. 43). The problem, according to Parry (1999), is that because both of these “theses admit of no point outside of discourse from which opposition can be engendered, their project is concerned to place incendiary devices within the dominant structures of representation and not to confront these with another knowledge” (p. 43). For Parry (1999), the solution is to follow

Fanon’s theory [which] projects a development inseparable from a community’s engagement in combative social action, during which a native contest initially enunciated in the invader’s language, culminates in a rejection of imperialism’s signifying system. This is a move which colonial discourse theory has not taken on board, and for such a process to be investigated, a cartography of imperialist ideology more extensive than its address in the colonialist space, as well as a conception of the native as historical subject and agent of an oppositional discourse is needed. (p. 44)

The purpose of this interpretation is not to promote or support any particular (post)colonial discourse theory. The critiques and analyses from Bhabha, Spivak, and Parry that I have briefly summarized here provide conflicting, yet strikingly interconnected interpretations of (post)colonial interaction. Each theorist has emphasized, to greater or lesser extent, the impact that the (post)colonial experience has had on the ability of the colonized to adjust and respond to various forms of oppression. Bhabha promotes ambivalence and hybridity; Spivak argues that silencing and epistemic violence result; Parry praises community activism, and the vital and crucial role played by grassroots opposition groups. To promote one interpretation of (post)colonial discourse would be to falsely suggest that (post)coloniality is a condition that can be identified,

defined, explained, and interpreted in definitive terms. The experiences, people, events, and places that comprise (post)colonial discourse are diverse, dynamic, disorderly, and unpredictable. With these points in mind, it is apropos to say that the discourse theories of Bhabha, Spivak, Parry, and others, are all part of a métissage of perspectives and analyses that describe the condition of (post)coloniality that are expressed through a diverse assortment of forms and genres.

In the Kainai community, the impacts of (post)colonial discourse are expressed in various ways. Aamsskááphkitópii's play *The Good, the Bad, and the Indians* expresses the ambiguity of striving to maintain pride in cultural traditions in Aboriginal communities that have been heavily influenced by residential school education, assimilation, stereotypes, and Christianity. Through his writing, the student brings together Jesus, Satan, and Napii (the Blackfoot trickster), three major players in the consciousness of the Kainai people, in a modern-day struggle for control over the faith, spirit, and pride of Aboriginal people. Siipista'pinii tells of a near death experience resulting from serious injuries sustained in a car accident. His story reminds the listener of the importance of faith, hope, and adherence to values. I, as both teacher and coach, express my ambivalent feelings of both hope and despair that commingle in my description of my relationships with Bill and Joe. These experiences and perspectives, and the ways that people choose to express them, offer significant insight into the realities of the (post)colonial discourse in the Kainai community.

The postindian warriors hover at last over the ruins of tribal representations and surmount the scriptures of manifest manners with new stories; these warriors counter the surveillance and literature of dominance with their own simulations of



survivance. The postindian arises from the earlier inventions of the tribes only to contravene the absence of the real with theatrical performances; the theater of tribal consciousness is the recreation of the real, not the absence of the real in the simulations of dominance. (Vizenor, 1994a, p. 5)

Who are postindian warriors? Vizenor suggests that the warriors of today are activists involved in political and cultural expressions in opposition to dominant forms of discourse—"manifest manners"—that descend from the earliest days of interaction between Europeans and Aboriginal people. The postindian warriors are harbingers of a new era of Aboriginality proclaiming new narrative re-creations that resist and subvert stereotypical representations and dominance in (post)colonial discourses. The role of postindian warriors today is critical to the re-creation of Aboriginal cultures because colonial discourse has most often portrayed Aboriginal people as operating outside of society's norms. Thus, Aboriginal people emerge as excluded extras, errata, the dislocated tribe, never part of the main, haphazardly communicating misguided conceptions of reality. Postindian warriors announce the survival of their people by disturbing dominant discourses with new stories, modes of expression, and inventions that amalgamate humour with sobriety and show that, rather than being disparate and marginalized, Aboriginal people are integral to the (post)colonial landscape. These are not nostalgic rehashings of old stories, but manifold attempts to acknowledge, explain, and interpret creatively the mixture of influences which contribute to Aboriginal perceptions of the world and their roles in it.

It is interesting to note that perhaps the most popular aspects of Aboriginal culture to be re-created are the Tricksters and their stories. As McLeod (2000) points out,

Tricksters are a “manifestation of liminal space” and their stories are told as a way of making sense of living in this liminal space (p. 451). Tricksters can meditate between different layers of reality, bridge the distance between humans and animals, and provide narratives that link the past with the present (p. 452). In the effort to re-consider historical conflicts, disagreements, and disputes, then, the Trickster figure is a very useful border-crossing character whose mutability makes her/him capable of transecting many different (post)colonial settings and situations.

The trickster’s business is to disrupt and subvert social and cultural values while puncturing every pomposity and pretension. Through the very process of disruption, the world is imaginatively kept in balance. By trickster’s actions, the world is defined and re-created. (Weaver, 1997, p. 142)

Thus, the Trickster is a popular character in contemporary re-creations because s/he is a figure capable of disruption and subversion of dominant discourses in imaginative ways. Trickster stories can re-create community and help people see the realities of their communities in refreshing, and often humorous, ways.

Aamsskááphkitópii has told me that he believes that most people he knows do not want to hear Napii stories anymore. Instead, they just want to forget about them or “get over it,” as he put it. I, too, have noticed a pronounced indifference to Napii stories among the students at Kainai High School, as though the Trickster were a dead cultural artifact from a long ago era that may have been relevant to ancient ancestors, but seems to have slipped out of fashion, like some quaint fairy tale meant to entertain small children. These changing attitudes towards Trickster figures like Napii may have something to do with the overanalysis of Trickster figures by European academics who

interpreted Trickster stories as immature products of an uncivilized and underdeveloped culture. Vizenor (1994a) has pointed out that the European misunderstanding of Trickster figures stems from the use of noun-centered languages which focus on the Trickster as a person, what s/he does, and what that figure represents (p. 171). In contrast, many Aboriginal languages are verb-centered with an emphasis on actions and movements (p. 171). As a result, European interpretations tend to focus on the Trickster figure as a person and the values that person represents while Aboriginal people consider the actions, relationships, and decisions of the Trickster as integral to interpreting the lessons of the stories told.

Aamsskááphkitópii, as a postindian warrior, wrote the play *The Good, the Bad, and the Indians* as an attempt to reclaim and resurrect Napii and make her/him a vibrant entity in the Kainai community once again. Much of his writing locates and announces feelings of pride, however ambiguous and elusive they may be, and uses these to project images of identity that have been misplaced. He characterizes Napii as a tough, loyal, witty, and community-minded resident of Standoff, hardened by the realities of living on a reserve much like the writer's friends, relatives, and acquaintances from the Kainai community. Through the play, the community is reminded of Napii's role in their history and memories. Aamsskááphkitópii's play re-creates Napii as a role model for the Kainai people, someone who has survived and persevered by operating on the fringes and the spaces in-between, and in this way the play celebrates the Trickster as a source of pride. In the script, Napii disrupts and disturbs the positions held by the two main protagonists of Christianity, Jesus and Satan, as a way to circumvent the dominant discourses that have prevailed on reserves since the arrival of missionaries and the imposition of

residential schools. While many have interpreted this play as a subtle attack on Christianity, it seems more likely that Aamsskááphkitópii questions the dominance of such discourses and re-establishes space for Napii as a mutable figure capable of bridging gaps and sustaining balance in the community. Immersed in the realities of his people, the Napii re-created by Aamsskááphkitópii uses humour, sarcasm, negotiation, and wit to trick Satan into entering a contest with him that Satan could never win. To re-interpret the role of the Trickster in ways such as this is to engage in trickster hermeneutics. Vizenor says (1994a):

Trickster stories are the postindian simulations of tribal survivance. . . Trickster hermeneutics is access to trickster stories, and the shimmer of a tribal presence in simulations; this new course of tribal interpretation arises from the postindian turns in literature, the reach of tribal shadows, postmodern conditions of translation, the traces of deconstruction, and the theories of representation and simulation. Trickster hermeneutics is survivance, not closure, and the discernment of tragic wisdom in tribal experiences. (p. 15)

In order to involve young people in the re-creation and re-invention of tribal wisdom and memories, they must feel that current realities and emerging futures are intermingled with the stories and experiences of the elders. Aamsskááphkitópii's play *The Good, the Bad, and the Indians* helps his peers feel good about themselves, but it also demonstrates the possibilities that emerge when cultural memories are blended with current realities and struggles. The play clearly depicts the harsh realities of living in the Kainai community. As a survivor, Napii perseveres under such conditions and, through the play, comes to embody the latent pride of the Kainai community that has survived in

shadow forms, despite the ravages of assimilation, residential schools, political oppression, and economic deprivation. In other words, Aamsskááphkitópii shows us that Napii's presence in the Kainai community is palpable.

Thus, the significance of *The Good, the Bad, and the Indians* may be "the fact that since Native American communities and traditions have in many instances been shattered, the young must reinvent viable conditions of being Indian" (Sequoya, 1993, pp. 458-459). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1966) has also argued that the social, political, and cultural vitality and resurgence of colonized peoples depends on the levels to which the consciousness of young people are raised (p. 160). "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it" (p. 167). What is the mission of Aamsskááphkitópii's generation on the Blood Reserve? Perhaps, as postindians, their mission is to reply to dominant forms of (post)colonial discourse. They expand the boundaries of that discourse using methods and strategies that express identity and memory, defy stereotypes, and re-create Aboriginality. Aamsskááphkitópii is clearly a leader among Aboriginal young people in the effort to invent, communicate, and promote such replies. As a "native intellectual," he has "realize[d] that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge" (Fanon, 1966, p. 181). Fanon (1966) has suggested that "native writers," through their writing skills, create an awareness of the future among their people that evolves in three distinct phases (pp. 178-179). First there is a phase of proving that writers have assimilated into the culture of the colonizers. Aamsskááphkitópii, I would argue, is in-between the second phase when "the native decides to remember what he is," and the third, or fighting phase, when the native writer

works to awake or “shake the people” by striving “to compose the sentence which expresses the heart of the people” and articulates “a new reality in action” (p. 179).

Such theorizing can seem rather aggrandized and romanticized, however, in light of the daily realities of working and teaching in Aboriginal education. As I see it, a major role of a teacher is to work with students to facilitate positive change, improvement, and success. Yet, the influences of the (post)colonial discourse in the Kainai community often disrupt these efforts. It must be truly bewildering for a young Aboriginal person to be caught in the middle of the conflict still raging between cultural traditionalists who promote age-old values as the key to restoring harmony in the communities, and those who believe that the future lies in the success of Aboriginal young people in upholding Eurocentric academic and cultural standards. To balance these competing views is obviously the goal, but how many young people, even under more favorable circumstances, have the wherewithal to figure out how this can be done? Unfortunately, this dilemma is usually “accompanied by a good deal of collective and individual confusion and anxiety” that “is characterized by striking out against the larger society and feelings of alienation, loss of self and cultural identity, and by acculturative stress” (Berry, 1999, p. 9).

The Blood Reserve, as a (post)colonial landscape, is an anachronism, contrived by the Canadian government one hundred and twenty-five years ago, a product of another era that has remained structurally, politically, culturally, and economically incomplete (Carstens, 2000, p. 326). The Kainai people, as products of the segregation and confinement of the Reserve system, have suffered tremendous loss of life through alcohol and drug related accidents, murders, and suicides. This destructive “reservation culture”

arises out of the historical contexts and forces as well as the (post)colonial discourses that have played a major role in the creation and maintenance of the Reserve system to the present day (p. 326). This is because “the life and culture of people living in closed communities” eventually succumbs to “a process of mortification over time” which causes feelings of humiliation and wounded pride in those people, as though parts of their bodies and spirits had died off (p. 326). Thus, the (post)colonial entrapment of the reserve that many Aboriginal people feel comes to be expressed in very damaging ways. Over a period of six months in the year 2002, there were numerous deaths on the Blood Reserve caused, in one way or another, by drug- or alcohol-related accidents and incidences. The funerals were so common that the woman who plays the organ during the church services complained that she didn’t have time to attend them all. Six of the dead were former students at Kainai High School. What is to be learned from their stories?

Each time a young person from Kainai High School dies, I am reminded of Bernie’s story. Bernie was a student in my Social Studies 23 class more than once. He failed the class several times actually. I didn’t mind. He was a pleasant guy to be around. Kind, considerate, respectful, honest with himself and others—those were the characteristics of Bernie’s personality that I found most admirable.

Bernie’s eyes told another story of himself and his life outside of school though. His eyes had a haunted look to them that revealed that he had seen things that he would rather not talk about. His large, deep set, and expressive eyes maintained their sad look even during his loudest fits of laughter.

When Bernie was in Grade 11, he and a friend came to school drunk. They had been drinking at home, and once they became drunk they decided to come to school. I

guess they thought it would be funny. I was one of the teachers that discovered the two drunks roaming the halls, and I escorted Bernie to the office. He was the most cooperative drunk that I have ever encountered. Although this was a serious violation of school policy, I found the two drunk students quite hilarious and had to stifle my own laughter several times.

Bernie's mom was called, and she came to the school to take him home. Naturally, she was angry with him and quite ashamed of his behaviour. As I helped Bernie to the car, he was still carrying on and laughing, but I no longer found him funny. I was thinking of his mother. How could he continue to act this way when his own mother was so ashamed of his behaviour? As I held him up to get him seated in the car, Bernie grabbed my arm. He looked me straight in the eyes, and with a sad grin on his face Bernie told me "I'm really sorry, Donald." Bernie said it again as I closed the car door.

A few years after he graduated, Bernie placed a gun under his chin and pulled the trigger. The bullet exited through his nasal passage and he survived.

I was bewildered.

A few months later, Bernie crashed his vehicle into the ditch while driving home on the Bingo Road. He was drunk. He was 23 years old when he died.

My memories of Bernie are poignant because his death marks the time when my disposition as a teacher became strained with fears for the safety of the students I teach at Kainai High School. Many teachers form emotional bonds with the students that they teach. We want them to make good decisions, be successful in school, and work to create meaningful lives in the future. However, Bernie's story, and my experiences as a teacher



in the Kainai community, have taught me to temper this teacherly sort of hope with the somber realization that it is entirely probable that some of the students I teach will die tragic, and untimely, deaths. The staff at Kainai High School approach most extended holidays with a certain trepidation because they know that the likelihood of a serious accident or death is greatly increased at such times. Although such harsh realities on reserves are very difficult to understand and explain, I would argue that the perilous decisions these young people are making are forms of communication, however damaging they may be, that express anxieties, fears, and their feelings of displacement and dislocation in (post)colonial Canada. Such expressions from Aboriginal youth comprise a major part of the (post)colonial discourse in Canada, yet this truth is overshadowed and silenced by the unending stream of Royal Commissions and expert committees that continue to recommend that more money be spent to solve a problem that is systemic and will not be solved by government officials nor tribal councillors.

It will be solved by leaders in community activism or “communitists” (Weaver, 1997, p. xiii).

In communities that have too often been fractured and rendered dysfunctional by the effects of more than 500 years of colonialism, to promote communitist values means to participate in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them. (p. xiii)

The elder, Siipista'pini, could be described as a communitist in the ways in which he uses stories of personal experience to teach others to value their lives and the opportunities they have. The story of his own brush with death, the aftermath of a head-on collision with a vehicle full of young people who had been drinking, is striking in the

way he focuses on the lessons he learned from this incident rather than the trauma and discomfort he has suffered from it. Rather than portraying himself as a victim, Siipista' pini instead tells his story as a way to depict a spiritual understanding of what has happened to him. To have faith in something means to have hope that things will get better. Stories can provide hope when they help people see a purpose, a role in their society, and a concern for the spiritual power in their way of life.

A most important relationship in Native cultures is the relationship which humans share with each other, a relationship that is embodied within the idea of community. Community, in a Native sense, is not simply a place or group of people, rather it is, as novelist Louise Erdrich describes it, a place that has been "inhabited for generations," where "the landscape becomes enlivened by the sense of group and family history." (King, 1990b, pp. xiii-xiv)

Through telling their stories, elders can reconnect community members to the history and memories of the people in potentially powerful ways. By speaking from, and to, their own communities, elders perform the work of "organic intellectuals." They tell their stories as a way to "draw out and make coherent the latent aspirations and potentialities already inherent in their people's activities" and memories (Hesch, 1995, p.100). To work to reestablish these connections is to promote healing in the community and garner hope for future generations.

Teachers can also build their own repertoire of stories as a way to connect the daily business of school to the emotions involved with knowing and working with young people (Noddings, 1996, p. 435). Such stories can be used in professional development practices or shared with students as a way to personalize the classroom environment and

promote the consideration of affect and emotion as requisite to a balanced educational experience in school. Initially, I wrote about my experiences with Bill and Joe as an attempt to make sense of their circumstances. What I have found through the writing is that the story is much more about me than the two of them. Clearly, my hopes and fears for them are wrapped up in my descriptions of Bill and Joe, their life circumstances, and the uncertainty of the future. That I would react in this way is surely related to “the idea that one’s past unresolved conflicts with others and within the self are projected onto the meanings of new interactions” (Britzman & Pitt, 1997, p. 65). In other words, I have transferred my emotional feelings of loss and pain, associated with memories of past students like Bernie, on to my relationships with Joe and Bill. This transference originates from the hope and belief that things will get better for them if only I could intervene in the right ways, at the right times, to rescue them from the precariousness of their lives. I have only recently become aware of this “rescue fantasy” and the influences of the (post)colonial discourse on my interactions with Kainai students (Britzman & Pitt, 1997, p. 66). I have begun to understand my relationships with students as byproducts of my own subjective conflicts and interpretations of Aboriginal reality. If my teaching and coaching at Kainai High School is heavily influenced by my interpretations of the (post)colonial discourse, then what sorts of messages, subtle or overt, am I sending to my students? Educators have an obligation to learn about their own conflicts so as to avoid their continued reenactment in educational settings (p. 67). But, in the Kainai community, where the (post)colonial discourse, heard in whispers and shouts, describes the life and death struggles over history, memory, and identity that are contested each day, what is my pedagogical responsibility? What is the role of an educator in such a setting? One

responsibility that I have taken on through this thesis is to see and hear the words of the elder, student, and teacher as a métissage connected to and implicated in the future of Aboriginal education.

### A (Kind of) Conclusion

In the past year, I became aware that my family has Blackfoot ancestry; my paternal great-grandmother was a *Pikani* or Peigan woman. Initially, I was somewhat elated by this revelation because it gave added meaning to my work in the Kainai community. That I am somehow distantly related to many of the Kainai people I have come to know provided me with some sort of spiritual explanation for my original decision to work at Kainai High School, as well as, the personal insights, growth, and learning that have occurred as a result of this decision. It was meant to be, or so I told myself. What is striking about the dynamics of this insight is the readiness with which I was willing to accept a re-creation of myself as Blackfoot. Out of a desire for identity, to identify, I had temporarily and conveniently forgotten the vast mixture of influences that have constituted my life.

You should not try to find whether an idea is just or correct. You should look for a completely different idea, elsewhere, in another area, so that something passes between the two which is neither in one nor the other. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 10)

In August 2002, I presented part of this thesis at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) hosted by the Treaty 7 tribes on the Stoney Reserve west of Calgary. This was a tremendous opportunity to receive feedback on my work since the WIPCE attracts thousands of educators from around the world. The first presentation I gave was attended by about a dozen people, but most prominent were two curriculum developers; one, an Aboriginal woman from central Australia, the other, a Maori from Aotearoa. After listening politely while I described the Kainai community,

provided examples of the roles of the elder, student, and teacher in the research, and the intended meanings of the concepts *métissage* and curriculum in the study, the two women began asking questions that caused me to wonder if I had been unclear during the course of my presentation. Their questions repeatedly centered on the notion of curriculum that I was promoting, and I soon came to realize that the problem was not my lack of clarity; rather, the two had been attracted to my presentation by the use of the word curriculum in the title. They had assumed that what I had to say about curriculum would support or build upon their own conceptions of curriculum, and its related development in Indigenous communities. In Indigenous education circles around the world, curriculum has come to be used as a restorative tool that can help heal formerly colonized peoples with essentialized notions of culture (McConaghy, 2000, p. 251). The women came to hear how this was being done on the Blood Reserve. That I was unable and unwilling to do this accounts for their confusion. Rather than promoting or critiquing culturalist notions of curriculum, I have instead used the genres of autobiography, literary *métissage*, and hermeneutics to interpret educational experience in the Kainai community in the context of Kainai culture, history, and memories. Following Deleuze and Parnet, my hope is that this thesis will foster something in-between, which is neither one nor the other, but a recognized and substantive mixture.

Throughout this thesis, my stance has been commensurate with the idea of postculturalism as described by McConaghy (2000):

Postculturalism is thus not complicit with the neo-conservative impulse to regard cultural difference as completely irrelevant to an understanding of social formations. Rather, it seeks to problematize issues of culture and identity and to

position cultural considerations within a wider framework for knowing

Indigenous education, beyond the two-race binary. (p. 9)

Postculturalism attempts to counter the pervasiveness of the (post)colonial discourse, which conditions our responses and prolongs stereotypical notions of identity, with subversive notions of culture that make visible the connections among people rather than the rifts that divide them. The desire to replace Eurocentrism with Aboriginality remains a major focus of Aboriginal educators in Canada. But, as Said (1993) points out, the goal of replacement, when it is done to simply “reaffirm the paramount importance of formerly suppressed or silenced forms of knowledge” or describe instances of historical, social, and cultural victimhood, does little to promote newness and re-creation (p. 311). Said goes on to suggest that the notion of *worldliness* may be one way to link together words, texts, and ideas as a way to bring them out of neglect and condemnation.

*Worldliness* is therefore the restoration to such works and interpretations of their place in the global setting, a restoration that can only be accomplished by an appreciation not of some tiny, defensively constituted corner of the world but of the large, many-windowed house of human culture as a whole. (p. 312, emphasis in original)

Said’s description of worldliness supports the creation of a curriculum of métissage. What would worldliness look like if it were curriculum? Both Maxine Greene and Bill Pinar have argued for curriculum that links the individual and the collective in efforts to make sense of living in the world. Greene (1975) has described the “network of relationships” which helps us know, believe, perceive, and understand our personal roles in a collective context by enabling us to project beyond our present horizons each time

we hear the story, memory, history, and life experiences of another (pp. 314-315). Pinar (1979b) adds to this conversation by suggesting that the task of portraying and interpreting collective actions and experiences can most accurately be done through descriptions of particular individuals, on particular days, in particular contexts, subject to particular influences and prejudices (p. 105). "Put another way, in the singularity that is an individual alive on a certain day during a certain moment is a complex configuration of political, economic, and cultural forces" (p. 105). The elder, the student, and teacher portrayed in this métissage are individuals producing, knowingly and unknowingly, a collective sense of community. The connections and links in-between these individuals are the fecund territory from which the future of Aboriginal education progressively grows.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more information on age group societies see Taylor, 1989, pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> I make this statement after hearing the life stories of many elders from the Blood Reserve. For documented examples, see Taylor (1989) or Dempsey (1986).

<sup>3</sup> The understanding of discourse used here is derived from the Glossary of Breaking Free, p. 336. "A discourse represents the way reality is perceived through and shaped by historically and socially constructed ways of making sense."

<sup>4</sup> In Aboriginal thought, tricksters play a significant role in the teaching of tradition, experience, and the forces of nature. All tribes or nations give their own distinct names to this force or being that can transform itself into a hybrid form of life. "Lessons are learned from trickster actions and transformations that encourage new interpretations and awakening" (Henderson, 2000, p. 73n).

<sup>5</sup> The understanding of grand narrative used here is based on the definition provided by Leistyna, Woodrum, and Sherblom (1996). "These *narratives* represent any macro-theories that attempt to explain social reality in its entirety" (p. 337).

<sup>6</sup> All information on the history of the Papaschase is derived from *Pimohtewin: A Native Studies E-Journal* located at [www.ualberta.ca/NATIVESTUDIES/LegalPDF/papaschase.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/NATIVESTUDIES/LegalPDF/papaschase.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Scrip is a legal document entitling the holder to land or the equivalent in cash payment. With the acceptance of scrip came the agreement that future claims to land or Aboriginal status were extinguished.

<sup>8</sup> "Two-29" refers to the amount of money (\$229.00) that single, childless adults receive in social assistance from the Government of Alberta each month.

<sup>9</sup> "The term *conscientizacao* refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 19).

<sup>10</sup> For examples of such stories see Dyck, 1992, pp. 17-20.

<sup>11</sup> Yet another unfortunate legacy of the residential schools.

<sup>12</sup> I am focusing on men here because that is the focus of the poems and texts concerned. Of course, women have also been negatively impacted by the introduction and prevalence of social assistance on reserves.

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