

**Physical Education Teachers as Allies to Aboriginal Students:**

**Dimensions of Social Consciousness**

**by**

**Louise Desmarais Champagne**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies**

**in partial fulfillment**

**of the requirements**

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Dimensions of Social Consciousness**

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**Louise Desmarais Champagne**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of  
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree  
OF  
Master of Science**

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores dimensions of social consciousness in relation to the ability of physical educators to be effective allies to Aboriginal young people. A theoretical framework is developed for a "community solidarity" approach and then applied to, and enriched by, interviews with physical education teachers who have worked with Aboriginal students. The framework incorporates aspects of critical pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, and anti-racist education. Using a qualitative research methodology, eight physical educators were interviewed as a means of encouraging their reflections pertaining to their teaching practices, philosophies, experiences and relationships with Aboriginal students. The research findings identify how unprepared teachers felt in response to the complexities of working with Aboriginal youth and their families. The research highlights the need for physical education teachers to develop a critical social consciousness that includes an understanding of Aboriginal economic history and colonial relations. In order for physical educators to become effective allies of Aboriginal young people, teacher-training programs need to provide students with a theoretical framework for understanding inequality and oppression.

## DEDICATION

To Julian Kelly-Champagne,  
to Aboriginal students in general, and  
to the teachers who are working hard  
to be good allies to young people.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have benefited greatly from the generosity of family, friends and colleagues. I am particularly indebted to my soul mate and partner, Russ Rothney, for his loving support, intellectual companionship, and editing skills; to Joannie Halas for her enthusiastic encouragement, inspiration and vigilance; and to my brother Lionel Desmarais who opened doors. A special thank you also goes to Susan White for getting the bibliography in shape.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT		ii
DEDICATION		iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		iv
TABLE OF CONTENT		v
PREFACE	Bad Omen	vii
CHAPTER ONE:	<u>Introduction</u>	
	Purpose of the study	1
	Research questions	3
	Social benefits of schools	3
	Social benefits of physical education	6
	Concerned engagement	10
	Insider perspective	13
	Social consciousness	16
	Overview of chapters	19
CHAPTER TWO:	<u>Schooling of Aboriginal Pupils: Past and Present</u>	
	A disturbing context	22
	Cultural deficits and negative stereotypes	23
	Pre-dominance of non-Aboriginal teachers	25
	Pedagogical practices	27
	Historical consciousness	31
CHAPTER THREE:	<u>Community Solidarity Pedagogy</u>	
	Community context	38
	Critical pedagogy	39
	Cultural relevancy	42
	Anti-racist education	46
	Internalized oppression	50
	Unpacking the inner landscape	52
CHAPTER FOUR:	<u>Aboriginal Communities in Historical Context</u>	
	Communal economies	63
	Social relationships	64
	Respect for young people and women	66
	Fatal imbalance	68
	Implications for Aboriginal students	70
CHAPTER FIVE:	<u>Methodology</u>	
	Knowledge construction	72
	Research questions	73
	Study participants	74
	Interview questions	74
	Ethical considerations	76

	Analysis	77
	Reporting of results	78
<b>CHAPTER SIX:</b>	<b><u>Building on Social Consciousness: Urban Teachers</u></b>	
	Bonnie	81
	Susan	89
	Dana	95
	Josie	100
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN</b>	<b><u>Building on Social Consciousness: Rural and Remote Teachers</u></b>	
	Robert	107
	Dorothea	113
	Edward	119
	Aggie	121
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT:</b>	<b><u>Conclusion</u></b>	131
	Key components of Community Solidarity	132
	Observations: gaps	136
	Opportunities	137
	Recommendations	137
	Future directions	138
	Recommendations for future research	138
.....		
<b>REFERENCES</b>		140
<b>Appendix A:</b>	<b>Glossary</b>	149
<b>Appendix B:</b>	<b>Factors associated with Aboriginal school drop-outs</b>	150
<b>Appendix C:</b>	<b>Interview protocol</b>	151
<b>Appendix D:</b>	<b>Situational prompts</b>	152
<b>Appendix E:</b>	<b>Call for participants</b>	153
<b>Appendix F:</b>	<b>Participant information sheet</b>	154
<b>Appendix G:</b>	<b>Informed consent form</b>	156

Preface: Bad omen...\*

In the summer of 1620 an incredible turn of events occurred at what is now Churchill, Manitoba. Some residents of the region were making a seasonal rendezvous with the Hudson Bay coast. They discovered a store of foreign provisions, an eight-pounder brass cannon, and a mass of European corpses:

They were much astonished to see so many dead bodies, the more so as they had never seen men of that kind before. Terror stricken, at first they ran away, not knowing what to make of such a sight. Then when fear had given way to curiosity, they went back thinking they would secure the richest spoils that had ever been obtained (Jeremie, 1720).

But then there was a dreadful explosion "with the result that they were all killed, and the house and everything in it were burnt up" (Jeremie, 1720).

This story, presumably based on oral tradition, comes to us from the pen of the French trade commander, Jeremie. He was employed by the fur merchants of the Compagnie du Nord, of New France, at the mouth of the Hayes River, southeast of Churchill, Manitoba for most of the years from 1694 to 1714.

In September 1619, two Danish naval vessels manned by a combined crew of 65, headed by Jens Munk, had reached the mouth of the Churchill River. There they were unable to cope with winter conditions and were overcome by scurvy. Many died. Only Munk and two others survived to return to Europe the following summer. After their

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\* This section is largely extracted from Rothney, 1983.

departure, gunpowder in their abandoned store of goods apparently was ignited unwittingly by people who had never seen the like before.

As an initial contact with Europeans, the incident of 1620 must have been regarded by people of the region as an inauspicious omen indeed. A visionary gaze at the future conditions of dependency, health problems and social crisis facing their Aboriginal descendants might have confirmed their worst fears.

Can the crisis be reversed? Where do Physical Education teachers of Aboriginal students fit in?

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Purpose of the study*

In this dissertation, I propose that having a critical social consciousness is a major factor in determining the ability of physical education teachers to be effective allies to Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> young people.<sup>2</sup> To demonstrate this, I examine the relationship between social consciousness and pedagogical practice. I do this by forming my thesis with a theoretical framework based on critical social consciousness. Accordingly, the thesis draws on the contributions of some key exponents of critical pedagogy. For example, I incorporate Freire (1970), Giroux (1998), Ladson-Billings (1994), and Sleeter (1993) as well as my own experience, knowledge and insights. After setting out the case for the importance of critical social consciousness, I proceed to present my understanding of some key aspects of the historical context of Aboriginal communities in northern North America. I do this to emphasize the connection between history and social consciousness. This is followed by an application of my theoretical framework to some experiences and perceptions of physical education teachers who were interviewed as part of my research.

My analysis starts with the beginning of a “community solidarity” approach, which grew from my own experiences and thinking. This community solidarity lens informs my interactions with critical pedagogy and with other perspectives that add to the community solidarity framework in Chapter 3. It also guides my exposé of the historical tension between community and commercial values in Chapter 4. Subsequently, the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Aboriginal’ refers to First Nations (‘Indian’), Inuit, and Métis people.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Young people’ refers to people under the age of twenty-one.

community solidarity perspective continues to evolve through my interaction with my interview material in Chapter 6 and 7. In these chapters I apply the framework, as it emerges both from my preceding “dialogue” with critical pedagogues and from my reflections on historical processes, to my study-participant teachers. Accordingly, Chapter 6 and 7 serves as an example of how my community solidarity lens functions as a guide to analyzing the ability of teachers to be effective allies to Aboriginal students, while also drawing on the teachers’ perceptions to enrich the lens. As a whole, these chapters produce a pedagogical framework and analysis aimed at assisting physical education teachers to become strong and effective allies to Aboriginal young people. In short, my thesis focuses on the capacity of teachers to deliver physical education programs that complement the need of Aboriginal students to succeed, and to develop confidence and pride around who they are in relation to their current and ancestral communities.

Paulo Freire (1970, 1974) wrote of a pedagogy of the oppressed and of education for critical consciousness. His left-wing Jesuit counterparts were known for their liberation theology. Jurgen Habermas<sup>3</sup> speaks of an emancipatory knowledge interest in research (Kvale, 1996). The common central link, shared by critical pedagogues generally, is the notion that knowledge informed by critical social consciousness can unleash human energy and creativity and lead to a better, more equitable world. Applied to education, this interest in social transformation is very different than interest in

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<sup>3</sup> Habermas is identified by Kvale (1996) as a “critical hermeneutical” scholar with roots in the “Frankfurt School”. Hermeneutics refers to the understanding of interpretation of texts, notably in regard to literature and history.

technical knowledge and control (Kvale, 1996). For teachers of most Aboriginal students, it can mean the difference between seeing teaching as solely a process of passing on technical information and skills, or seeing teaching as being an ally to young people who struggle to cope with social inequity and deprivation.

My research methodology is conditioned by my interests in “liberation” pedagogy, “transformative” pedagogy, or “emancipatory” pedagogy. In other words, the subject matter, questions, approach, structure and interpretation reflect my desire to see social relationships transformed in a way that frees up creative capacity and humanity and that fosters a more equitable distribution of wealth and power. In particular, I am interested in knowledge that can help physical education teachers to be good allies to Aboriginal young people who desperately need to reverse inter-generational patterns of destructive influences upon Aboriginal communities.

### *Research Questions*

In order to investigate the impact of social consciousness in applied pedagogy, I began my inquiry by asking: How do physical education teachers interpret the effect of their own teaching practices on the performance of students? What knowledge do teachers have about the historical social and economic backgrounds of their students, and how does this information impact on their relationships with Aboriginal students? What is involved in critical social consciousness applied to teaching? How is critical social consciousness important to being an effective ally to Aboriginal students?

### *Social Benefits of Schools*

Heather-jane Robertson (2005) recognizes the significance of multi-dimensional community interactions in promoting responsible behaviour among young people and in

teaching “foundational values that make living together possible” (p.108). Recognizing the different types of opportunity for learning that schools offer in social development, Robertson makes the distinction between the role of family and the role of schools:

Public education is a remarkable experiment in learning to live together. Families enjoy, or at least expect to enjoy, the privileges of intimacy, love, empathy, common experiences and common expectations. Families are where people who are much like each other, except for age, work out how to be with each other - or not. But schools can teach what most families can't, which is how to work things out within a public space. Schools can teach the values that apply to getting along with people whom you don't know well, who are different in every way except age. True, they do this imperfectly, but better than any other institution we have created (p.108).

I agree with ‘critical education theorists’,<sup>4</sup> such as Peter McLaren (1998) and Henry Giroux (1998), who acknowledge the role that schools have in reinforcing and reproducing social and economic inequalities. I believe that schools sustain and legitimize the status quo social order (McLaren, 1998). However, like Robertson and the critical theorists, I believe it is important to recognize the positive social benefits that schools can offer. As community institutions that bring young people together, schools can be great places for young people to learn about themselves and others, to learn how to develop social relationships outside of family, to develop skills that will allow them to be less vulnerable to social inequity, and perhaps to gain understanding that would allow

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<sup>4</sup> Critical educators (Grant and Ladson-Billings, 1997) maintain that “schools can become institutions where forms of knowledge and values are taught for the purpose of educating young people for democratic empowerment rather than conformity and subjugation” (p. 52).

them to avoid some of the effects of 'race',<sup>5</sup> gender and class bias. Some students find refuge in schools that can be - "a safe haven in a confusing and sometimes violent world" (Weissglass, 1998, p.3) and there are many adults in school settings who care about young people and learning. Within a school context, physical educators are advantageously situated to provide leadership in transforming schools into community institutions that focus heavily on building respectful connections among people involved in the school environment.

Physical educators have a special opportunity in the school system in the sense that their interactions with students are less centred on written academic work. They have the opportunity to observe students' interactions and presentations of themselves outside of the physical confines of a classroom. This observation is not meant to discredit the social relations in the classroom, which can be as intricate and complex as the social relations in the gym. The point is that physical educators have a different opportunity to create space for supervised interactions among students that can cultivate respect and caring values. They can create a variety of opportunities to engage students in ways that are inclusive and positive. Conversely, physical education can be exclusionary and promote negative experiences (Graham, 1992).

Helping people to develop positive feelings about themselves is an important principle of teaching. However, this can be very challenging in an inner-city school or in

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<sup>5</sup> The word 'race' is used in quotations because it represents a construct that identifies humans on the basis of genetic classification. The concept is based in colonial ideologies that rationalize exploitation. I believe that eventually we need to stop using the term 'race' because using it gives creditability to the false notion that there are basic physiological traits that are unique to particular population groups. On the other hand, 'racism', understood as attitudes, actions and social divisions related to skin colour or other surface appearance, is all too real. It is extremely important not to disregard the terrible hurts inflicted by racism; i.e., inflicted by thinking and actions tied to the false belief that 'racial' differences are real and related to genetic and cultural superiority. Racism hurts people and needs to be routinely challenged and stopped.

an impoverished community where poverty and generations of colonial subjugation weigh heavily. In this context, critical social consciousness can serve as an essential part of the framework for community building and people building.

### *Social Benefits of Physical Education*

The value of physical education is based on the widely accepted notion that there are many physical, social, and emotional benefits from participation in physical activity (Sallis & Owen, 1999). Increased levels of physical activity can result in “higher levels of personal fitness, a life-long participation in health-enhancing activity, social inclusion, and an overall sense of belonging” (Fishburne & Hickson, 2005, p. 24). Fishburne and Hickson make a distinction between physical education and physical activity. According to them, in physical education, activity should be used as a medium for teaching in ways that make learning fun. It can be “an essential component of a quality Physical Education program” and a vehicle for becoming “physically educated”. They define physically educated people as having performance skills, participatory skills and physical literacy skills. Even more significantly, from my perspective, they maintain that a good physical education program includes social relationship skills that support self-expression, opportunity for interaction with others, displays of responsible behaviour and an understanding of and a respect for all people during physical activity.

The immediacy of the social learning experiences within physical activity and the potential for social development within the instructional settings of physical activity makes physical education an extremely important element of the schooling experience for young people. The physical activity environments “are very emotional, interactive, and

for some kids, attractive” (Hellison, 1995). Beyond the mechanics and techniques of performance, these environments are exceptional for social learning and teaching interactions. As Hellison (1995, p.1) states, “Life in the gym provides seemingly unlimited opportunities for intervention and for the demonstration of personal and social qualities, not only in games but in exercises, drills, discussions, and informal student actions (which may include inaction).” Young people “show more of themselves” in physical activity settings, and in the gym or on the playing field.

We cannot assume that positive outcomes automatically emanate from involvement in physical activity, as young people are complex beings who bring with them feelings, attitudes, values, and behaviours. Rather, positive changes “are more likely to occur if they are planned for and exemplified by someone whose presence reflects the desired qualities” (Hellison, 1995, p.2). Physical educators are important role models and need the social skills and confidence to provide respectful and safe learning environments. Along with content knowledge, physical educators need highly developed ‘people’ skills that include sensitivity to how young people feel about themselves and how these feelings can be projected onto others in ways that may not be helpful. Graham (1992) speaks to the significance of these people skills in physical educators:

Physical activity has a powerful influence on how children feel about themselves. Consequently, it is imperative that physical education teachers do everything they can to be sensitive to how children feel and help them build positive feelings about their involvement in physical activity. Teachers who help children build positive attitudes are constantly aware of children’s feelings and consciously modify and select activities that are considerate of both the highly and the poorly

skilled, the enthusiastic and the reluctant, and the physically fit and the unfit children. They understand that competition may cause some children to 'turn off' to physical activity and find ways to provide alternatives to games that emphasize winning and score keeping... (p. 146).

As with other school programs, poor teaching practices in physical education classes can have long-term consequences. Young people can be 'turned off' physical activity. The widespread '*I hate Phys. Ed*' mantra of many disengaged students cannot be attributed to student attitudes alone. Patterns of inactivity can be reinforced by humiliating experiences in physical education classes as well as by long periods of sitting still in a classroom context. Lack of student participation, and even some program cuts, happen not because physical education and activity are not valued but rather because physical education has not been delivered effectively (Collingwood, 1997).

Evidence in the physical education literature suggests that participation in a quality physical education program can provide many holistic outcomes, including improved academic performance and a willingness to attend school for some (Halas, 2001; Halas & Hanson, 2001; Orchard, Stark & Halas, in press). In one case study that investigated the experience of physical education and activity for troubled youth, the majority of whom were Aboriginal, it was shown that relevant and meaningful physical activity programs can create the space for students to experience important social and emotional benefits (Halas 2002; 2001). While showing worthwhile results for these students who were from very troubled social backgrounds, Halas' analysis and illustrations indicate that participation in physical education experience alone does not ensure sustainable outcomes.

Quality daily physical education has potential to engage, attract, and foster long-term benefits for Aboriginal young people. Physical education programs can help motivate young people to pursue active lives and contribute to building a more inclusive school environment. Halas and Watkinson (1999) identify some of the benefits of physical education for youth: it helps burn off energy, it can be fun, it can feel good, and it can relieve boredom. Physical education can be a 'hook' for students to stay in school, motivate them to stay on task, decrease personal tensions, enhance cooperation and improve teacher-student relationships (Halas, 2001). Quality physical education programs can contribute to the overall school climate (Janzen et al., 2002). Poor teaching practices in physical education can contribute to an alienating climate at school and a sense of irrelevancy for the student (Ennis, 1999; Halas, 2002). Poor teaching practice in physical education is poor schooling for Aboriginal young people.

The high rates of suicides, school dropouts, incarcerations, addictions, diabetes and obesity, etc., that are affecting Aboriginal young people all point to a "social crisis" that cannot be solely laid at the doorstep of schools (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2000; Long & Dickason, 2000; Silver, Mallett, Greene, & Simard, 2002). Nevertheless, teachers of Aboriginal students can make a difference in the lives of these young people. My impression in undertaking this study is that many teachers have only superficial understandings of their engagement with Aboriginal students and that many teachers work in isolation without recourse to timely supports needed to be more effective. In Manitoba, Aboriginal communities have experienced varying degrees of social crisis for generations. In turn, this has had a very strong impact on the attitudes and challenges of teachers of Aboriginal students, whether they choose to acknowledge it or not.

While there is limited research investigating the experience of Aboriginal students in physical education, there are emerging studies that show how physical education programs can be beneficial for some Aboriginal youth (Halas, 2004; van Ingen & Halas, 2003). In particular, it has been shown that programs designed to be meaningful and relevant for students can positively affect student desire to participate in school (Halas, 2001; Halas & Hanson, 2001). There is also evidence that physical education teachers are failing to connect with Aboriginal youth. Constraining factors that have been identified include students' discomfort about changing for gym class, students forced to participate in seemingly irrelevant activities, and students not being seen by their teachers as athletic (Champagne & Halas, 2003).

In my current study I attempt to go further by exploring the social and historical roots of the alienation of Aboriginal students through my construction of a critical pedagogical framework that speaks to my own experience and perceptions. I also draw upon the experiences and perceptions of some physical education teachers who have had some success in engaging Aboriginal youth in their programs.

### *Concerned Engagement*

Julie Ellis (1998) defines "concerned engagement" as a process for arriving at a research topic. It involves asking oneself questions about what preoccupies you in relation to the research. Specifically, Ellis guides the researcher to ask, 'what do you care about and what matters to you?' The idea is to explore these questions as a means of arriving at a topic that interests you or a topic that you have a passion for and that will sustain you throughout the research process itself. Ellis suggests that placing a personal story at the beginning of the research report will assist readers with a more informed

perspective about the meaning of the work. As a researcher, I situate myself within the Aboriginal feminist community and choose the language of liberation and healing to introduce and argue for the development of critical social consciousness among physical education teachers.

Some time ago I worked in a life skills/employment program with Aboriginal youth who were growing up poor, had dropped out of school, and had difficult lives. In my work with these young people, I increasingly recognized my own struggles as a young person growing up 'poor'. From personal observation and experience, it seems to me that many young people who have difficult lives tend to give up play. It appears to be one of the first things given up in the context of hopelessness.

Halas (2001) made similar observations in her work with troubled youth at a treatment centre school where she taught physical education. She recognized that creating opportunities for interactive play can help make schools more relevant and attractive for some. Despite these benefits of play, Halas concludes that, "we are constantly reminded that play and playfulness as a remedy, however healing, is highly contextual, and for the most part, sadly unsustainable" (p.11).

In large part, my dissertation is a search for more sustainable benefits from physical education. I contend that critical social consciousness can help to open the door toward the development of a more transformative pedagogy that incorporates play as an important tool for community healing and personal enrichment. For play to become a sustainable remedy, physical educators and education leaders need to recognize it as an important physical education outcome. Physical education programs can become culturally appropriate and relevant through the incorporation of play as a tool for building

alliances between teachers and students and among students. My hope is that this study may help physical educators take leadership in creating and offering pedagogy that incorporates play into a community building approach.

I believe that sensitive physical education teachers with critical social consciousness who are able to fully engage students in physical play can make a real difference in the quality of life in schools. Teachers with critical social consciousness who work as allies to young people need to be respected as professionals and have the time for reflection and learning. At the same time, the thinking and opinions of young people and their parents need to be respected by teachers. Being an ally to a young person is a way of influencing future change and is important work. As a parent, a grandparent and an educational change advocate, I recognize that young people need allies and that adults need to be well supported to be effective allies.

I have noticed that schooling can be a torturous experience for some young people. It should not be that way. It seems, as Peter McLaren (1998) writes, that we are preparing young people for whatever jobs are generated in the pursuit of commercial profits, without discussing the relationship between jobs and human needs. In other words, there is a disconnect between community and personal values on the one hand, and the roles that young people are being prepared for within schools. Those who succeed in formal schooling generally land the 'cleaner' jobs, the managers and the administrators. The others, as McLaren notes, are prepared, through their failure, for "the factory."

My own deep interest in how teachers can be effective allies to young people is closely related to my experience as a parent and grandparent. Most recently, I have been

acutely aware that, like so many others, year after year my grandson has had a lot of difficulty relating to his school environment, especially stationary classroom and homework routines. He loves physical education and activity but this passion is confined because physical education is only offered every second day (Champagne, 2001).

### *Insider Perspective*

In this section, I present a brief profile of myself to shed some light on 'who I am' as an interpreter and to build on an understanding and appreciation of the insider perspective that I bring to the analysis. My self-identification is consistent with the "hermeneutical" emphasis on the importance of being transparent about "presuppositions" and on the importance of being clear about "knowledge interest" drivers behind a research undertaking (Kvale, 1996). I fully agree that the reasons for a person's interests in acquiring knowledge are highly significant in shaping research questions, methodology and outcomes.

Although much time has passed since I was a young person in an inner-city school and many actors have changed, some things have not. Presently, there are many more children living in poverty (one in five in Manitoba)<sup>6</sup> and schools can still be alienating experiences for 'raised-poor' and working-class Aboriginal youth.

I grew up in the context of poverty and I believe that the context in which one is raised is a salient feature throughout one's life. I grew up as an inner-city, raised-poor working-class, Métis school girl. After completing grade nine I left school because that is what most poor kids did. I got married and gave birth to two children. Later, I completed high school as a young adult and then enrolled in university. Throughout the

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<sup>6</sup> Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, press release, April 2006.

1970s and 80s, I became active in an anti-colonial struggle for social change, or what was then referred to as the 'native movement'. I read Karl Marx, Franz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Howard Adams, and others. I claimed Aboriginal identity with pride. I claimed feminism as a commitment to end the oppression of women. I participated in an international women's conference in Kenya that raised my consciousness about the commonalities of poverty and of women 'of colour' around the world.

In the mid 1980s, in inner-city Winnipeg, I took leadership with other Aboriginal women to bring attention to the urban crisis in Aboriginal child welfare. One of the key concerns at the time was racism within the child welfare system. We believed that the racism within the social work profession created a situation where Aboriginal children were quick to be apprehended by the agency responsible and that many parents (particularly women) were victimized by the process. The Winnipeg Native Child Welfare Coalition <sup>7</sup> gave voice to the concerns about the numbers of children in care and quality-of-life issues for parents, children and community.

At the time, the Children's Aid Society was a private non-profit agency with a self-appointed board of directors that was responsible for child welfare in the city. The

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<sup>7</sup> The Winnipeg Coalition on Native Child Welfare (1982 – 1985) was instrumental in initiating restructuring of child and family services in Winnipeg. It was instrumental in negotiations that led to the establishment of the first urban Aboriginal family resource centre in Canada, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc. Coalition members had envisioned a de-centralized community building process that would support and nurture families in an urban context. Always recognizing that poverty was the real issue, coalition members pursued a community economic development (CED) strategy that included: development of co-operative housing centred on a single parent support model (Payuk Inter-Tribal Co-op), development of a commercial food store (Neechi Foods Co-op), and a child care centre (Niigaanaki Day Care) situated within the housing co-op building. This project focus led to the establishment of a community development corporation, Winnipeg Native Family Economic Development Inc. (WNFED). This information is based on first hand knowledge of the process. As Co-chair of the coalition, I provided leadership along with many other sister comrades.

Coalition raised concerns about the Eurocentric perspective and policies of the agency, but to no avail. Coalition members fought against the common practice of apprehending Aboriginal children and of sending them out of the province and country for private adoptions. Older children who were considered difficult to place went to farm families in the USA. Assumptions of cultural deficits drove professionals to be quick to apprehend Aboriginal children. With assimilation assumptions, they believed that removal from the family and community context was in the child's interest.

The "export" of Aboriginal young people was a stark example of the belief that disconnection from community identity is in the best interest of Aboriginal children. The old perspective that gave rise to the establishment of the Indian residential school system was continuing in the policies and practices of the child welfare system,<sup>8</sup> and I believe that, in modified form, it continues today in the public school system. In sharp contrast, the community solidarity approach developed in Chapter 3 provides an alternative way of thinking about relationships with young people and community. It offers a framework that can help physical education teachers root out their own unhelpful and harmful assumptions and to consciously work *with* Aboriginal communities, rather than unconsciously *against* them.

All of our work in the Winnipeg Coalition on Native Child Welfare was undertaken with acute awareness of the link between economic circumstances and the well-being of Aboriginal families. It was at that time that the roots were laid for the creation of Neechi Foods Co-op and Payuk Inter-Tribal Co-op (housing). I was centrally

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<sup>8</sup> The export of Aboriginal children finally stopped in the mid-eighties with a moratorium imposed by Judge Hamilton. A wave of apprehensions took place earlier in the 1960s, now referred to as the 'sixties scoop.' Thousands of children were taken from homes and sent to other provinces, the USA and Europe. For more information see Johnson, 1983; McKenzie & Hudson, 1985; Fournier & Grey, 1997.

involved in the development of both projects and Neechi is still a major focus for me today.

These are some of the key experiences behind the perspective that informs my current examination of social consciousness in relation to physical education teachers who work with Aboriginal young people. I believe that schools and teaching practices need to become relevant or go the way of the old residential schools, the last of which closed in the 1980s. Although there are many well-meaning teachers practicing skilful and conscientious teaching, this is not good enough. Teachers' perceptions of inferiority of Aboriginal students' culture and community inflicts serious harm. Teachers, school administrators and leaders, and university faculties need to take responsibility for this outcome.

### *Social Consciousness*

The importance of teachers knowing their students in the context of the students' historical identities, and in the context of power dynamics between teachers and students cannot be overstated. Everyone has social consciousness; i.e., everyone has knowledge and awareness of relationships between people. However, as I see it, the depth and breath of social consciousness depends on the intellectual and emotional make-up of a particular individual in regard to particular circumstances and issues. Drawing upon Freire (1970), '*critical*' social consciousness implies depth in terms of knowledge and analytical understanding of power relations. Critical social consciousness posits an understanding of the historical social and economic relations within and between different groups of people and it includes an awareness of the impact of these relations on everyday individual lives and communities. For example, the historical anecdote in the

opening preface alludes to the impact of the coming colonization of Indigenous peoples. By "colonization", I mean control of people and natural resources in the interest of an external centre of power. What knowledge of Manitoba colonial history do students and teachers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, hold? How effective can teachers be without historical understanding of who their students are? In the words of Black singer-songwriter, Faith Nolan, "if you don't know my people, you don't know me!"<sup>9</sup>

Critical social consciousness can also help teachers recognize attitudes and perceptions of their own that hamper their relationships with others. In part, this applies to legacies of colonialism and racism in relation to Aboriginal communities. Having critical social consciousness allows teachers to move beyond subtle and not-so-subtle patterns of 'blaming the victim' that are a common and punishing response to difficult and frustrating teacher-student dynamics.

Becoming a strong ally to Aboriginal young people involves having consciousness of patterns of oppression and intervening to minimize the hurt that gets inflicted or re-enacted upon Aboriginal people. I use the term 'oppression' to refer to social relationships that involve the intentional or unintentional exercise of power by one group of people at the expense of another. From my point of view, a teacher is an ally of Aboriginal students if she or he acts in solidarity with the students in dealing with oppressive personal and social relationships. In regard to social groups that hold privilege at the expense of others, Bishop (1994) defines an ally as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> In "Africville", Faith Nolan (1986) sings about her Black community neighbourhood in Halifax, bulldozed in the 1970s to make room for newer social housing and, in the process, destroyed.

A member of an oppressor group who works to end a form of oppression that gives her or him privilege. For example, [it could include] a white person who works to end racism or a man who works to end sexism (p.126).

In regard to teachers of Aboriginal students, I would add working to end 'colonial relationships' and working to end 'adulthood'. By 'adulthood' I mean the conscious or unconscious pre-emption of leadership and self-actualization of young people. To me, self-actualization refers to a process whereby people come to terms with who they are and position themselves in a way that leads to positive engagement with the world around them. Inherently, this involves notions such as sense of purpose, self-respect, curiosity, creativity and peace of mind. In turn, this is heavily related to emotional and physical health.

Oppression is divisive and harmful to individuals and community. Individuals within an oppressed group are challenged to recognize the damage from oppression on their own group cohesion. The hurtful and destructive nature of oppression and the lack of information about historical process make it difficult for people to understand the effects of internalized oppression<sup>10</sup> on the social relationships within the groups. For example, the impact of internalized oppression is devastating to Aboriginal communities, with people often inflicting damage on each other rather than focusing on the oppressive systems that work against their communities.

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<sup>10</sup> Ann Bishop (1994) defines internalized oppression as the negative beliefs that people have about themselves. Through their socialization, oppressed people come to accept (and often act on) the negative beliefs they hold about themselves.

Physical education teachers who want to become more effective allies to Aboriginal students need to become better informed about the nature of internalized oppression. They need to encourage and not discourage young people in becoming allies for each other. Critical social consciousness can help teachers to do this. As emphasized above, physical education teachers are strategically placed to help Aboriginal students nurture healthy relationships among themselves, their families and their communities.

### *Overview of Chapters*

I began this introductory chapter with some little-known historical drama, followed by a discussion of opportunities within physical education to be supportive of Aboriginal students. I then identified the purpose of my study as examining the relationship between social consciousness and pedagogical practice of physical education teachers of Aboriginal students. The theme that is examined throughout this dissertation and that serves as the basis for my theoretical framework is the premise that critical social consciousness can significantly help physical education teachers to become more effective allies to Aboriginal students. In this context, an ally is a person who commits themselves to ending oppression and, in the process of becoming an ally, re-defines her or his relationship with the oppressed. Being an effective ally to Aboriginal students involves developing critical social consciousness of oppression and of its impact on individual and community life. Critical social consciousness hinges heavily on an understanding of how changes in the past have led to the present. This knowledge is extremely important in allowing people to make sense out of difficult, current economic

and social circumstances. In regard to large numbers of Aboriginal students who live in poverty, this can hardly be over-stated.

I situate myself as a researcher with an insider perspective, as an ally to young people and their teachers, and as having major concerns about the effects of systemic oppression on community life. Employing a qualitative research methodology, I develop a 'community solidarity' lens that combines the perspectives of key theorists of critical pedagogy and critical race theory (Delgado Banal, 2002) with my own thinking, informed by my first-hand experience, sensibilities, and common-sense understandings of community needs. I then apply this lens to the analysis of interview conversations conducted with relatively successful physical education teachers of Aboriginal students. My goal for this study is that it will contribute to thinking about culturally relevant, emancipatory, physical education programming for Aboriginal young people.

Chapter 2 applies a critical lens to analyze the current context, complexities and tensions associated with the schooling and education of Aboriginal students and particularly with the non-Aboriginal teaching force. Chapter 3 sets out my underlying analytical framework based on a community solidarity approach. I present the theoretical case for my thesis that social consciousness is a crucial pedagogical factor. I do so by building on pedagogical theory that resonates with my own experience and thinking. Chapter 4 offers an historical perspective of pre-commercial communal societies and of the subsequent impact of merchant trade on them. It provides a 'counter knowledge'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The term 'counter knowledge' is used in critical race theory and is associated with Delores Delgado Bernal (2002). It is knowledge stemming from perspectives that are in opposition to the status quo. This can include non-academic, community-based thinking, as well as academic scholarship.

platform for critical social consciousness. Chapter 5 provides details of my qualitative research interview methodology. In Chapters 6 and 7 my community solidarity framework is applied to, and further developed by, the interviewed teachers' own understanding of their relationships with Aboriginal students. Chapter 8 provides a summary of key aspects of a Community Solidarity Pedagogy.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Schooling of Aboriginal Pupils: Past and Present

#### *A Disturbing Context*

The complexities associated with the education and schooling of Aboriginal young people is a concern of many (Kirkness, 2001; Battiste & Barman, 1998). Although more Aboriginal pupils are completing high school than in previous years, a simple statistical comparison with the non-Aboriginal population draws a shameful picture of systemic failure (Mackay & Myles, 1998). There is overwhelming evidence that the education system in general does not serve Aboriginal young people very well (Battiste & Barman, 1998; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Wotherspoon, 1998; Silver, Mallet, Green & Simard, 2002). For Aboriginal young people school dropout rates are high with only small percentages graduating from high school. Furthermore, Aboriginal students often leave the school system with entrenched feelings of inferiority and lacking confidence in their own abilities and intelligence.<sup>12</sup>

In Manitoba, Aboriginal communities have experienced varying degrees of social and economic crisis for generations. This explains a lot about the challenges facing teachers of Aboriginal students. The crisis also has had a very strong impact on the attitudes of the teachers themselves, whether they acknowledge this professionally or not. Historically, schools have been one of the most salient vehicles of cultural genocide for Aboriginal people (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). Canada's Indian residential school system operated on the premise that young people needed to become detached from their parents' culture to succeed in the mainstream of Canadian society. It was a process of

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<sup>12</sup> Personal communications with young people between the ages of 16 to 24 who had dropped out of school and were participating in a youth pre-employment program (1995-97).

cultural genocide perceived by the perpetrators to be in the interest of Aboriginal people. The Christian, Eurocentric social perspective that prevailed resulted in a process that ultimately contributed to more social crisis. From an Aboriginal perspective, it might be argued that the systemic failure of schools reflects the strength and determination of Aboriginal people to survive as a community, or as 'a people', and involves resisting acculturation, whether the resistance is conscious or not (Miller, 1989).

While high school graduation is highly valued in Aboriginal communities and is perceived as the route toward greater economic security, many parents are conflicted in their feelings about school: schooling for many adults in previous generations was a difficult experience. Painful memories of alienation and humiliation from their school days have left many parents and grandparents mistrustful of the system and emotionally scarred. Certainly, not all Aboriginal people had negative schooling experiences (including residential schooling); however, I can relate to the alienation based on my own experience. Furthermore, Canadian school curricula were deliberately designed to assimilate by disconnecting young people from their communities and Aboriginal identities (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). Today most school curricula still have not reversed this disconnect. The community solidarity approach developed in this thesis offers a framework for a pedagogy and curriculum that would directly challenge the disconnection legacy of the residential schools.

#### *"Cultural Deficits" and Negative Stereotyping*

Although many Aboriginal communities have local control of schools and have established local education authorities, the problems of schooling are complex and not easily addressed. In a two-page national newspaper article that was part of an on-going

series on "Canada's Apartheid", John Stackhouse (2001) described the sorry state of the school system in a First Nation community in Manitoba and painted a bleak picture of social deterioration and poverty. It is a picture of hopelessness, lawlessness, disrespect for authority and property, gangs, inaccessible resources (the library was locked up), and adults who do not provide support and care. The well-meaning journalist was intent on drawing attention to social inequality and constructed a series of articles meant to raise the social consciousness of the Globe & Mail readership. Although Stackhouse was effective in drawing attention to inequalities, this type of 'crisis talk' also runs the danger of reinforcing stereotypes of people as failures. Aboriginal students are perceived as 'underprivileged', 'disadvantaged', lacking in 'cultural capital', etc. The assumption of cultural deficit, a Eurocentric perspective, inflicts further damage on students because it re-enforces a sense of inferiority (Delgado Bernal, 2002).<sup>13</sup>

Ron Mackay and Lawrence Myles (1998) conducted a survey to better understand the factors that contribute to school dropout (Appendix B). Clearly the study was motivated by a desire to improve the lot of Aboriginal students. However, it really amounts to an assessment of surface phenomena *alone*. Without a structural analysis informed by critical social consciousness their correlations continue to reinforce a

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<sup>13</sup> Some educators respond to the cultural deficit perspective by seeking out positive role models for Aboriginal pupils. Aboriginal career success models are promoted in the hope of motivating pupils to stay in school and pull themselves out of poverty conditions. However, I believe that the odds of this approach leading to positive long-term results are heavily conditioned by whether or not it is framed in a way that is relevant to the self-perceptions of Aboriginal young people in relation to their families and communities. If the role model focus is on individual career success alone ('rising-above' approach), young people may be psychologically torn between career advancement and community identity. If role modeling unwittingly (or openly) advances a 'save yourself' message, then it still does not break free from the old residential schooling system of community detachment. Schooling for Aboriginal students needs to be deliberately designed to avoid making young people feel like they must make a choice between 'success' and community bonds. If success in schooling or career feels like a betrayal of community then serious problems of self-identity, self-esteem and self-confidence will continue.

'cultural deficit' or 'blaming-the-victim' perspective. The analysis in Chapter 3 serves as a radical<sup>14</sup> alternative to studies that address symptoms without addressing underlying social determinants. As noted by Christine Sleeter (1993), a surface understanding of social circumstances leaves teachers unable to offer an explanation of the inequality that is right in front of them without effectively demeaning their students or their families. Well-meaning reform can even reinforce low student self-esteem by effectively laying responsibility for their problems at their family doorsteps.

Life in schools for Aboriginal students is especially difficult and complex because they face challenges related to parent-teacher relationships, multiple social problems related to poverty and colonization,<sup>15</sup> an unstable teaching population, and limited resources in general (Taylor, 1998). In addition, misinformation about the history of pre-commercial societies and the colonization of the Americas is closely intertwined with social and psychological stress (Antone, Miller & Myers, 1986). In this regard, Aboriginal students receive very little information about major, historical social-economic forces because their teachers also have very little information and understanding of this sort. Many of their teachers accept a Eurocentric version of the history. The absence or distortion of information can only cause further confusion and identity crisis for Aboriginal students.

#### *The Pre-dominance of Non-Aboriginal Teachers*

Non-Aboriginal teachers currently have and will continue to play a major part in the education of Aboriginal young people in Canada. "Ninety per cent of Native children

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<sup>14</sup> Radical means going to the root.

<sup>15</sup> The term 'colonization' is used here in reference to psychological subjugation, as well as to the loss of economic and political independence.

in this country will, at one time or another, be taught by a non-Native teacher, and many of these children will receive most of their education from non-Native teachers” (Taylor, 1998, p. 224). They are hired by the hundreds to teach in Aboriginal communities across the country, both rural/remote and urban. In addition to the problem of non-Aboriginal teachers teaching students whose culture, history and communities they know little about, in the rural/remote communities they constitute an unstable teaching force. The turnover is high for various reasons. As Taylor, himself a non-Aboriginal teacher who worked in northern Aboriginal communities observes, many see these teaching positions as a prelude to a teaching career in southern non-Aboriginal communities. In urban areas, the teachers are less likely to move out, unless they seek to leave inner-city schools, but this very ‘stability’ results in the continuing predominance of non-Aboriginal teachers in schools with large or majority Aboriginal student populations. Their lack of critical social consciousness thus becomes even more ‘normal’ in cities where, unlike northern or rural Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal students know that they are in the minority.

Taylor is calling for more thought and attention to be paid to the training and education of the large numbers of non-Aboriginal teachers who will influence Aboriginal young people. He maintains that people who are responsible for hiring teachers to work in Aboriginal communities “need to give greater consideration to hiring people who are suitable for cross-cultural teaching” (p. 241). Taylor believes that it is essential that non-Aboriginal teachers become aware of the community and culture where they teach and live. “The more aware teachers are the more effective they can be in their jobs. Increased awareness of community will lead to culturally appropriate teaching styles and

materials” (p. 241).<sup>16</sup> Although Taylor does not spell out exactly what is meant by “awareness of community”, he is calling for better preparation of teachers in the context of community connection. Cross-cultural sensitivity and diversity training must go beyond ‘folklorama’.<sup>17</sup> We need to go beyond training that focuses on surface difference (dance, food, clothing, mannerisms, etc.). Without an appreciation of relevant human history, cultural sensitivity training can simply reinforce superficial knowledge about people and mystify human relationships. Without critical social consciousness, it can unwittingly promote the development of alienating stereotypes.

### *Pedagogical Practices*

Growing numbers of teachers of Aboriginal students are developing pedagogical practices that are based on respect for the students and on a willingness to adapt curricula to individual and group needs. Two examples follow that describe non-Aboriginal teachers who are clearly operating as allies to their students. The first, Halas (1998), shows a high degree of respect for individual difference and is very skilful in making students feel welcome. The second, Brown (1998), developed a historical consciousness that led him to embrace a community-focused, emancipatory pedagogy, similar in many respects to the community solidarity perspective developed in this dissertation.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, teachers need to be mindful of the tensions in some communities between people who hold traditional worldviews and others who hold Christian views, making discussion of Native culture difficult and/or unacceptable (Taylor, 1998). Even if teachers believe that cultural teachings would benefit students, teachers need to be mindful of the various forms of resistance they can meet from students and parents.

<sup>17</sup> Folklorama is an annual event in Winnipeg where many different ethnic groups host pavilions displaying cultural heritage in the form of traditional foods, clothing or regalia, music, dance, art and crafts. It is viewed as an opportunity to become familiar with the heritage differences among population groups in the city. Although for the most part it is a pleasant exchange, it is also superficial. An exchange which focuses on surface differences instead of human commonalities and historical experience does little to build meaningful alliances among people. It may even contribute to further distance and alienation by facilitating stereotypical mystification of ethnicity.

In an article about teaching physical education at an adolescent treatment centre, Halas (1998) shows herself to be a socially conscientious teacher who successfully navigates relationships with the students and staff of an Adolescent Treatment Centre School. Her tale of resistance and conversion provides a picture of a teacher who emphasizes a concern for instructional practices that suit specific contexts. She has the confidence to travel a different route to ensure the success of her students. She writes:

Abruptly, those kids at that school, in a defiant show of resistance, would force on me an intensive search for new ways of doing. If physical education was to meet their needs, something had to give, and I knew the giving would necessarily start with me (p. 213).

Halas addresses the immediate social circumstances of her (mostly Aboriginal) students and (mostly non-Aboriginal) colleagues. She states that, "more important than curricular content, I needed to know my students and how their lived experiences affected who they were in my class" (p. 215). The questions that Halas posed focused on trying to understand what the students were presenting, how their behaviour should be interpreted, and how to respond. Consequently, she was able to adapt her program with their input.

These successfully negotiated relationships ultimately worked well for other staff and the school. Although Halas was initially full of anxiety about the challenges of working with this particular group of students, her approach was to try and "work with whatever each class presented." The repeated attempts at staying connected worked in the long run because students needed respect and connection.

Halas is aware of where her students fit in the social hierarchy as she reflects on the challenges: "As I looked around at my new surroundings I could imagine the voices

of my former colleagues, no doubt chuckling at my predicament: relegated to the minor leagues of the school division as payment for subverting the system” (p. 210). This reflection shows Halas’ consciousness of who these young people are and where they fit (or rather do not fit) in the mainstream school system. The “minor leagues” are for the very troubled Aboriginal adolescents. Her language reflects consciousness of a social structure that excludes some and celebrates others. Halas’ social consciousness reflects the notion of schools as sites for the reproduction of social hierarchy (McLaren, 1998). If teachers are not conscious of their own perceptions and assumptions of social hierarchy, they are more likely to reinforce it.

It is within this context that schools function to socialize young people to accept the current conditions of injustice in society. Most often students and families are blamed for the difficulties that are rooted in broad social and economic conditions or in the way schools are organized and operated. McLaren (1998) states that many schools reproduce oppression for marginalized students. He argues that as teachers:

... we must face our own culpability in the reproduction of inequality in our teaching, and that we must strive to develop pedagogy equipped to provide both intellectual and moral resistance to oppression, one that extends the concept of pedagogy beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and skills and the concept of morality beyond interpersonal relations (p. 234).

Halas believes that it is important to understand the context of the students’ lives. Her focus is largely on immediate individual relationships and individual experiences. She pays attention to micro-practices of pedagogy and shows a high level of flexibility in handling her role as an authority figure. She appears to be quite exceptional in

understanding power as circulating within teacher-pupil relationships and needing to be negotiated. Halas is keenly aware “of the practices of self” which allow her to make choices about how to respond and to ask herself how she can be helpful. Although Halas demonstrates keen awareness of the personal circumstances of her students, she acknowledges a need, “to increase my awareness of the personal, social and historical influences that were shaping who my students were” (p. 215).

Adapting the curriculum to suit the context is an effective strategy. Most important is Halas’s confidence that student-centred changes make sense and her confidence in acknowledging that ‘others’ have power as well. Students make choices in how they respond to authority. Halas’s concept of power as circulatory allows her to be “reflexive”<sup>18</sup> and makes her a stronger ally to young people. By immediately questioning her own assumptions, she extends her reflective practice beyond the typical physical educator whose focus often prioritizes technique (O’Reilly, 1998). Having confidence to initiate change and to negotiate power relations is a key ingredient to becoming an ally to young people.

Halas’s perception of social exclusion appears to be built on the idea that some people accidentally get left out or “marginalized” by a social-economic system that does not serve people very well. While she is critical of the existing social order, her teaching methodology seems consistent with the belief that fundamentally the existing education system is not that bad and that it can be adapted to help “disadvantaged” pupils move ahead or make their way through it. For the most part, teachers who operate within this

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<sup>18</sup> The term “reflexivity” is used by some educators to mean “the immediate critical consciousness of what one is doing, thinking or writing” (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1998, p. 98). Conditioned by critical social consciousness, the term implies a reflex response, rather than reflection later on.

framework focus on supporting students to get through the perils of the system, as it is.

Halas's awareness of the need to know who her students are in historical context is important. The historical insight presented in Chapter 4 provides some key features of the macro historical background that is needed by Canadian teachers of Aboriginal young people. It is an example of what is known in critical race theory as "counter knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Most Aboriginal students in Manitoba know very little about the social-economic history of their own people before the arrival of commercial trade.

When I reflect on the assumptions I held as a young person, I can recall believing that in indigenous times Aboriginal people lived a desperate 'hand to mouth' existence, a perspective that I was schooled in by the combinations of textbook and media versions of 'Indian' life. This was a far cry from the vision of healthy economic and social balance based on seasonal economic planning that existed in those times. These internal 'movies' (assumptions) were fed by Eurocentric images of 'primitive' 'savages' in schools, church and film, and sub-consciously 'confirmed', or re-enforced, by my own first-hand awareness of poverty among Métis and First Nations people. Francis's (1992) discusses internalized images of 'Indians'. His critique of the "Imaginary Indian" provides an illuminating analysis of the construction of identity.

### *Historical Consciousness*

In a critique of Canadian society, Sherene Razack (1998) affirms that we need to push past the "cultural difference" model that serves to further alienate people and calls for understanding of how power operates within social relations. The cultural difference framework is essentially what I have labelled a 'folklorama' approach. Razack argues that:

Encounters between dominant and subordinate groups cannot be 'managed' simply as pedagogical moments requiring cultural, racial, or gender sensitivity. Without an understanding of how responses to subordinate groups are socially organized to sustain existing power arrangements, we cannot hope either to communicate across social hierarchies or to work to eliminate them (p. 8).

Razack believes that the history of oppression needs to be acknowledged and accounted for if relationships are to go beyond managing diversity (which Halas appeared to be doing). She challenges educators to engage in a politics of accountability, one that requires critical reflection on how inequity in Canadian society has come to be produced:

Without history and social context, each encounter between unequal groups becomes a fresh one, where the participants start from zero, as one human being to another, each innocent of the subordination of others. Problems of communication are mere technical glitches in this view, misunderstandings that arise because the parties are culturally, racially, physically, mentally, or sexually different. Educators and legal practitioners need only learn to navigate their way through these differences, differences viewed as unchanging essences, innate characteristics – the knowledge of which enables us to predict behaviour (p. 8).

Razack's call for the development of historical consciousness is extremely important to Aboriginal students, who have a pressing need to understand their history in a meaningful way. They need to have affirmation of the existence of healthy pre-commercial economies and recognition and an understanding of destructive commercial

processes. A transformative pedagogy can help equip young people with knowledge and understanding that will nurture a spirit of re-claiming and rebuilding community. The lack of historical consciousness among educators is damaging. People need to claim their history, both the histories of the colonized and the many faces of the colonizers, which include merchant traders, armed forces, immigrant settlers, missionaries, police, residential school teachers, mining, forestry and hydro companies, social workers, lawyers, stockholders, etc.

An excellent example of a non-Aboriginal teacher with historical consciousness is provided by Brown (1998), who reflects on his experience as a teacher in a northern Athabaskan community. He discusses how he came to understand the role of the “bush teacher”. Brown, who is of Euro-American heritage, refers to the modern-day teacher as a colonizer who is no different from the black robe missionaries of earlier times. He argues that the school, which he describes as the “borderland” where indigenous and non-indigenous cultures interact to affirm cultural domination and subordination, is an enterprise of cultural genocide. It is what he calls the “contact zone” where violence is done in the name of education; a “site where the work of cultural bleaching is accelerated”. (p.122)

Brown was initially perplexed and irritated by the “ungrateful natives” whom he had come to educate so that they could participate in the “American Materialist Dream”. However, he became sensitive to the unequal power relations in the classroom and the objectification of students:

Oppression was thus perpetuated through a pedagogy that reduced the native to an object of education, instead of one that enabled them to become active

participants in the making of knowledge, a pedagogy which privileged the practitioner as sole knowledge-maker, which placed the power and authority for the definition and dissemination of knowledge solely in the hands of the teacher, who was bathed in the active and magnanimous aura of gift-giving while the native was reduced to the passive, inferior, and supposedly grateful posture of gift-receiving - like so many peasants whose empty hands are hungrily extended toward the master who walks in their midst bestowing alms. (p. 129)

Brown speaks of his conversion from seeing himself as a "helper" in bestowing education to the indigenous population to seeing himself as a cultural "thief" who disseminated Euro-American history, language, customs, literature, and lore at the expense of the Athabascans' own ancestral history, language and lore. He wondered about the hostility towards his work in the community and how he was perceived. "Seeing myself, not through my own self-congratulatory eyes, but through the more critical gaze of the Athabaskan, comprised the first painful step toward an alter/native pedagogy". (p. 136)

Reflecting on the power relations between oneself, as benefactor, and the people who are supposed to be benefiting can be a painful process. It led Brown to ask some difficult questions about the ethics and justification for a pedagogy that continues to inflict violence. "What useful purpose is served by a pedagogy that reproduces the violence of the culture at large in the classroom?" (p. 122)

Brown argues that teachers of Aboriginal students "must cease teaching to the core of the dominant culture" which he describes as "a colonizing curriculum" (p. 136). "This is not to imply that History, English, Science, and Physical Education must not be

taught," but, rather, it must be taught within the context of Aboriginal knowledge, community life and language. "History must be 're-read' through the subversive eyes of the native" and "physical education must similarly foreground the traditional games of the native" (p. 137).

Brown recognizes that liberation pedagogy is more than an intellectual process; it is an emotional healing process as well. He concludes that:

The borderland teacher must teach to hybridity - to the volatile contact zone of the in-between, for this is where the subaltern student lives and breaths, sighs and cries. This is where the scars are, where the wounds have been inflicted - wounds which a pedagogy of the oppressed must somehow seek to heal, as Freud sought to heal the psychic wounds of his sufferers through a 'talking cure' that allows the sufferer to name that which has been silenced and repressed. (p. 137)

And finally, Brown's critical social consciousness allows him to appreciate the value of a pedagogy that is emancipatory on a psychological, and therefore political, level:

For it frees the native from that which oppresses in a very real sense, from the invisible as well as the visible oppressor. It sets in motion those realms of the indigenous spirit that have been fixed, rigidified, petrified, calcified - each a dark native creek losing the shackles of its ice. And the sound it makes is loud, disruptive, forceful, and violent - it is a sound which makes those who would be masters look up and take notice, a sound that is far-reaching, the sound of something long held in check under an oppressive weight beginning to move again, creating sharp-edged ruptures, for it is an eruptive, discordant noise - one that shatters the prolonged silence of the Winter ice; it is, in the last analysis, the

violent, loud, disruptive sound of freedom being won, of subaltern students coming into voice for the first time. (p.138)

I have heard this voice, in particular, the voice of young women coming into their own power and it is the social motivation behind this thesis. Brown articulates his growing consciousness of his role as a non-Athabaskan outsider with power and privilege in a historical context. He displays critical social consciousness in the education of Athabaskan young people and is accountable to the community. He has gone far beyond a cultural difference model, a model that Razack (1998) argues only serves to mystify power relations.

Teachers who ignore historical context run the risk of inadvertently encouraging Aboriginal young people to grow ashamed of their own people and of themselves, which I see as internalized oppression. Furthermore, educators need to come to terms with where they fit, themselves, into the history of colonization and oppression on a global scale and the history of the various forms of continuous resistance. People have to come to terms with the broader social-historical context: who they really are, why and how they came to be here. This involves confronting degrading stereotypes and related distress and pretence patterns that interfere with people's engaged, clear thinking about themselves and each other. An ally with critical social consciousness can find the openings to build human confidence and self-esteem.

What do teachers understand of this process? Razack (1998) illustrates the complexities of social consciousness within a framework of interlocking relations of oppression. She speaks of the interlocking relations of domination and subordination and how the portrayal of one group as negative or backward only serves to reinforce the other

as positive or more capable. The identity of 'Canadian' needs to be explored more fully. What is the relationship between denial of Aboriginal community identity and the needs of immigrant populations who arrived to settle Aboriginal lands? The greater and faster the disappearance of indigenous identity the more naturalized the colonizer identity becomes. Following Razack's framework of interlocking relations of domination and suppression, the disappearance of Aboriginal identity and community serves to reinforce the colonist identity as dominant and 'native' to Canada.<sup>19</sup> It is not difficult to apply Razack's presentation to our school system. For example, what is being drummed into the heads of non-Aboriginal students and of Aboriginal students when every day they are asked to stand and sing about "our home and native land"? What identity is being affirmed and whose identity is being undermined?

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<sup>19</sup> Perhaps there is a direct relationship between the development of the settler population identity and the destruction and (attempted) disappearance of Aboriginal identity. Current immigrant populations are usually very quick to pick up racist stereotypes of Aboriginal people that reflect mainstream culture.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Community Solidarity Pedagogy

#### *Community Context*

How do you teach someone to cycle from Winnipeg to The Pas carrying 500 pounds on their back? Better posture? Focused, muscle-enhancing exercises? Effective use of gears? Better bicycle? Lightweight clothing? Better diet? Think positively?

Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? Well, teaching in this way would be analogous to teaching physical education, or any other subject, to students encumbered with a very heavy social burden while ignoring the social burden. In practice, most teachers of students from impoverished Aboriginal communities do not actually ignore the social burden. However, because they lack critical social consciousness, they see only surface manifestations of problems. Accordingly, they do not integrate social-change consciousness and practice into their school curriculum. Instead, they generally attempt the impossible task of teaching individual students in isolation from community context. Ignore the 500-pound pack and learn to pedal better!

Often teachers seem to respond to problems associated with poverty by trying to encourage and train students to escape from their backgrounds or community. Here is where the analogy stops. Where are you going to run to? You can leave a 500-lb sack behind. You cannot leave who you are behind. You cannot leave your community sensibilities behind.

I believe that there is no separating a student's self-confidence and capabilities from community context. For most Aboriginal students in Canada today this means that school programs need to directly and thoughtfully address the social and historical

context of students, schools, and teachers. Teachers are likely to agree that building lasting, positive self-esteem is essential for the well-being of their students. However, this cannot happen by ignoring the roots of social problems or by ignoring the need for students to identify with their own families and communities. In short, educators need to shift to a community solidarity perspective if they are to be better allies to Aboriginal students.

Consistent with the basic premise of this thesis, I believe that critical social consciousness is a requirement for teachers to effectively incorporate community solidarity into their school programs. As set out in Chapter 1, critical social consciousness involves awareness of the historical development of social relationships and values. It includes an awareness of how these relationships and values play out in particular situations. Critical social consciousness refers to social consciousness that entails penetrating, analytical insight. At the opposite end of the spectrum, many people have very limited social consciousness.

The central purpose of this chapter is to set out key components of critical social consciousness that are needed to develop a strong “community solidarity” pedagogy. In so doing, I build the case for the proposition that social consciousness is a strategic determinant of the ability of teachers to be effective allies to Aboriginal young people.

### *Critical Pedagogy*

The application of critical social consciousness to educational theory is generally identified under the umbrella of “critical pedagogy”, pedagogy informed by critical social consciousness. The emergence of critical pedagogy is associated with two streams of thought. One is “critical theory” originating from a group of writers known as the

Frankfurt School (post -World War I, Germany), and the other is in the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, whose thinking matured through his involvement with liberation struggles in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. The roots of Freire's social consciousness were planted in the dramatic economic underdevelopment and impoverishment of northeast Brazil, a process of economic exploitation and resource exhaustion with striking parallels to the commercial fur trade in northern North America, discussed in Chapter 4.<sup>20</sup>

As an evolution from the structural "determinism" of Marxist thought, critical theory developed as a reinterpretation of the way society works with particular attention on the way lives are shaped by injustice and subjugation. The Frankfurt School theorists looked at the changing forms of domination within capitalism, analyzed how consciousness is produced, and explored the capacity of individuals to act as agents of social change. Human "agency" is exercised when people deliberately alter their social environments. The Frankfurt School focused on personal agency and on class struggle within everyday life experiences, in contrast to the "structuralist paradigm" which was pre-occupied with how oppressive economic structures were produced by the macro economic forces ("laws") of capitalism (McLaren and Kincheloe, 1997; Giroux, 1989).

Giroux describes the difference as follows:

The Frankfurt School...connected a Marxist analysis of class structure with psychological theories of the unconscious to understand how oppressive class relations are produced and reproduced. The culturalist paradigm of the Frankfurt School emphasized human agency, focussing on the lived experiences of people

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<sup>20</sup> In the case of northeast Brazil, coffee plantations for colonial profit exhausted the earth's fertility, while in northern North America the commercial fur trade generated external profits and led to severe depletions of all manner of wildlife.

and how consciousness is formed within class struggles. The structuralist paradigm analyzed how oppressive political and economic structures are reproduced, but it tended to ignore or deny personal agency. (Giroux, 1983 quoted in Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2004, pp 241)

Freire promoted popular literacy among the poor in Brazil and was exiled to Chile in the 1960s after the imposition of a US-backed military dictatorship. He connected the act of reading with the development of critical social consciousness and argued that “oppressed people need to develop a critical consciousness that will enable them to denounce dehumanizing social structures and announce social transformation” (p. 242). The concept of “voice” in critical pedagogy is based in Freire’s notion of “dialogical” communication, which rejects an authoritarian imposition of knowledge as well as the idea that everyone’s beliefs are equal. Both voice and dialogue are tools to uncover “whose ideas are represented and whose ideas have been submerged, marginalized, or left out entirely” (ibid).

In the 1980s, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren picked up on critical pedagogy, by drawing on both the Frankfurt School and Freire, and applied it to the context of contemporary schools. They viewed schools as contradictory social sites where hierarchical relationships are reproduced, contested, and reconstructed. Giroux thought of critical pedagogy as “an entry point in the contradictory nature of schooling, a chance to force it toward creating conditions for a new public sphere” (p. 241). The motivation for applying critical theory to the study of education is based on the hope that schools can become instruments for the cultivation of democratic citizenship. Critical pedagogues believe that schools can be transformed to become places that nurture young people’s

humanity and are hopeful that this will contribute to building an educated democratic citizenry and a more egalitarian culture.

The recognition and acceptance of the notion that schools have functioned in a way that reproduces social hierarchy which serves to inflict damage on human relationships is one of the key components of my community solidarity model. If teachers are allies to young people, schools can become sites of social transformation. The potential that schools offer for building a democratic citizenry has motivated critical theorists. Conversely, schools have been the vehicle for reproducing social hierarchy through patterns of ritualized relations of domination and subordination over generations. For some, these unequal power relationships feel normal. Recognizing the potential of schools as sites for social transformation requires critical social consciousness.

### *Cultural Relevancy*

Another key component of community solidarity pedagogy is the concept of "cultural relevancy". This notion is based on the recognition that everybody has culture and that culture is an evolving phenomenon. I define culture to mean the way people live, not something that belongs in a museum. Accordingly, how Aboriginal young people think, and what they do today, is their culture. Aboriginal young people need to be recognized as being culturally competent in their own sphere and to be supported in connecting with academic culture. Teachers need to act as cultural coaches by reinforcing positives and bridging skill development. They need to plug into who their students are.

The concept of culturally relevant teaching has been articulated in Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1994) study of the teaching practices of successful teachers of African

American young people. Ladson-Billings maintains that a teacher's negative perception of students interferes with her/his ability to be an effective teacher for those students.

She argues that teachers who are restricted in this way are not 'bad' teachers but that they do fail to see the connection between their perceptions and their effectiveness. Ladson-Billings discovered that poor teacher preparation programs led "them to an intellectual death" and that successful teachers choose different pathways to achieve success.

Basically, Ladson-Billings characterized teachers as being on their own to figure out strategies for success.

Like other critical pedagogues, Ladson-Billings contributes towards a vision of schools as nurturing communities. She envisions schools as both intellectually and emotionally nurturing for everyone involved. Ladson-Billings identified this as an attribute of culturally relevant practice. She says of teachers in such schools:

They encourage a community of learners; they encourage their students to learn collaboratively. Finally, such teachers are identified by their notions of knowledge: They believe that knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike. They view the content of the curriculum critically and are passionate about it. Rather than expecting students to demonstrate prior knowledge and skills they help students develop that knowledge by building bridges and scaffolding for learning. (p. 25)

Critical social consciousness applied to pedagogy involves having an understanding that systemic social problems exist and that these problems have an effect on how we think about people. Although teachers and schools are not to be 'blamed' for the conditions of inequality, if teachers are lacking critical consciousness, schools are

institutions that can unwittingly help to maintain social injustice. For schools to become sites of social transformation, Weissglass (1998) states that educators need to question their own roles within inequality and how schools condition young people to accept social injustice. He argues that these two aspects of schooling, "often take precedence (often without educators being aware of it), [and that] schools do not reach their full potential for stimulating young peoples' learning and thinking" (p. 4).

Ladson-Billings found that the teachers who were raised in the same context as their students, in poor or working-class neighbourhoods, were able to adapt the curriculum in ways that made it more useful to student learning. Regardless of the "colour" of the teacher, she found that the most conspicuous characteristic of culturally relevant teaching practices was that the teachers knew the culture of the neighbourhood because they had grown up in the neighbourhood or in a similar neighbourhood before they became teachers. Upon becoming teachers, they chose to teach in the neighbourhood school and saw themselves as part of the community. They frequented the same church, stores, and community facilities. They knew the students' families outside the school setting. This included the successful white teachers of African American students in the study who were described as culturally "Black".

Although it cannot be assumed that Aboriginal teachers make better teachers for Aboriginal students, they are more likely to have a form of 'cultural capital' similar to the teachers in Ladson-Billings' study. Familiarity with the everyday culture of students can make it easier to practice culturally relevant teaching. More significantly, Aboriginal teachers are more likely to see themselves as part of the community or perhaps, more willing to become part of one. It is very unlikely that the large non-Aboriginal teaching

force currently working in Aboriginal and Inuit communities across the country is delivering, or is capable of delivering, culturally relevant practice. Aboriginal teachers are more likely to have the social motivation for successful practice in a way that is fundamentally different. Furthermore, as noted previously, Taylor (1998) affirmed that many non-Aboriginal teachers see their teaching posts in Aboriginal communities as short term or as a transition to a better position somewhere else.

Ladson-Billings (1995) maintains that the most significant issue is the teachers' belief that students can and will succeed academically and that the successful teachers in her study took that as their fundamental responsibility.<sup>21</sup> "The students who seemed furthest behind received plenty of individual attention and encouragement" (p. 163). Teachers perceived their relationships with their students as a partnership with families. Students' success was the teacher's contribution and a form of accountability to community. The teachers themselves considered this a significant community contribution which is a relationship that is fundamentally different than an individual advocacy approach. The teachers valued their work with students and received personal 'job' satisfaction in the role. This perception of their relationship to community allowed them to identify with teaching as a true vocation, as opposed to just a 'job'. Ladson-Billings (1995) describes the teachers in her study as identifying strongly with teaching:

They were not ashamed or embarrassed about their professions. Each had chosen to teach and, more importantly, had chosen to teach in this low-income, largely African American school district. The teachers saw themselves as a part of the

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<sup>21</sup> This is the central message of an outstanding film, "*Stand and Deliver*", about the successful outcome for Chicano/a students when teachers believed in them.

community and teaching as a way to give back to the community. They encouraged their students to do the same. (p.163)

According to Ladson-Billings, culturally relevant teaching stands out in its commitment to collective empowerment, “not merely individual empowerment.” It is an indispensable component of community solidarity pedagogy. Every student’s success is everyone’s success because they are building community pride. Ladson-Billings identified culturally relevant pedagogy by three criteria. First, students must experience academic success. Teachers need to hold out high expectations and believe that students are capable of developing strong academic skills. Secondly, students must develop and maintain cultural competence. This involves using students’ culture as a vehicle for learning. And third, “students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 162). This involves cultivating critical thinking skills and teachers providing “counter knowledge” to help develop multiple perspectives and historical consciousness.

### *Anti-racist Education*

Christine E. Sleeter (1993) studied white teachers of African American and Latino/a students, and argues for training that encourages and equips teachers well enough to interrogate their own racial identities. Sleeter identifies two perspectives about racism that help in understanding the challenges for white teachers. One perspective locates racism in individual actions and the other perspective locates racism in group dynamics, or in a “structural arrangement among racial groups.”

Sleeter explains that the individual perspective is “a psychological view of racism that assumes that if we change and develop what is in the heads of white people, they in

turn will create significant changes in institutions” (p. 158). In her study, Sleeter offered white teachers professional development workshops over a two-year period on multicultural teaching practices and opportunities to explore racism. Sleeter found that, in the United States, white teachers held on to their assumptions that students of colour had “dysfunctional families and communities, and lack of ability and motivation” to succeed (p.162). Sleeter discovered that many teachers participated in the workshops in the hope of learning something they did not know about people of colour and took for granted that mainstream social structures were fairly open for everyone to succeed.

One of the critical observations in Sleeter’s study is that most of the teachers thought that the application of racial stereotypes to individuals was unfair even though they believed that the generalizations about the group as a whole were probably accurate. Sleeter describes the amazing logic:

Individuals should be able to succeed or fail on their own merit and should not be held back by ‘deficiencies’ of their race as a whole. As long as a teacher does not know for certain which students will be held back by ‘cultural deficiencies’, it is best to treat them as if one did not see their skin color. Therefore, in an effort to not be racist themselves and to treat all children equally, many white teachers try to suppress what they understand about people of colour, which leads them to try not to ‘see’ color. (p. 162)

Effectively, this is a pretence pattern, or a form of self-deception, which Sleeter says requires immense (unconscious) psychological energy to maintain and which generates multidimensional stress for many teachers. This focus on individuals as separate from

community can cause students to sense that their community is not respected and to disconnect from teachers.

The second contrary perspective on racism centres on group interest in maintaining the status quo. Sleeter explains that this structural analysis of racism focuses on the distribution of power and wealth across groups and on how those of European ancestry attempt to retain supremacy while groups of colour try to challenge it. Sleeter offers Wellman's explanation of group interest:

A structural analysis assumes that how white people view race rests on their vested interest in justifying their power and privileges. White people's common-sense understandings of race "are ideological defenses of the interests and privileges that stem from white people's position in a structure based in part on racial inequality." (Wellman 1977, as quoted in Sleeter 1993, p.158)

Ethnicity theory maintains that the prevailing social system is open to all individuals and that mobility can be attained by anyone who works hard enough (Sleeter, 1993). This assumption is based on the belief that white affluence is the outcome of European ancestors having worked very hard. Ethnicity theory denies the history of colonization, economic exploitation, and the subjugation of people of colour and by doing so "denies white social institutions any complicity in the subordination status of people of colour" (p.161). These assumptions make it very difficult for well-meaning white teachers to understand why their students of colour do not do well. Sleeter asks how a teacher socialized with this mythology can explain social inequality without "demeaning their own students." The counter history sketched in Chapter 4 directly

challenges the liberal pluralist<sup>22</sup> assumption of ethnicity theory that Sleeter critiques. Basically, ethnicity theory tells us to ignore the “500-pound pack” we are carrying and “pedal” harder.

According to Sleeter, the ‘race’ of the teacher does matter and “a predominately white teaching force in a racist and multicultural society is not good for anyone, if we wish to have schools reverse rather than reproduce racism” (p. 157). Sleeter understands that those “teachers [of European descent] bring to the profession perspectives about what race means, which they construct mainly on the basis of their life experiences and vested interests” (p.157). Basically she is making a call for teachers to reflect on who they are, currently and historically. Like Ladson-Billings, Sleeter also argues for the cultivation of critical social consciousness. I believe very strongly that young people need thinking adults who will hang in there with them and who understand that everyday social dynamics are the ‘front line’ of the struggle for social change. The ‘social change’ challenge that I refer to here involves understanding the intertwined effects of oppression on the lives of individuals and communities.

Oppression has many dimensions. Harvey Jackins<sup>23</sup> (1997), founder of an organization committed to human liberation, maintains that ‘oppression’ can be understood as the “systematic mistreatment of a group of people by the society and /or by another group of people who serve as agents of the society, with the mistreatment encouraged or enforced by the society and its culture” (p.151). Drawing on this definition of oppression and the concerns that critical pedagogues hold about the

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<sup>22</sup> The term liberal pluralist is my terminology, not Sleeter’s.

<sup>23</sup> Of the various theories of oppression and internalized oppression that I am aware, it is Re-evaluation Counselling, pioneered by Harvey Jackins (1997), that most explicitly addresses the process by which hurts and distress patterns cripple people. It also focuses on techniques for helping to reclaim humanity.

reproduction of social hierarchy in the school system, we get a complex picture of social relationships within schools. A key component of my community solidarity pedagogy involves recognition that oppression exists on many levels and awareness of how it plays out in social relationships is needed. It is especially important to pay attention to the way oppression blocks people from being in solidarity with each other. With this recognition and awareness, teachers as allies can thoughtfully intervene to help end oppression. They can help find interventions that contribute to building community strength.

### *Internalized Oppression*

Frantz Fanon (1963), a psychiatrist of African heritage who worked with Algerians during their independence struggle from French colonial rule, identified “internalized oppression” as a psychological process where both the colonized and the colonizer are damaged by hatred. He understood the painful existence of the colonized, who he perceived as “the wretched of the earth.” Fanon articulated how the minds and souls of the colonized were occupied by the culture of the colonizer. Colonized people hate and reject their powerless selves and generally want to take the place and the power of the colonizer. Stuart Hall (as quoted in Razack, 1998) acknowledges Fanon’s insight and the historical context in which he worked:

The subject to which Fanon addresses himself is historically specific. It is not racism as a general phenomenon but racism in the colonial relation which he dissects. His task was to unpack its inner landscapes – to consider the conditions for the production of a new kind of subject. (p. 4)

Fanon was articulating what many oppressed people know in their hearts even if many do not have consciousness of it. People learn about this in relationships with others

and in community. This is the basis for vernacular terms (and there are many) such as “apple” to describe people who are perceived as wanting to be white. They are ‘red’ on the outside and ‘white’ on the inside. In general, people of colour torment themselves or each other for acting white or wanting to be. The destruction of self and community gets played out in the social dynamics, generating social crisis.

Colonialism and oppression are inter-connected, complex processes that have long and continuing records of wreaking havoc in communities around the globe. It is in this context that I refer to particular groups of people as being “targeted for destruction.”<sup>24</sup> Within the social hierarchy, people are targeted. In the bigger picture, they are disposable people. In the social hierarchy, people are systemically targeted in relation to ‘race’, class, gender, age, ability, religion, etc. These dynamics of social crisis have an impact on young people’s notions of self and community. To be an ally, a teacher needs critical understanding of these social relationships.

Ann Bishop (1994) defines internalized oppression as the negative beliefs that people have about themselves. Through their socialization, oppressed people come to accept (and often act on) the negative beliefs they hold about themselves. Liberation is the process of freeing yourself from these negative beliefs. Bishop (2005) believes that stories of oppression need to be told by those targeted. Bishop states that it is difficult for some to hear the stories. Teachers need to understand internalized oppression and how white mainstream definitions of success imply a ‘way out’, which, if achievable, would

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Native kids’ are targeted for destruction: shocking numbers are either taking their own lives or killing each other. The ‘news’ media informs us almost daily of yet another tragic story. Suicides generally do not even get reported. While writing this chapter (April 2006) I have been informed that two thirteen year old Ojibwa-Cree girls have hung themselves only days apart, one in Winnipeg and one in Garden Hill, Island Lake. Both were closely connected to families of workers at Neechi Foods Co-op. If I were not a member of this worker cooperative, I would not be aware of these two awful tragedies.

be a betrayal of community. Yet, being in a position of power and privilege can obscure peoples' perception of oppression and recognition that those with less power need to be heard. Speaking as a white privileged person, Bishop claims that:

Part of the oppression is that we are cut off from our own ability to empathize with the oppressed. If we are aware of it at all, we tend to get defensive or write it off as not very serious – ‘they are just whining’....the privileges that we obtain from oppressing others is invisible to us....oppression is structural. We derive benefits from being male or white or straight or able-bodied *without taking any personal action* against a woman, a person of colour, a gay/lesbian/bisexual person, or person with a disability. (Bishop 2005, p. 5; emphasis added)

### *Unpacking the Inner Landscape*

“Unpacking the inner landscape”<sup>25</sup> is a psychological process that can be emotionally complex. Patterns of class and age oppression, gender inequalities, colonialism, and racism are internalized in our families of origin and re-enforced among the social relations within schools and the broader community. These oppressive patterns are played out in our social lives unless we consciously make decisions to change our thinking and related behaviour. Developing critical social consciousness is a necessary step in the process of liberating ourselves (our thoughts and emotions) from the misinformation we received about others (and ourselves) and in becoming allies who are committed to ending oppression in all its manifestations. It is a decision and an orientation which places power in the hands of individuals to take responsibility for

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<sup>25</sup> “Unpacking the inner landscape” is a term Stuart Hall uses to describe Fanon's concepts of internalized oppression.

social relationships in everyday life and to help (re-)build social structures that nurture individual and collective humanity.

Unpacking the inner landscapes is an intriguing process for building alliances that fosters social change relationships. Our early memories of inequality or mistreatment are part of the foundation that distances people and contributes to the reproduction of social divisions. Young people are painfully socialized into accepting inequalities around them and, as adults, tend to reproduce these inequalities in their own social relationships because it feels natural and is perceived as normal. Early memory work is an important emancipatory process and people need to set up their lives in a way that creates the safety in relationships to do this kind of work. Similarly, teachers need to support each other. Sharing stories of early schooling experiences can help transform schools.

Freire tapped into this process in teaching literacy. It is a different kind of learning process based on people giving each other respect and good attention. Early feminists who organized support groups for consciousness-raising understood this process as well. Teachers committed to becoming allies can use a similar form of supported learning and create safe environments to unpack their inner landscapes.

Understanding class oppression involves reflecting on one's own class background. It is important to claim the identities of our social location, even if the process is uncomfortable. Becoming an ally involves an exploration of class patterns, behaviours and attitudes towards others that we learned in the context of growing up in various gradations of working class, middle class or owning class. Some of us have parents with very different class origins. This claiming process is similar to the memory-work described by Henry Giroux (1998), a leading critical pedagogue who argues that our

social relationships and experiences are a form of “social texts” to be explored as a way to gain consciousness and insight into how we learn to be who we are and how we “perform ourselves” in our socially stratified society.

Giroux argues for the importance of “memory-work” as an element of pedagogy where biography is turned into a “social text” useful for “challenging our understanding of the present, our relationships to others and what it might mean to use such texts as part of a broader struggle” for social change (p. 148). Giroux offers his reflections on some everyday practices that shaped his life as a white working-class boy living in a working-class neighbourhood in the United States:

When college students walked through my Smith Hill neighbourhood from Providence College to reach the downtown section of the city, we taunted them, mugged them on occasion, and made it clear to them that their presence violated our territorial and class boundaries. We viewed these kids as rich, spoiled, and privileged. We hated their arrogance, and despised their music. Generally, we had no contact with middle-class and ruling-class kids until we went to high school. Hope High School (ironically named) in the 1960s was a mix of mostly poor black and white kids, on the one hand, and a small group of white wealthy kids, on the other. The school did everything to make sure that the only space we shared was the cafeteria during lunch hour. Black and working-class white kids were generally warehoused and segregated in that school. Tracked into dead-end courses, school became a form of dead-time for most of us – a place in which our bodies, thoughts and emotions were regulated and subject to either ridicule or swift disciplinary action if we broke any of the rules. We moved within these spaces of hierarchy and

segregation deeply resentful of how we were treated, but with little understanding, and no vocabulary to connect our rage to viable forms of political resistance. We were trapped in a legacy of commonsensical understandings that made us complicitous with our own oppression. In the face of injustice, we learned little about what it might mean to unlearn our prejudices and join in alliances with those diverse others who were oppressed. (p. 148)

People do not generally reflect on social and economic inequality unless effectively challenged and supported to do so. Giroux explains that his sense of who he was as a white male “emerged performatively through my [his] interactions with peers, the media, and the broader culture” and that he inherited a language and a particular vocabulary that rarely challenged, but rather, reinforced social divisions. His introduction to the “languages of dissent” came from his involvement with the anti-war movement and the civil rights struggles of the 1960s which supported his rethinking about his own memories of class and ‘race’ divisions. Giroux surmises:

In looking back on my experience, moving through the contested terrains of race, gender, and class, it is clear to me that power is never exerted only through economic control, but also through what might be called a form of ‘cultural pedagogy’. Racism and class hatred are a learned activity, and as a kid I found myself in a society that was all too ready to teach it. (p.151)

Giroux reflects on the everyday practices that shape life in schools, which he sees as being organized “around rituals of regulation and humiliation.” He reminisces on his early schooling experience of segregation and on how social class difference was registered in rituals such as the door used to enter the school building. In the following

passage, he describes how working-class young people responded to these rituals of class oppression:

...the working-class Black and White kids from my section of town entered Hope [High School] from the back door of the building while the rich White kids entered through the main door in the front of the school. We didn't miss the point, and we did everything we could to let the teachers know how we felt about it. We were loud and unruly in classes, we shook the rich kids down and took their money after school, we cheated whenever possible, but more than anything, we stayed away from school until we were threatened with being expelled. (p. 149)

These patterns are similar to those exhibited by Aboriginal students today. Rituals of segregation such as the type that Giroux describes would effectively remind young people everyday that some of them are neither good enough nor smart enough to matter too much in the social hierarchy. In a recent study on Aboriginal students' lives within school landscapes, van Ingen and Halas (in press) discuss how groups of students in one school congregated at different doors throughout the school setting and how one of the doors was known as the 'smokers' door. Smoking has its own stigma of bad and unhealthy behaviour and with the concentration of Aboriginal students in this area it became known as the 'neechi' door. van Ingen and Halas maintain that this "reinforced and essentialized notions of a collective, marginalized Aboriginal youth identity; if you want to find an Aboriginal student, check out the neechi doors" (p. 17).

'Race' differences are even more complex. Giroux reflects on how 'race' difference, intersected with class difference, was registered in his schooling experience.

He maintains that bodies rather than minds defined difference:

Along with the Black kids in the school, our bodies rather than our minds were taken up as a privileged form of cultural capital. Both working-class Whites and Blacks resented those students who studied, talked in the elaborated code, and appeared to live outside of their bodies to extremes, especially in those public spheres open to us, that is, the football field, basketball court, and the baseball diamond.

As a working class White kid, I found myself in classes with Black kids, played basketball with them, and listened mostly to Black music. But we rarely socialized outside of school. Whiteness in my neighborhood was a signifier of pride, a marker of racial identity experienced through a dislike of Blacks. Unlike the current generation of many working class kids, we defined ourselves in opposition to Blacks, and while listening to their music did not appropriate their styles. Racism ran deep in that neighborhood, and no one was left untouched by it. (p.149)

In the absence of critical consciousness, many teachers are ill equipped to address poverty and racism with young people, especially if the students are themselves poor. For some educators, there appears to be no sense of obligation or consciousness to do so. Young people are often not given a framework to understand the context of their life. In the absence of a framework for understanding, they are left to conclude inferiority, either their own, or their community's, or both. This type of schooling experience, in general,

can constitute mistreatment. As argued previously, systemic mistreatment of young people is a form of oppression that can be internalized and reinforce chronic patterns of low self-esteem. It can undermine young peoples' confidence in their own abilities and intelligence. In the absence of critical social consciousness, well-intentioned educational practice can generate social-psychological setback for students.

In the case of Aboriginal communities, residential schooling was especially damaging because young people were left completely vulnerable by the separation from their parents and by the colonization of their birthright lands. Racist social relationships target young people, and educators need to think about how they are complicit in this process. Lee Maracle (1988), an Aboriginal writer, poet, and parent laments on this process:

The society we live in is racist. Naturally, the education we receive is racist. Our students are the victims of this racism. It takes a tremendous amount of effort on the part of Native parents and our children to prevent racism from becoming internalized. (p. 64)

Unpacking the inner landscape of the colonizer is important development work for allies. The following story of a healing session with "Jackie"<sup>26</sup> is included here to offer a glimpse at the process involved in 'cleaning' up the emotional baggage that we carry from our early socialization that gets in our way of our clear thinking about people. Critical social consciousness helps us recognize that we cannot grow up in a racist, sexist,

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<sup>26</sup> "Jackie" is a fictional name. In the context of 'healing' work, I respect and appreciate confidentiality. At the same time I recognize that human struggle is constant, continuous, and painful for many. We all have stories. The experience of the healing work was real. Early memory work such as this is necessary to stop the racism and requires allies. Posing questions such as 'what is your earliest memory of....?' can start the process. Educators need to have safe places - safe relationships - to do this work. Support groups for educators willing to clean up racism would be helpful.

classist, adultist<sup>27</sup> society and not have all of the thoughts associated with those oppressions. Becoming an effective ally to others demands a process of wading into our psychological make-up. This process requires safe and supportive relationships with our own allies as a necessary part of the journey.

Some time ago I participated in a healing workshop<sup>28</sup> organized by people interested in exploring ways to eliminate racism. Participants came together to explore the impact of racism on their lives. In the safety of a well supported environment among conscientious allies, Jackie was able to focus on her deep-rooted racism which she traced back to her early childhood. With lots of positive attention focused on Jackie, she talked about her life experiences and allowed her thoughts, memories, and emotions to surface and be experienced. Although this was not an Aboriginal-healing context, such as sharing circle or a sweat lodge, there were similarities. Emotional healing of this type involves giving people focused attention, either one-on-one or group attention, while they tell their story or respond to questions about a topic that will help bring the memories to surface. With group attention on Jackie, the facilitator posed questions about her childhood and then eventually asked about her earliest memory of Aboriginal people?

Jackie, a 'white' middle-aged professional woman, recalled childhood memories of hearing her father speak harshly to the 'Indians' with whom he did business. They

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<sup>27</sup> Adultism is the conscious or unconscious pre-emption of leadership and self-actualization from young people.

<sup>28</sup> Healing methods involve experiencing early memories or emotion and allowing the expression of the emotion through talking, crying, trembling (fear), and shaking (terror), perspiring, yawning (stress) or laughing. It is based on the theory that unexpressed painful emotions cause distress and distress (defined as unexpressed painful emotion) interferes with clear thinking. Distress, unless it is expressed through a human healing process, stays with the person and clouds their perceptions. Distress means that we have been hurt and that these hurts cloud our vision. The hurt gets played out in the person's social relationships or in the physical body (disease). This contemporary approach to healing has a lot in common with traditional Aboriginal healing techniques, such as sweat lodge or peyote ceremonies.

were his customers. She recalled that this was a regular form of discourse within her family and her non-Aboriginal community. What is particularly interesting about her early experiences is how, as a young person, she was able to connect her own mistreatment with that of others. Jackie's father often spoke to his daughter in a patronizing and authoritarian tone of voice, a tone that he frequently used when speaking to Aboriginal people with whom he had daily interactions. Jackie's connection with the disrespect and mistreatment of the 'Indians' in the community was made at a very early age as she recognized the similar mistreatment. She was a child in a world dominated by an insecure adult.

This is not to say that the father was a 'bad' parent, as such. It was, and still is, common parenting practice to exercise authoritarian control to silence young people. In Jackie's cultural landscape neither 'children' nor 'Indians' were very well respected. Jackie's consciousness of this early connection of a shared oppression re-emerged when she was in her mid-adulthood and only after significant exploration through this healing work. The processes helped to explain, to Jackie herself, some of the choices she made in her life work. For example, she had spent the greater part of her adult life working in solidarity with Aboriginal people. She realized that her attraction to do this type of social change work was related to her early perceptions. She concluded that her internalized awareness of being mistreated and of witnessing the mistreatment of others explained her affinity with the oppressed.

Children can be expected to unconsciously rationalize exploitation by adults. 'Children of the colonizer' can be as damaged as 'children of the colonized'. While some young people come to believe themselves to be inferior, others learn to assume a position

of superiority, depending on their families' social location. It can be argued that notions of inferiority are fundamental to developing a sense of superiority. According to Jackins (1997), people accumulate distress by getting emotionally hurt or humiliated. They are made to feel inferior by the distress and seeing the world through the hurt experiences, they claim a position of superiority (or inferiority), whenever or wherever they can. By the time we reach adulthood we have accumulated a significant amount of distress from our interactions in the social world, whether we are aware of the distress or not.

Exercising power over others in a way that is destructive is often a symptom of hurt experience. People often act out or dramatize their hurt. Emotional healing involves understanding these lived experiences and claiming them. Critical social consciousness helps us deconstruct the experiences of power within our social relationships.

Children of the colonizer will claim notions of superiority to rationalize their identity and power privilege. Being mistreated or witnessing mistreatment of others is emotionally painful and needs to be rationalized in some way. The rationalization process is how we internalize the social hierarchy. People respond differently depending on how damaged they are by the process. It is our humanity that is damaged. Recovering from our distress and reclaiming our humanity is a life-long struggle and important liberation work.

In summary, oppression refers to the social relationships that involve the intentional or unintentional exercise of power by one group of people at the expense of the other. In this context, an ally is someone who acts in solidarity with a person or group in dealing with oppressive personal and social relationships. Teachers can be allies to Aboriginal students by working to end 'colonial relationships' and 'adulthood'.

'Adultism' is the conscious or unconscious pre-emption of leadership and self-actualization from young people. I use the term 'self-actualization' as meaning a process whereby people come to terms with who they are and position themselves in a way that leads to positive engagement with the world around them. It involves notions of sense of purpose, self-respect, curiosity, creativity and peace of mind, all of which contributes to emotional and physical health. In my mind, this whole package defines the critically important, end-goal of helping Aboriginal young people to develop positive self-esteem. There is no separating cooperative social constructs from community integrity, and, accordingly, from "fortification of self-esteem", and personal self-actualization.

The understanding of key historical processes that could be so important to the identities and personal development of Aboriginal students is not at all well known among teachers or the general public. Accordingly, Chapter Four provides some of that knowledge in regard to populations living on what is now known as the Canadian Shield and on the Northern Plains. Entitled, *Aboriginal Communities in Historical Context*, it provides historical insight and, from my point of view, an important indigenous feminist perspective not usually articulated.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Aboriginal Communities in Historical Context

#### *Communal Economies*

Prior to the arrival and advance of merchant fur trade companies in the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, communal band societies prevailed from the Central Rockies to the Atlantic seacoast and from the north shore of Lake Superior and the northern Plains to the Arctic. These included the Beothuk in what is now called Newfoundland, various Algonquian linguistic groups stretching through the Boreal Forest from the Atlantic to Lake Winnipeg, the Dene northwest of the Churchill River, and the Inuit of the northern tundra and Arctic coastal areas.

The basic workings of communal economic systems can be identified and understood by combining oral traditions in Aboriginal communities, the writings of early merchants and missionaries, and archaeological evidence. All Aboriginal societies had oral traditions but north of the Aztec Empire there were no written histories. However, a critical reading of the chronicles of European merchants and missionaries can be very revealing. The writings referred to as the "Jesuit Relations" provide a major example. They are basically field notes by missionary priests to inform superiors in France and each other of their undertakings. The Jesuits were Roman Catholic missionaries who were out to "save" souls by replacing "pagan" culture with their version of Christianity. As this mission centred on deliberate cultural subversion,<sup>29</sup> the Jesuit Relations have a lot of anthropological value. The missionaries had an interest in understanding the indigenous culture because of their intention to dismantle and supplant the belief system.

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<sup>29</sup> Not unlike an intelligence agency plotting the overthrow of unfriendly foreign regimes.

Although their writings reflect their own racism, sexism, and religious myths, they provide a lot of information about egalitarian culture.

Iroquois and Huron villages in the vicinity of the upper St. Lawrence and lower Great Lakes and the Mandan and Hidatsa villages adjoining the Missouri River relied extensively on the cultivation of corn and other crops and were more formally structured than the hunting and gathering communities to the north. They were typical of what anthropologists describe as tribal societies (Rothney, 1979). The Siouan-speaking Assiniboine and Dakota communities, based in the Parklands and northern Plains, had strong elements of both tribal and communal band societies.

Both communal band and tribal economies were based on production for direct social use-value, rather than on an impersonal market value.<sup>30</sup> In other words, decisions about production and distribution were based on community needs and goals, rather than on the pursuit and accumulation of privatized commercial wealth (Rothney, 1983). The concept of unemployment did not exist. The workings of communal economies would make Aboriginal students proud... if they knew about it!

### *Social Relationships*

Social relationships within communal band and tribal societies were egalitarian because the economy operated on the basis of community interest. Every member of the community was involved in various forms of production, contributing to the well-being of the community as a whole. Individuals acquired self-esteem by sharing and contributing to the well-being of others. Distribution of goods and services was based on

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<sup>30</sup> Recognition of the tension between community use value (social-use value) and commercial exchange value (impersonal market value) is fundamental to a critical understanding of the entire economic transformation that has been occurring ever since the arrival of merchant trade. However, this recognition is largely absent in published works.

people's needs, not on the ability to pay. Production was directly geared to what people needed and used. Communities "produced what they consumed and consumed what they produced" (Rothney and Watson, 1975). These consumption and production patterns ensured structured economic balance alongside highly egalitarian social relationships.

In 1634 Paul LeJeune, a Jesuit missionary, spent several weeks traveling and camping with Montagnais inland from the lower St Lawrence.<sup>31</sup> The Montagnais are part of the Algonquian linguistic group, which in the west includes the Ojibwa and Cree. The Montagnais lived in migratory communal bands, north of the tribal villages of Huronia. LeJeune's perspective was one of a missionary from a patriarchal, class society trying to convert "savages" to Christianity. Nonetheless his chronicles offer an unparalleled glimpse of communal band societies at a very early stage of European contact. LeJeune reflects on the quality of the social relationships he observed among the people he lived with, "They treat each other as brothers; they harbour no spite against those of their own nation". In communal band societies people acquired self-esteem from sharing and displaying generosity. Being non-materialistic or non-acquisitive was a highly valued personal trait. LeJeune observed:

They are very generous among themselves and even make a show of not loving anything, of not being attached to the riches of the earth, so that they may not grieve if they lose them. Not long ago a dog tore a beautiful Beaver robe belonging to one of the Savages, and he was the first one to laugh about it. One of the greatest insults that can be offered to them, is to say, "That man likes everything, he is stingy." If you refuse them anything, here is their reproach...:

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<sup>31</sup> The social formation of the Montagnais was similar to the Cree and Ojibwa in northern North America. Communal band societies were the dominant social formation of hunting and gathering economies.

'Khisakhitan Sakhita', "Thou lovest that, love it as much as thou wilt" they do not open the hand half way when they give... You will see them take care of their kindred, the children of their friends, widows, orphans, and old men, never reproaching them in the least, giving them abundantly, sometimes whole Moose. This is truly the sign of a good heart and of a generous soul. (LeJeune, 1633-34, VI, p.237)

These non-materialistic values and patterns of caring and sharing were dominant characteristics of communal band society, and have been continually undermined by colonization.

#### *Respect for Young People and Women*

Elders, women and children, as well as men, enjoyed a high level of autonomy and social respect in communal band economies. In the early 1630s, LeJeune left a telling glimpse of the social respect experienced by young people. He described an incident where a Montagnais man was observing a young French boy playing a drum. The boy used his drumstick and struck the Montagnais man on the head and caused him to bleed. The French became upset with the child and the Montagnais demanded compensation for the injury, which was the custom. However, the French insisted on their custom, which was to punish the child with a public whipping. The Montagnais would not allow the physical punishment and one of them intervened by protecting the child and offering himself for punishment instead of the child. LeJeune described the incident in his journal as follows:

Our interpreter said: "Thou knowest our custom; when any of our number does wrong, we punish him. This child has wounded one of your people: he shall be

whipped at once in thy presence." As the Savages saw we were really in earnest...they began to pray for his pardon, alleging he was only a child, that he had no mind, that he did not know what he was doing; but as our people were nevertheless going to punish him, one of the Savages stripped himself entirely, threw his blankets over the child and cried out to him who was going to do the whipping: "Strike me if thou wilt, but thou shalt not strike him." And thus the little one escaped. (Jesuit Relations, 1632-33, V, p. 219)

LeJeune's journal show how the Jesuits functioned as accomplices to commercial trade and colonial rule in trying to undermine egalitarian social relations, particularly in regard to women and children. In spite of his admiration for indigenous sharing, generosity and honesty, in 1640 he wrote with pleasure that, after being berated by recently converted Christian men, "some of these poor women" reported:

Yesterday the men summoned us to a Council, the first time that women have ever entered one; but they treated us so rudely that we were greatly astonished. 'It is you women' they said to us, 'who are the cause of all our misfortunes, - it is you who keep the demons among us. You do not urge to be baptized; You are lazy about going to prayers; when you pass before the cross, you never salute it; you wish to be independent. Now know that you will obey your husbands; and you young people, you will obey your parents and our Captains; and if any fail to do so, we have concluded to give them nothing to eat.... I believe, indeed, that they will not all at once enter into this great submissiveness that they promise themselves; but it will be in this point as in others, they will embrace it little by little. A young woman having fled, shortly after these elections, into the woods,

not wishing to obey her husband, the Captains had her searched for, and came to us, if, having found her, it would not be well to chain her by one foot; and if it would be enough to make her pass four days and four nights without eating, as penance for her fault (Jesuit Relations, 1640, XVII, p.107).

Conversion to Christianity involved the introduction of social hierarchy. It introduced domestic violence by the subjugation of women.

### *Fatal Imbalance*

Like most Canadians, Aboriginal students generally know very little about how commercial trade underdeveloped indigenous economies. Nor are they aware of their forebears' constant resistance to commercial subjugation or the fact that commercial trade disrupted healthy economies and undermined egalitarian social relations, an eventuality that was particularly harsh for women and children.

Commercial trade steadily undermined the balance of communal band economies (Rothney, 1975, 1983). European trade goods, such as metal pots and pans, traps and guns, had technological advantages over ceramics and other pre-metal manufactures (Ray, 1974). However, reliance on these items soon led to a critical dependency on foreign imports. In turn, this created a fatal imbalance with production geared to commercial value, rather than to social-use value. Early roots of modern "welfare dependency" were planted rapidly, in the late 1600s, when Cree families periodically had to rely on rations of oatmeal doled out to them by the Hudson's Bay Company. This was because they had started wintering around desolate trading posts on the Hudson Bay coast as a direct response to commercial trade. They remained late in the fall, after freeze-up, hunting and fishing to supply the company with provisions. In so doing, they

were cut off from the inland forest resources that had sustained people in the region for thousands of years (Elias, 1974).

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, local economic balance had been destroyed to such an extent that severe depletion of wildlife, hunger and submission to debt were common in woodland areas. People were no longer exclusively producing for the well-being of their communities. Rather, commercial commodity relationships increasingly undermined the egalitarian nature of local cultures. The spread of insatiable merchant trade and foreign goods increasingly undermined other forms of skilled, artisan manufacturing. Region by region, commercial trade exhausted stocks of fur bearing animals and led to over-hunting of game and to other forms of resource depletion. In turn, this set the stage for widespread epidemics (smallpox and measles) and food shortages in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, all of which laid the groundwork for the wholesale surrender of land, packaged by treaties (Ray, 1974; Rothney, 1975).

Because of the prevailing patriarchal culture of Europe the merchant companies traded directly with men. Men became the captains of the trade while women became the carriers. While men did not travel without women, who were the principal producers of food, clothing, and shelter, commercial trade relations and the shift in production priorities of men undermined the social status of women.<sup>32</sup> Although the egalitarian nature of Aboriginal culture has not completely disappeared, thanks to continued hunting and gathering activities and to household production outside the commercial sphere, it is still being eroded.

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<sup>32</sup> There are many archival descriptions of trade between local people and merchant traders. Prime examples include the journals of James Isham, Hudson Bay Governor at York Factory in 1740s, and Samuel Herne, who, in the early 1770s, was the first Hudson Bay Company agent to penetrate the interior

This shift in production priorities marked the beginning of the destruction of economic self-reliance and community health. Aboriginal people were pulled into the evolving global commercial marketplace. They became the victims of revolutionary, global restructuring, ultimately defined by the shift in production from communal use to commercial use. On the plains, in the late 1800's another shift occurred, this time from the commercial fur trade economy to a commercial agricultural economy and European settlement. Following the Indian Treaties, which were concluded with Aboriginal people who were under severe economic duress, opportunities for European peasants to acquire free land for agricultural pursuits were heavily promoted throughout Europe. The result was heavy immigration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Residential schooling was imposed during this period with the intention of training young people for the emerging industrial and agricultural industries.

#### *Implications for Aboriginal Students*

These historical insights lead us back to a discussion of 'community'. What needs to be understood in historical perspective is that the destruction of community is a global economic process that has been happening internationally and has been evolving for several hundred years. It is important to understand the significance of what was destroyed by commercial trade and how it happened. Aboriginal people had healthy economies which fostered and nourished an egalitarian culture. Many educational change leaders who argue for traditional cultural programs in the schooling of Aboriginal students in the hopes of nurturing pride in their identity fail to focus on the connection

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north-west of Prince of Wales Fort (Churchill). Herne's writings are exceptional in their focus on a (Dene) band of intermediary traders.

between economic relationships and cultural values. Imagine the impact of a social studies curriculum that allowed Aboriginal pupils to understand that their ancestors:

Lived in egalitarian, communal societies, free of governments, magistrates and police. Everyone enjoyed a high degree of personal autonomy and social responsibility alongside consensus-based group independence. Class distinctions arising from property relationships did not exist. Each person developed a very diversified balance of mental and physical skills and fully participated in all general spheres of human endeavour. All facets of industry and technology were locally pursued, controlled and integrated. Communities produced what they consumed and consumed all that they produced. Thus, there was complete social and economic independence and balance. (Rothney, 1983, p.1)

Without this understanding how can teachers effectively deal with the 'noble savage' commercial imagery used to sell "cures" for arthritis and to convince girls to buy Pocahontas paraphernalia?<sup>33</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, how can Aboriginal young people feel positive about themselves without making historical sense out of the social crisis that weighs heavily on so many of their families. In addition to helping to offset self-doubt among Aboriginal students, historical knowledge also can foster self-respect through interest and pride in the egalitarian, self-reliant economies and culture of their ancestors and through fascination with the intricate material culture developed over the centuries.

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<sup>33</sup> Recent TV marketing of medication for arthritic pain using the stereotyped 'noble savage' imagery and, Walt Disney's marketing campaign of an animated film and related paraphernalia using a female "princess" version of a 'noble savage'.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Methodology

#### *Knowledge Construction*

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to investigate social consciousness as a factor in determining the ability of physical education teachers to be effective allies of Aboriginal students. In this chapter, I present the specific research methods relevant to the interviews that generated the informant responses that are examined in Chapter 6. I chose an interview process to study the pedagogical orientation of some relatively successful physical education teachers and to inquire about their knowledge of Aboriginal communities.

Steinar Kvale (1996) describes the qualitative research interview as a “construction site of knowledge”. Its purpose is to obtain a “description of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 6). Kvale identifies features of a postmodern construction of knowledge generated by interviews to include:

The conversational, the narrative, the linguistic, the contextual, and the interrelational nature of knowledge. These intertwined features are taken as a starting point for clarifying the nature of the knowledge yielded by the research interview and for developing its knowledge potentials. (p. 42)

The phenomenon being studied in this interview process is the social consciousness of physical education teachers. Given the lack of engagement of Aboriginal students in many schools, the purpose of my study is to contribute towards the development of a framework for a transformative pedagogy that nurtures community values of inclusion,

cooperation, respect, confidence, pride and belonging. As articulated previously, within the school context physical educators are uniquely placed to facilitate a community solidarity strategy.

A transformative pedagogy involves the cultivation of a qualitatively different teacher–student relationship. Critical social consciousness can nurture more effective alliances between physical education teachers and Aboriginal students. As previously stated, the importance of physical educators knowing their students in the context of the students’ historical identities and in the context of power dynamics between teachers and students is critical. I have pursued this inquiry because of an “emancipatory interest”, that is, the possibilities it offers teachers in understanding challenges related to Aboriginal communities, and because of opportunities it may suggest in regard to the training and education of physical educators.

### *Research Questions*

In order to investigate the impact of social consciousness in applied pedagogy, I constructed the following research questions:

- How do physical education teachers interpret the effect of their own teaching practices on the performance of students?
- What knowledge do teachers have about the historical, social and economic backgrounds of their students, and how does this information impact on their relationships with Aboriginal students?
- What is involved in critical social consciousness applied to teaching?
- How is critical social consciousness important to being an effective ally to Aboriginal students?

### *Study Participants*

Within the context of qualitative research, I interviewed eight physical education teachers who are currently teaching, or have taught, physical education and physical activity to Aboriginal students. The research involved a “purposeful sampling” (Patton, 1990) of physical educators who were referred to the study by colleagues of theirs who perceived them as having been successful in motivating Aboriginal young people to participate in their program offerings. Seven were interviewed in person and one through e-mail correspondence. Selections were made based upon references from colleagues and on their willingness to participate in the study. I also placed an advertisement in the Manitoba Physical Education Teachers Association’s *MPETA Journal* inviting physical education teachers who self-identify as being successful to contact me (Appendix E). However, the ad did not draw any response.

For sampling purposes, ‘success’ was primarily defined as having a significant level of student participation in physical education classes and physical activity. Many of the physical educators in the study cited their own primary goal as effecting participation in physical activity. Seven of eight study participants worked in schools where the population of pupils was either totally or predominately Aboriginal. Four worked in an urban environment, three worked in a rural environment, and one in a remote northern community.

### *Interview questions*

Entry questions start a process of inquiry that Ellis (1997) describes as a “hermeneutic” loop. One question leads to another as the researcher acquires more depth of understanding. I began the research by asking: What knowledge do teachers have

of the historical and social economic backgrounds of their students? A second set of interview questions explored the knowledge teachers have about colonial processes and about anti-colonial struggles that people are currently engaged in. The construction and analysis of this set of questions was informed by key historical insights into Aboriginal history that challenge Eurocentric assumptions of economic scarcity and inter-tribal warfare.

An interview protocol (Appendix C) probed participants to explore questions in areas of personal background, teaching philosophy, building relationships with students, and understanding of the social-historical background of Aboriginal youth. Narrative prompts (Appendix D) posed questions related to (1) changing into gym attire for class (2) participation in class and (3) trying out for interschool teams. These narratives were constructed from a recent study that investigated the physical education experiences of Aboriginal youth in Manitoba (Champagne & Halas, 2002), where some key participation barriers were identified. Using these barriers as illustrations to prompt teacher reflection, I developed teaching scenarios to probe how these teachers would respond. For example: "During a fitness unit, a small group of Aboriginal girls are standing together in the corner of the gym. They are not participating but they are also not disruptive. How would you address this situation?"

The individual interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and were audio tape-recorded and transcribed. In some cases, where research participants lived out of town or were not available for an in-person interview, I emailed the list of questions and used their returned email as part of the data collected.

Kvale (1996) says that with "skepticism about global systems of thought, a

renarrativization of culture takes place, with truth to be worked out locally in small narrative units and with the collective stories contributing to uphold the values of the community” (p. 43). The interviews were conducted as conversations with guide questions used only as tools for stimulating narration about the participant's background, experiences and thinking. According to Kvale, knowledge evolves as narratives embodied in story telling. In this study I pursued “stories” told by physical education teachers of Aboriginal students.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Participation in the study was voluntary. All tapes were transcribed in anonymous form and will be erased at the completion of the thesis. Transcribed interviews were located in a locked filing cabinet. Only the researcher had access to the transcripts. Identities were protected by using pseudonyms and by avoiding any specific, identifying information. Study participants were advised that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time if they so choose, without consequence. A participant information sheet (Appendix F) was provided to each interviewee.

There was no risk in participating in this study and no deception was involved. All participants provided informed consent and signed a form (Appendix G). A summary of the project was given in advance with assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. A benefit was experienced by teacher participants who had an opportunity to reflect on their practice and talk about their successes and challenges. Approval to proceed with the study was received from the University of Manitoba Ethics Committee prior to commencement of the study (Protocol # E2003:038).

## *Analysis*

The analysis was guided by two questions: How does social consciousness manifest itself in the dialogue? And, how would having critical social consciousness make a difference? Kvale (1996) describes excerpts from interview transcripts as:

Decontextualized conversations, they are abstractions, as topographical maps are abstractions from the original landscape from which they are derived. Maps emphasize some aspects of the countryside and omit others, the selection of features depending on the intended use. (p.165)

The selection of text following the analysis is a mapping of the landscape of relationships which features various dimensions of social consciousness among the physical education teachers. The selected features of this analysis, drawn from interview descriptions, dialogue, and discourse, are an interpretation of what constitutes dimensions of social consciousness.

All the information was transcribed from the interview questions and narrative prompts onto a computer file. Interview data was coded and categorized according to what Kvale (1996) calls “ad hoc meaning generation”. As an “ad hoc” and eclectic approach, the analysis includes my perceptions, interpretations and experiences as well as textual interpretations that incorporate theoretical material.

The analytical lens that I use comes from a “community solidarity” perspective that emerges in my literature review. I also used critical race theory (Dalgardo Banal, 2002), critical pedagogy (Giroux 1998, McLaren, 1998), anti-racism (Sleeter, 1993) and theories of culturally relevant education (Ladson-Billings, 1994) to inform the analysis. As noted above, my own lived experiences and understanding of socio-historical issues

related to Aboriginal peoples in Canada were key parts of the development of the community solidarity lens used to interpret the interview data. Kvale (1996) identifies a hermeneutical method of interpreting meaning whereby: "The researcher has a perspective on what is investigated and interprets the interviews from this perspective. The interpreter goes beyond what is directly said to work out structures and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in a text" (p. 201). Recognizing the "plurality of interpretations" and the perspective of the researcher, I acknowledge that my approach is but one of many perspectives that could inform the analysis.

As a means to evaluate whether the research questions were adequately addressed, I used Ellis' (1998) six recommendations as a tool to evaluate the research findings:

1. Is it plausible, convincing?
2. Does it fit with other material we know?
3. Does it have the power to change practice?
4. Has the researcher's understanding been transformed?
5. Has a solution been uncovered?
6. Have any new possibilities been opened up for the researcher, research participants, and the structure of the context?

Analysis was considered complete when the research questions were addressed, using the above guidelines.

### *Reporting of Research Results*

With respect to the diverse complexities of teaching Aboriginal students in different geographic locations (see van Ingen & Halas, in press), I divide my analysis into two sections, one for teachers who work in urban contexts, and one for those who teach

in rural and remote contexts. As discussed above, and as Taylor (1998) confirms, there may be less of a turnover of teachers within an urban environment, where many teachers, particularly non-Aboriginal teachers, may prefer to work and live. In rural and remote communities, teacher turnover is greater and the unstable teaching force creates many challenges for students.

Within the two groups of study participants, I include a brief profile of the physical education teachers who agreed to be interviewed. It includes a discussion of some aspects of their social consciousness, as suggested by their descriptions of events and circumstances and by their interpretation and analysis of teaching challenges. I situate myself as a critical respondent with hopes that comparisons or insights will help to draw out differences in perspectives related to social consciousness and contribute to a stronger understanding of critical social consciousness. As previously stated, my thesis proposition is that critical social consciousness can make a strategic difference in the choices educators make and in the quality of life in schools for Aboriginal students. In other words, critical social consciousness can help physical education teachers be more effective allies to Aboriginal students. The analysis of the interview conversations is also intended to contribute to theoretical perceptions that support critical social consciousness, and to a greater awareness of its value to teachers and students. To protect the anonymity of study participants, pseudonyms are used.

Kvale suggests that a final research report should be a readable presentation of “methodologically well-substantiated, interesting findings.” The final report incorporates a critical analysis of the teacher's perspectives drawn from their reflections and stories within their different landscapes. I hope that my interview analysis contributes toward a

better understanding of teachers' perceptions of how Aboriginal students perform in school, and will aid in developing information and resources that teachers need to better serve Aboriginal youth through physical education.

For convenience, and in line with the previous comments about the difference between rural and urban teaching environments, the analysis of the interview material is divided into two chapters. Chapter Six presents an analysis of participant physical educators working in an urban context. Chapter Seven presents an analysis of those teaching in a rural and remote context.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Building on Social Consciousness: Urban Teachers

The following represents my analysis of the physical educators teaching in an urban context. All are women and all are non-Aboriginal.

#### *Bonnie*

Raised in an upper middle-class, white, suburban family, Bonnie claims that as a young person in high school she was not one of the better students academically because her main interest was sports. Throughout high school she was involved in all of the sport activity that the school offered. She describes herself as “a gym rat” because as a student she hung out in the gym at every opportunity. She wanted to do physical activity and “everything else was kind of just there.” Bonnie became a successful athlete and had the opportunity to compete on a world stage. Eventually, as a mature student, Bonnie returned to university and graduated with a degree in physical education and teaching certification.

Bonnie has been teaching in urban schools for a number of years. Her first teaching post was in an upper middle-class private school for several years where she would have preferred to continue. However, cutbacks forced her to take a position within the public school system where she currently finds herself teaching physical education to a large population of inner-city poor Aboriginal students. Other than some brief encounters in a casual game of basketball in ‘cottage country’ over the years, Bonnie had never met an Aboriginal person and knew very little about them.

Bonnie is obviously struggling to understand the context of her current pupils' lives and wavers between 'blaming the victim'<sup>34</sup> and posing 'big questions' about schooling and social responsibility. She notices that Aboriginal people do not appear to be making wise choices with regard to lifestyles. "It's not healthy and it's killing them." With a tone of frustration, she acknowledges not knowing how to understand the situation or how to address it:

Is it lack of education? Is it lack of knowledge of what's happening to them?  
How long has this been going on? I think it is the highest killer, the diabetes in the Aboriginal populations...Is it us? Is it the schools that aren't doing their job?  
Is it just the choices that people are making?

Bonnie's concern for health conditions in the Aboriginal community is an expression of her social consciousness. However, the absence of historical understanding and relevant information limits her ability to address underlying issues behind the lifestyles facing Aboriginal young people. Bonnie's uncertainty about what is going on and what needs to be done is understandable in light of the "absence and distortion" of information described in Chapters 2 and 3.

Physical education teachers need to be better equipped to address the connection between colonial history and poor health conditions. It is well known that, as a whole, Aboriginal people are one of the most 'disadvantaged' groups in Canada. Less understood is how health challenges among Aboriginal people are associated with poverty and are linked to historical processes (Beveridge, 1998; Hill, 1995; Waldram, Herring, Young, 2000; Williams, Guilmette & Jacobson, 1998). Annette Jo Browne

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<sup>34</sup> 'Blaming the victim' refers to seeing personal or group characteristics as the problem (Ryan, 1976).

(2003), a health care professional who studied the social relationships among First Nations women and their health care service providers in British Columbia stressed the importance of understanding health conditions within the context of colonial history:

Stemming from years of oppression, welfare colonialism, poverty and violence, these social and health inequities cannot be glossed over as lifestyle, behavioural or cultural issues; rather, they are manifestations of the complex interplay of historical, social, political and economical determinates influencing health status and access to equitable health care. (Browne, 2003, p. 27)

Likewise, the links between poor health and poverty have been clearly identified (Evans, Barer & Marmor, 1994). Income level is strongly correlated with personal health in Canada. In a study on women's health and social inequality, Etyllt Jones and Anna Ste. Croix Rothney (2001) maintain that health-related behaviours are closely related to socio-economic conditions. This means, "... that we can not look at risk factors such as smoking, poor diet and alcohol consumption as representing strictly individual preferences" (p.7). The poor health condition of low-income populations requires a more complex explanation and understanding than just "people make bad choices." To respond effectively, physical education teachers need an understanding of the 'big picture'.

Bonnie's concern for the schooling and health of Aboriginal young people and a growing concern about an ineffective school system is an expression of her social consciousness. She maintains that the situation is not getting better and that the young people are becoming "more and more unfit everyday." Bonnie asks relevant questions about the schooling process itself, "How come we have kids for 12 years of their lives

and we're supposed to be educating them and it doesn't seem to work?" The emotional intensity behind this questioning reflects a growing disappointment with the school system itself. This disappointment mirrors her initial middle-class expectations and assumptions about the role of conventional schooling. Bonnie's reflection on the "12 years" of schooling reminds me of a similar lament from an Aboriginal parent. Based on different expectations, Maracle (1988) reflects on her daughter's years of schooling:

The first twelve years of instruction she receives amount to fixing her head up so that she will move with the way society is organized without complaint. (p. 117)

This parent's observation on the schooling of her child is an expression of powerlessness in preventing the imposition of a destructive ideology and of silencing. There are no expectations that the system will nurture the young person to move toward full human potential. Rather, indoctrination and conformity is the outcome. Tragically, the indoctrination process does not work. By anybody's criteria, our school and society as a whole fail large numbers of Aboriginal youth. In sharp contrast, Bonnie's disappointment reflects her initial uncritical expectation that the school system is good for young people. It is an assumption that reflects her experience in middle and upper-class schools where the children of owning, managing, and professional classes respond relatively smoothly to status-quo schooling. The questions that Bonnie poses reflect her growing frustration with the magnitude of the problems and the lack of support in the larger context. In frustration, Bonnie claims:

I don't know how to fix it. I mean it is everything...it is having a Pepsi machine here and having the fries in the cafeteria and can't you just get those out of here

and offer water and juice? It will still come into the building but at least it won't be in your face.

The lack of supports for conscientious teachers in the school system suggests a lack of understanding of 'front line' challenges faced by teachers. As previously stated, social consciousness includes varying degrees of awareness of particular circumstances faced by particular people in particular situations. Clearly Bonnie's evolving social consciousness expresses itself in her growing concern for the health of her pupils and the Aboriginal community in general. This social consciousness is obvious by the probing and intense questions she poses about social responsibility.

Bonnie demonstrates flexibility in response to her concerns by adapting the program to better meet the needs of her pupils. She tries to make the program relevant and pays attention to students' responses. For example, she organized a self-defence course for women and was excited to speak about the successful outcome. The Aboriginal female students participated fully over the time period that it was offered and asked for more. The classes were full and Bonnie was very pleased. She understands that a conventional program will not work and speaks to her adaptations:

I mean there are a lot of schools out there that are doing skills and drills and that kind of thing...but that does not work here. We kind of mix up our curriculum...the way we are teaching seems to work. Kids seem to enjoy coming in here; I think most of them...there is no way you can mark like on a checklist, how to get the ball in the basket. You just can't teach like that.

Given that she had very little contact with Aboriginal people prior to this teaching position and very little knowledge about the socio-economic conditions of the inner city,

it is significant that although Bonnie is concerned about “the choices that people are making,” at the same time she does not assume that the pupils or their backgrounds are the problem, certainly not all of the problem. She even asks, “Is it us?” Without substantial historical understanding and critical social consciousness such questions beg meaningful answers.

Bonnie provides a rationale for taking her students on a field trip to the university campus in Fort Garry to watch an athletic event. Her pupils are not familiar with the suburbs or the campus and rarely venture out of their neighbourhood. Bonnie explains that:

Some of these kids are a little delayed socially, so getting them out into a public event where there's expected behaviours...just to see something in the south-end of the city...going over the bridge, going down Pembina Highway. They have no idea where Pembina Highway is. So it is part of the learning process, not just going to a volleyball event to see professional athletes...they seem to get into it for an hour and then they seem to get a little antsy and they need to move around.

Bonnie's perception that her pupils are “a little delayed socially” and her choice of location for an educational excursion reflects her disconnection from and lack of knowledge about, her pupils and their community. “Delayed socially” signals a perception of limitation due to personal shortcomings and suggests a ‘cultural deficit’ perspective rather than an orientation toward building on ‘strengths’ and affirmations. As noted by Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) and other proponents of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1998; McLaren, 1998) and critical race theory adherents (Delgado Bernal, 2002), this sort of outlook can paralyze a teacher's ability to be an effective ally.

My own view of "Pembina Highway" includes memories of estrangement, even on the portion of Pembina Highway closest to my inner-city neighbourhood. In my early teens I had a summer job washing dishes at the Garwood Grill on Pembina Highway. Each day I'd get on the bus at the corner of Isabel and William (core inner city) and thirty minutes later, after the bus had wound its way through downtown Winnipeg, I'd notice that I had arrived in unfamiliar terrain. Conscious that I was working for wages to contribute to my mother's household, I persevered and tried not to let myself notice that I was scared of making mistakes and of being humiliated. The most stressful and frightening example of this lonely 'immigrant' experience happened one night after my shift. I had crossed Pembina Highway to catch the northbound bus home. While waiting a car with three young white men pulled up to the curb where I was standing. I heard the shouting coming from inside the car, "Hey, squaw, get in the car! I said, squaw, get in the car!" One of the men in the back seat jumped out of the car and I darted out onto the street and made my way back to the restaurant. I waited in the doorway for the next bus and crossed again when I saw it coming, anxious to get out of that neighbourhood. I never returned to that job, even for my pay.

By the time I was 20, I had become aware that my story was by no means unique.<sup>35</sup> Now I was traveling all the way south on Pembina Highway to Fort Garry and the University of Manitoba. I was caught up in the first wave of 'Native' re-awakening and began intentionally developing my social consciousness.

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<sup>35</sup> Helen Betty Osborne, a young Cree woman from Norway House who was in The Pas to attend school, was grabbed off the streets by three young white men and brutally raped and murdered. Other Aboriginal women have shared similar stories of being grabbed off the street or of attempted abductions. This integrated racist and sexist behaviour includes the perception that Aboriginal women are 'public property'.

With these Pembina Highway memories and with my own experiences as an inner-city Aboriginal student, and with my own subsequent ideological development, I react to Bonnie's story, thinking that her anecdote would have been very different if the pupils had been engaged in a discussion of why they had never been to that area of the city before. It could open the door for a discussion about income-segregated neighbourhoods. They could have been asked how much they understand about this type of segregation. I would be very curious about their responses, and be quick to affirm what they already know. They could have been asked to share stories of experiences they have had in their life when they noticed social inequities (Giroux, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2002). The discussion could have gone further in exploring the differences in the state of people's health, behaviours, opportunities, etc. They could have explored questions like who gets to have opportunities to engage in sport activity and develop skills, etc. and who does not.

One might speculate that the actual field trip may have been experienced by the students as an excursion into somewhat alien terrain. The idea of living in a suburban neighbourhood, attending university or becoming a professional athlete could be experienced as something unattainable or far beyond their reach of possibilities. It could be perceived as something that is within reach for 'them' or 'those people' and not for 'me' or 'people like us'. It could foster the experience of being on the margins looking in and the whole learning experience could inadvertently become an affirmation of inferiority. Feelings like this would likely go unarticulated given young people are rarely engaged in discussions about poverty or their experiences in this regard. In contrast, facilitating such dialogue would give them "voice" in the emancipatory context of critical

pedagogy associated with educators such as Freire (1970), Delgado Bernal (2002), and Ladson-Billings (1994).

The absence of dialogue and of positive affirmations can render programs irrelevant to students' lives and may even be insulting. Student alienation figures predominantly in the survey results regarding dropout rates among Aboriginal students in Ontario high schools (Appendix B). As noted in previous chapters, without critical social consciousness, well-intentioned educational practice can amount to social-psychological setbacks for young people. When they are not given a framework to understand the context of their lives, young people are left to conclude inferiority, either their own or their community's, or both, even if teachers are trying to encourage them to succeed. In this context, schooling can constitute mistreatment, a form of oppression that reinforces chronic patterns of poor self-esteem and undermines confidence in their own intelligence. For Bonnie's pupils, perhaps being in a group with other young people and attending an athletic event can be encouraging and enriching but it can also 'backfire' and have an adverse effect.

### *Susan*

Susan teaches in an inner-city school. She is white middle-class person who grew up in an urbanized northern community where she came into frequent contact with Aboriginal people. In spite of the racism around her and the family pressure to not associate with Aboriginal peers, she continued to maintain many close relationships with friends who were Aboriginal. An athletic parent and positive relationships with physical education teachers influenced and nurtured her interest in sport and physical activity. She considers herself a high performing athlete and currently leads a very active lifestyle.

She graduated with a degree in physical education and teaching certification. She is teaching in a school attached to a treatment centre. The student population is predominately Aboriginal. Susan has good rapport with her students and feels 'at home' in these relationships. She attributes this comfort level to her northern upbringing.

Susan explains that many people in her youth were instrumental in supporting her through her sporting career. They included a number of physical education teachers in junior and senior high school who spent extra time with her. They acknowledged her talents and encouraged her dedication. They inspired and motivated her throughout her adolescence, thereby influencing her decision to become a physical educator. She wanted to inspire young people in the same way and reminisces about that decision as a young person:

At first my idea was to become a high school physical educator. I wanted to be coaching basketball, volleyball, holding practices in the evenings and mornings, going on road trips, hosting tournaments. My life was sports. Everything I did was for sports. I wasn't your typical teenage young girl in a small town where it was about dating boys and going to school dances and wearing the nicest clothes; it was just being active and I loved it so much. So I wanted to become the same type of teacher that really helped me through my years.

The nurturing relationships Susan had as a young person in school with physical education teachers inspired her to become one and helped her cultivate the passion and motivation to support young people in the same way. Susan's positive childhood experience with physical education teachers supports the idea that a good physical education program can make a positive difference in the quality of one's life. Susan's

passion for teaching, her desire to inspire young people, and her love for physical activity was built on the foundation of these earlier relationships with physical educators. The attention that she received during her participation in physical activity as a young person reinforced a sense of being valued. Susan knew that she mattered to some people in the world. This, in turn, created opportunities for Susan to grow and nurture positive self-esteem and confidence. She explains the impact on her well-being:

I felt important, I felt valued, a sense of accomplishment...I mean, if I didn't play sports I really don't know where I would've got my self-esteem from. I felt good about myself because I was good at something and physical education gave me that opportunity...but it felt good being a physically healthy person in that it helps you become healthy in other ways. If you don't have your health you don't have much.

Susan's social consciousness is expressed in her flexibility to adapt her program to the needs of her pupils. She initially started teaching with expectations that she would deliver the conventional program that she was familiar with but soon discovered that her students were different and that her teaching practice had to shift. Susan is teaching in an urban school with young people who have very difficult lives. From Susan's point of view, the need for her pupils to experience success was more important than delivering a conventional physical education program. She states that:

The physical education program is very different than you would find in any other public school. The physical education program here isn't really about teaching kids the rules of sport. It's not about all the skills and how to become the best athlete. I've learned that my goal changed due to the needs of the kids here. My

program evolved out of the needs of the youth and I made a program that is going to have them experience success or what they need.

Similar to Halas's (1998) experience at another adolescent treatment centre school, and Brown's 'bush teacher' conversion experience, Susan underwent a conversion as well. She demonstrates flexibility, confidence and caring in shifting her program from the conventional offering to an adaptation that makes sense for her students' needs. Susan is a physical educator who is acutely aware of the hard lives of her pupils and of the impact of growing up poor. She knows the context of her students' lives and is able to develop a culturally relevant program.

Susan demonstrates what Ladson-Billings characterizes as culturally relevant teaching practice. Although her personal life experience is very different from her students in terms of her class background and "racial" identity, she is familiar with the everyday culture of Aboriginal youth based on her early years living in a northern town. Because of where she grew up, she maintains that she understands racism. Her confidence and sense of well-being allows her to effectively handle the anger that is directed at her by hurt and confused young people. She believes that when an angry young person heralds a "white trash" insult, she does understand why she is the target. Similar to Halas's practice of paying attention to the presentations of young people, Susan is focused on building the relationships despite these tensions.

The description that Susan provides about the lives of the young people in her physical education program is not typical of all Aboriginal youth. What is typical, however, is that Aboriginal young people are disproportionately represented in the

student population of a treatment centre school. Susan's social consciousness is expressed in her awareness and sensitivity towards her pupils:

For them it's learning to be kids. A lot of them didn't experience the childhood they should have, a lot of them don't know how to play. They don't know to be comfortable in their bodies. So my program tried to encompass all those things. Because of that, I found myself getting away from the physical education teacher that I thought I was going to be, that I wanted to be and everything that I had experienced growing up. Then I really kind of embraced the kids here and realized that it's probably twenty times more rewarding than the physical education teacher I thought I was going to be... I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Susan is mindful of how different her program is from conventional curriculum:

There were no tournaments to host... They're not going to be a part of sports teams. They're not going to play at other schools, not going to be getting athletic scholarships... So that is how it ended up, not planned but it was a wonderful experience and I wouldn't trade it for anything. Now I take a look at those public school teachers who are spending all those weekends traveling and coaching and there is a lot of reward involved in that as well but I look back and now I think I don't know if I'd want to be one of those teachers now and the experience here has changed my idea of what being physical is all about.

Susan gives us a glimpse of what societal oppression of young people living in poverty can look like:

They focus on being older and growing up and doing adult things they need to do because adults haven't done it for them. They feel they need to become adults to

take care of themselves. The problem is that so many of our kids get into so many problems and hard situations because they're still too young to know what appropriate adult behaviour is. They think that they are grown up because they are drinking, they're having sex, they're going to adult places, to bars, they're engaging in a lot of things considered adult-like behaviour. What it comes down to is that they are not making good choices because they are not mature enough. My number one goal is bringing them back to being kids. Some of the kids have grown up too fast and simple because they've never had the opportunity to be kids. They've been taking care of their siblings and they're trying to take care of themselves just because they come from poor families.

This insightful recognition of the theft of childhood provides a very telling illustration of the psychological oppression of young people discussed earlier.

Unfortunately, pre-emption of childhood is common in impoverished families. In contrast to her students, Susan's comparatively privileged life circumstances have helped set her up as a good ally to young people. She was able to enjoy being a child and was well supported by family and key teachers. She has given thoughtful consideration to incorporating play into her physical education and activity program. This is similar to Halas's response to the young people she worked with. In an article on the benefits of physical activity for troubled youth, Halas (2001) tries to show the relevance of "physical activities by connecting the dots between the physical and the socio-emotional as they are experienced through playfulness and play" (p.10). Susan describes how some of the young people leave the school and get their lives on track but others "take a dive" and

continue in destructive life styles. Similar to Halas, Susan raises concern about sustainable outcomes.

Susan is mindful of self-care and strives for balance in her life. She speaks about how different her physical education program is from her original goals and objectives. Similar to other participants in this study, it speaks to the unpreparedness of physical education teachers in the context of poverty:

Where I used to be a very high level athlete, I do get a balance in the sense that I do coach outside in the community and I deal with a lot of public school kids whose goals are to play high level female hockey and they want to go on and get scholarships. So I do still have that in my life as well. I play at an elite level in a couple of sports still; so I have that balance. I mean I haven't left that life altogether. But in my day-to-day life as a teacher and professional the goals and objectives of my physical education program are much different then what I thought they ever would be.

Given evidence of her successful program, perhaps conventional programs need to change?

#### *Dana*

Dana grew up in a white working-class family environment with an athletic parent who influenced her love for sport and active living. As a young person she enjoyed school and was intensely involved in extracurricular activities. As an athlete she received "good coaching experiences" during her high school years and can recall only one student-teacher relationship that was not positive for her. Her decision to become a physical educator was influenced by her grade seven physical education teacher who had

a positive attitude, "dressed well", and coached her volleyball team. What impressed Dana most about this particular physical education teacher was that she seemed to be having a good time. She appeared to be having fun.

Like her role model, Dana also appears to be having a good time when interacting with pupils. Humour has become one of her most effective tools. Dana uses good-natured teasing and joking to engage young people around her and it seems to work effectively. It is a style that 'pulls them in' towards her and has them laughing. She interacts with students as much as she can. She explains that she tries to be very mindful because she believes that it is possible for some young people to go through the whole day without anyone ever speaking to them, not even a greeting. Dana observes her students' responses and claims that it is important to interact in some way:

Cracking a joke to the kids that have said hardly anything to you and you see the corners [of their mouths] turn up and I think, 'Alright, ok, we're making some headway now!'

Dana described her interaction with a young woman who turned up for gym class one day with only flip-flop shoes instead of runners and a mini skirt instead of sweat pants or shorts. Rather than a negative response to her ill-prepared student, Dana encouraged her with a light-hearted comment: "You're ready for class! That's excellent!" Her pupil responded in a similar tone and asked for some gym shorts. The student went into the equipment room and used it to change clothes. She quickly and privately slipped on the shorts and played in her bare feet. Dana keeps a supply of used gym clothes for her pupils knowing that many do not have appropriate gym attire. She comments that, "At least they are playing." Many Aboriginal students have issues with appropriate gym

clothing or concerns about changing their clothes in school locker rooms. Some will quit if these concerns are not addressed comfortably (Champagne & Halas, 2003). Dana's interactive and relaxed style appears to effectively engage her students and address their issues.

Dana has been teaching high school physical education for more than ten years. Other than her student teaching practicum while in university, she has not worked outside of the inner city. Dana's teacher training experiences while in university were based in a "white middle-class" environment. She teases that it was "a natural springboard" to prepare her for teaching in the inner-city school that she landed in. She comments that in teacher training she learned to develop plans on how to run a class in the context of a well resourced school with a large gymnasium and looked forward to delivering a conventional program in her first teaching post. Dana's program has shifted significantly since that time. Had Dana continued teaching along the lines that she had been trained, she claims that she would have failed as a teacher and found herself with an empty physical education class. Similar to successful teachers in Ladson-Billings study of culturally relevant teaching practices, Dana was on her own to figure out how to make the program relevant to her students. Similar to other physical educators in this study, for example Susan's experience, it speaks to the unpreparedness of the teachers and the unrealistic expectations cultivated at the teacher preparation level.

She has since learned that flexibility and humour are keys to success. And she now measures her success by the level of pupil participation in the program. Dana's inclusiveness and flexibility are further examples of pedagogy that fits into the cultural relevancy framework. It goes hand in hand with conscientious respect for students. It is

essential in encouraging positive student self-esteem, a key objective of my community solidarity focus.

Dana's expression of an apology for not having the typical "banners of success" across the gymnasium walls may be an indication of the difficulty transitioning from a competitive culture. Clearly, Dana embraces an approach that centres on the needs of her pupils. Letting go of unworkable criteria of success is challenging for physical educators who also want to be accepted by colleagues. By focusing on student engagement, Dana demonstrates concern for the particular needs of her students. The discussion of competition (Kohn, 1992) is an important topic in connection to self-esteem issues for both students and physical educators. For Dana, "kids sitting out on the stage" and not participating in physical activity are a program failure. Her commitment to keeping young people participating has grown along with her flexibility and humour.

Underneath the humour, however, there is a sensitivity to the hard lives of her pupils, who are objects of racism, and an awareness of how easy it is to lose them. Dana describes an incident on a class outing with a group of Aboriginal pupils where one of them was spoken to in a rude manner by a staff person in a downtown gym facility. The student was quietly sitting on a basketball in the middle of the court waiting for the other students to arrive from the locker rooms to play. A staff person arrived on the scene and rudely ordered the student to "stop sitting on the basketball like that" and to get off or he would have to leave. Offended and upset, the student immediately left the facility and walked back to the school.

In the hopes of getting an apology for the rudeness, Dana spoke to the management staff of the facility about the incident. She believed that the incident was

fostered by racism. To her disappointment, the management staff only reinforced what appeared to Dana as a racist attitude toward her group of Aboriginal students. The manager implied that the Aboriginal students bring these types of problems on to themselves and stated that if they cannot conduct themselves better they would not be allowed to continue using the facility. Dana was outraged by the incident, partly because she had perceived the facility as a useful community resource for her pupils and because she recognizes that Aboriginal young people experience racism routinely. She states, "I just want kids to be comfortable enough to participate so that they can go to the [gym] and not be intimidated by the whole facility."

Upon returning to school after the incident, Dana followed up with the offended student. The school principal followed up with a letter to inform the management staff of the offence and a request for an apology. The school has never received an apology and Dana has never returned with her students. As presented earlier, Sleeter (1993) describes two perspectives on 'race': "individual" and "group". In this particular incident of racism, it appears that the Aboriginal student was perceived by the white staff person to have behaved inappropriately and the whole group of Aboriginal students were targeted or held hostage. This story provides a glimpse of the daily racism that is in the lives of Aboriginal young people.

From my experience, in our structurally racialized society, negative encounters between white and Aboriginal people will routinely be perceived through a racialized lens. If the young person sitting on the basketball in the middle of the gym waiting for his peers to arrive to play ball was a white student and a grumpy white staff person came along and rudely told him to get up off the ball, the white student would likely be upset at

being treated rudely. The disrespect would not be perceived by a white student as racism. But rather, it would likely be perceived as the usual type of disrespect that many young people are subjected to routinely because they are young or not adults. The grumpy staff person might have spoken to everybody he met that day with the same tone and attitude, but it is the Aboriginal young person who feels it deeply as racism. He walks away, often angry and hurt, from the facility to the safety of a more familiar environment. This internalized racism makes the Aboriginal young person more vulnerable to deeper and more frequent hurts. Allies need to understand this process.

Dana maintains that generally her students are different from the kind of student that she was in her youth. According to her, a lot of the young people that she teaches are the students who would be "sitting on the stage at some other high school." Often, these students are allowed to sit there and blend into the background while their teachers just let them. Dana believes that most often she is working with young people who have come to "hate physical education." In spite of that, she will not allow them to just blend into the background. She wants them participating and tries to find ways to pull them into activity. She tries to make the program relevant and negotiates some successful relationships by "traveling a different route" to ensure inclusion and to foster a culturally relevant practice of the type outlined earlier in reference to Ladson-Billings (1994). Dana expects participation and expects success.

### *Josie*

Josie has taught physical education at various urban middle years schools for more than ten years. As an active young person who had many affirmative experiences in sport, Josie decided to become a physical educator while still in junior high school.

Inspired by a family friend who was a successful athlete and who had become a physical educator, Josie followed a similar path. She graduated with a degree in physical education and teaching certification. Overall her schooling experience was mostly positive; she was considered "a good student" who learned to meet most of the adult expectations as she grew up in an immigrant middle-class family of European heritage. Reflecting on her time of decision-making as a young person, Josie acknowledged to herself then that she was not the best athlete but she would not let that get in the way of pursuing goals that she identified for herself.

Although she had many positive teachers, she was very conscious of the way fellow students would be hurt when excluded from participating in organized sport because "they were not good enough." As a young person it seemed to her that teachers only cared about the best athletes. Josie, the junior high school student, made a very conscious decision to become a physical education teacher who was not going to continue this practice. Josie takes pride in the fact that in her twenty years of teaching and coaching she "has never cut a student off a team using athletic ability as criteria." Josie's social consciousness expresses itself in this boast. In spite of the indoctrination of competitive sports culture in her profession, she does not lose sight of people's humanity in her practice. She refuses to buy into the obsession over "winning" in sports.

Alfie Kohn (1992), a leading advocate of social relationships that are not based on "winners" and "losers", argues that winning in the context of competitive sports offers the possibility of psychological "euphoria" rather than fortification of self-esteem. And, parallel to my community solidarity model, Kohn maintains the importance of high self-esteem:

It might be thought of as a sine qua non of the healthy personality. It suggests a respect for and faith in ourselves that is not easily shaken, an abiding and deep-seated acceptance of our own worth. Ideally, self-esteem is not only high but unconditional: it does not depend on approval from others...it is a core, a foundation upon which a life is constructed". (p. 98)

Kohn maintains that: "The more importance that is placed on winning – in the society, in the particular situation, or by the individual – the more destructive losing will be" (p. 111). He speaks of the gradual psychological process "of coming to equate losing with being a loser":

As we might expect this terrible process takes place more rapidly and decisively with those whose self-esteem is precarious to begin with. Self-doubt will predispose such people to expect failure, to be crushed by it when it comes, and even ... to help bring it about (p.109).

These thoughts should make physical education teachers who have a winner-takes-all sports orientation tread carefully when working with Aboriginal students who carry the psychological weight of the various oppressive social relationships. In regard to Aboriginal people, concerns about self-esteem and hierarchical, competitive culture go beyond concepts of 'winning' and 'losing' to historical underpinnings of cultural identity. The confrontational and predatory nature of competitive sports, business competition, job hierarchies, politics, legal contests, etc., stand in stark contrast to the communal societies that prevailed in northern North America before the arrival of merchant capital. Although Josie doesn't articulate her concerns about competition specifically in relation to Aboriginal students, her consciousness of the liabilities of competition is evident.

Social consciousness is expressed in Josie's vision for physical education programming that contributes to building a society of people who are healthier both physically and emotionally. Many other physical educators would express this level of social consciousness. Josie goes further to promote the holistic value of physical education and activity in schooling and believes that educators can be highly influential in young people's lives and in building an educational environment that is nurturing. She values participation, inclusion, and play experiences for young people in schools. She states that:

We really need to reinforce the need for physical activity and play in the school day. You don't need to even necessarily get marks in physical education as long as you are being physically active and being encouraged to participate with effort and take part. Then you can experience the health benefits of it.

Josie articulated the concern that physical education needs to include both educational outcomes and health benefits. She claims that a focus on health benefits involves a different orientation than that of an academic subject. With an academic subject orientation, physical education teachers tend to become preoccupied with grading and testing performance. According to Josie, many of her colleagues want to perceive that an 'A' in physical education is similar to an 'A' in science. Instead of defining the right way to throw the ball and then testing and grading on how it was thrown, a physical educator focused on physical and mental health would encourage participation for the fun of ball throwing at any level. There would be an emphasis on enjoyment of movement and positive body experiences. Josie's social consciousness situates her on the side of health

benefits and social development outcomes for physical education programming in schools.

Like others, Josie believes that all young people can have a lot of positive experiences with their bodies in motion and can be validated for that (Hellison 1995; Halas, 2001). She maintains that positive experiences and validation through play is healthy and nourishing:

They may not be the best athletes but they can have a great time playing volleyball and looking silly on a volleyball court. And there is something very healthy about it... a great stress reliever and I think kids need that more in the schools.

Josie's social consciousness is expressed as a concern for quality relationships. She points out that in the gym, relationships can be very different than in the classroom. There are advantages for teachers who play with their pupils on the court. Relationships can develop differently than in the classroom because teachers can present themselves differently. Teachers make mistakes and miss the ball. By making mistakes, they can show their vulnerability. They can become a 'significant other' who has confidence and belief in the pupils. Josie acknowledges that the role of the physical educator can be very challenging "when you see thirty different kids every fifty minutes coming into the class with all these different needs." Josie is an ally to young people and is able to see a person as a whole being.

The traditional, one-sided teacher-pupil relationship dominates institutional culture and is framed by adult authority over young people's lives and activities.

According to Josie, this traditional teacher-pupil relationship works conveniently well in

early school years but tends to break down in middle years. Ineffective teaching practices are hardly noticeable to young people in early years because pupils are so busy learning new things. Josie believes that in middle years this changes and young people do notice ineffective teaching practices. Because of this, Josie recommends a new program development phase in middle years that incorporates the belief that young people at this stage in life need to have choices. Josie believes that her students are capable of engaging in collaborative learning. Her belief is supported by Ladson-Billings's description of successful teachers: "They believe that knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 25). Josie's social consciousness supports the idea that young people need to exercise voice in the development of a program that serves their needs and confirms a pedagogy that gives opportunity for young people to take leadership. She is particularly aware of this need to exercise independence and leadership as young people mature between the early and middle years, stating that, "I think in early years kids can take a lot of direction. They are excited to do a lot of stuff. It is all new. So it is fun and teachers do not have a lot of resistance." In describing the experiences of a colleague who taught the same students from Grade 1 - 8, she commented on how the teacher could not understand the students' changing attitudes toward him and his teaching:

The same kids that he [previously] taught who were cooperative became rude and disruptive to him in middle years. Well, maybe his style might have been a little bit hierarchical. Kids are smart and when they get older and start to express their independence a bit more and get more confidence in seeing the world, they make

value judgments and express it. I think maybe the teacher didn't change to respect the developing individual and give them more leeway into the program.

In this regard, Josie is interrupting patterns of adultism, as she openly expresses respect for young people's intelligence and abilities to make responsible choices. As she says, "being older they want to be in a position where they are making choices and calling the shots." As an ally to young people, she was willing to let this happen.

In the next chapter, I present the analyses of the teachers who taught in rural and remote contexts.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Building on Social Consciousness: Rural and Remote Teachers

In this chapter, I present my analyses of the teachers who lived and worked in rural and remote communities. All four had worked in Aboriginal communities at one time in their careers. Two are Aboriginal men, two are white women. They all incorporated different strategies for integrating themselves and developing physical education programs within their communities.

#### *Robert*

Robert taught high-school physical education for over twenty years in a rural Aboriginal community. He grew up in a northern Cree community where he attended elementary school and then left home to attend high school in a residential school setting. He was born to a large family with Cree-speaking parents who stressed the value of education for the boys in the family and stressed marriage and child rearing for the girls. Robert thinks about how these parenting patterns benefited him as a young man but is mindful of the limitations placed on girls and young women at that time. He has become very conscientious of the limited choices and opportunities awarded to girls in sports. For example, he has made constant efforts to support girls' involvement in hockey.

Robert was influenced by a physical education teacher who was intensely involved in organizing sports and extracurricular activity for the young people in his high school. This teacher lived in the community, played sports, coached teams, organized events for young people and was a significant role model for Robert. The young athletic Robert became active in track and field, volleyball, and hockey. As a physical education

teacher, Robert made similar commitments to his own students. He describes how he focused his attention on facilitating young people's play events and eventually "became a part of the community."

As a mature student he graduated with a degree in physical education and teaching certification. Robert completed his teacher training practicum in an urban school and moved on to become the physical education teacher in a rural Manitoba Ojibwa community school. At the time he perceived that his major challenge was to be accepted by the community as an effective physical educator who could motivate and facilitate play that was attractive and encouraging to young people. He started this process by making himself available and visible in the community; he reminisces about how he often found himself playing outside alone at first until he started attracting the attention of young people in the community:

Like, I did play against myself in the community after school. I spent a lot of time outside by being visible, being around, and because of my training in physical education, especially the area of exercise and coaching, I was able to set up practices.

Robert used his knowledge and skills as a physical educator as currency in building relationships in the community that ultimately brought him acceptance. Eventually, he was seen as someone who could be trusted to work for the well-being of the community. He says that using his physical educator training, he took the time to build relationships, to create opportunities for play and opportunities for work on skills as well. Robert attributes his successful relationship-building approach to his skills and training as a physical educator. However, in contrast to the relatively detached

orientation of teachers who turn over rapidly in rural Aboriginal communities, Robert's commitment to community, both inside and outside of school, is significant. I suspect that, without his community solidarity orientation, Robert would have been much less successful, no matter what athletic and curriculum skills he might have incorporated.

Robert's approach to building relationships in the community demonstrates respect and caring. Rather than imposing himself on others he created inviting opportunities and demonstrates confidence in young people's abilities to make good choices:

I was able to set up practices. The practices that I set up were very well organized practices where we had achieved things, where we did things, where we did drills and the kids liked that. They liked to do something and from what we were doing, they're able to progress to other levels.

Ladson-Billings (1994) explicitly identified relationship building as characteristic of culturally relevant teaching practice. "They [such teachers] see themselves as part of the community and they see teaching as giving back to the community" (p. 25). Building respectful relationships with young people involves respectful listening and assuming that the pupils can make good choices. It also includes becoming a part of the community. Robert has a sense of giving back to community, a social motivation to do his best or to make the best contribution that he can to 'community' via his relationships with young people and the application of his skills and knowledge as a physical educator:

... And trying to provide them with things that they can do, you know, like after school activities and things like that, the practices that they did, the coaching I

was involved in, and the community events and community activities I took part in. I became a part of the community.

Robert's background awareness of rural Aboriginal life and his deliberate integration into the community put him in a good position to develop a culturally relevant curriculum and to be seen as an ally by the students, their friends and their communities. Without strategic positioning of this sort, community solidarity theory can have little practical value. By identifying with community Robert inevitably conveyed himself as caring about his students. Conversely, teachers who remain detached from, or cynical about, the families and communities of Aboriginal students should not expect to win the trust of the students.

Robert believes that he has influenced many pupils and has confidence in his abilities to make a difference. By building respectful relationships with pupils, he expects them to be respectful in return. Holding high expectations on the social relationships 'front' has paid off in the long term. Similar to Halas's (2001) approach, Robert's social consciousness is demonstrated in the commitment to supporting young people well by allowing them to set the direction and being able to share power:

So you can see that there are respectful relationships that develop. I think that happens a lot if you are able to listen to what they have to say or to what they want to do. [Teachers] give them that opportunity to do it the way they [students] feel that they are capable of, being active to achieve whatever goal that they set for themselves.

Robert speaks about respectful relationships as a 'two-way street' and about the importance of listening, an essential skill in relationship building. Similar to Ladson-

Billings's (1994) description of culturally relevant teaching practices, Robert held high expectations, did not assume failure and maintained equitable relationships that extended beyond the gym or classroom.

Subject matter knowledge is an important criterion for successful relationships with students. Successful teachers have knowledge and passion for their subject. Robert maintains that because of his training in physical education he is able to make a significant contribution towards young people's well-being. Using a developmental methodology, Robert believes that people can identify where to start and move towards a goal. His developmental approach is facilitated by noticing where the students start, noticing how their skills improve and then providing positive affirmations for their efforts:

As a physical education teacher, the activities that you can do with the students are developmental...you can see the results of the things that you do with them, the way they are improving in their skills. So they always feel good about themselves, the encouragement that you can give to them to continue and to try harder.

Robert organized regular field trips for a group of Aboriginal badminton players that he coaches. On these trips to the city the pupils were set up to play with experienced players at a number of athletic clubs. Robert explains the purpose of these games is to reinforce in his players the need to practice and be more self-disciplined to get better:

When we did play them, sometimes we were blown right out of the water. In their club system you specialize in that sport and you get better at it. We used to

play provincial champions. We use to play with people that played for 10 years.

In their young life they [club members] already played for ten years.

He hoped that these experiences would encourage and motivate his pupils to set goals for themselves and to commit to a disciplined training regime in their chosen sport activity.

Holding out high expectations and vision of excellence, as well as being sensitive to issues of low self-esteem and confidence, Robert tried to level the (psychological) playing field by telling his players that the other players from the club were “not that different” from them other than the fact that they had had more practice time. Robert explains that:

Those kinds of things you can see and we'd say to the students: 'If you want this to happen then we need to get to that stage where some of these people are at. It's not because they're better than you, it's because they've had more time and more experience than you to get to that.'

Robert's communication style and caring relationships allows him to get in there with pupils and go after the negative internalized messages: “[I] try to get them to see the need to put more into their skills, into their talents that they have. It's not only academics but also athletic ability that they have.” Robert, himself, is a positive role model. His social consciousness is expressed in the desire to cultivate hope and ally himself with young people. However, Robert's statement that there is no difference between his pupils and the experienced players at the club other than commitment and effort is questionable. The “playing field” is not equal. Accordingly, there is a danger that such encouragement might promote illusions that can backfire.

Whether or not the practice of exposing students from a relatively impoverished community to up-scale, athletic club standards is sound or not begs a couple of questions. Robert is gambling that being “blown right out of the water” will have positive results. However, as suggested by Kohn (1992), who questions the value of competitive sports, competing to win can have unintended, negative psychological repercussions, particularly among young people from relatively insecure social backgrounds.

In addition, students might interpret trips to more affluent settings as confirmation of the inferiority of their own communities. As discussed in the context of Bonnie’s Pembina Highway field trip above, young people need to be encouraged to think critically about the social context of their experiences in order to develop understanding and strength from such experiences.

Robert has demonstrated that physical education and activity is a very good context to build relationships. His respectful interaction with young people went far beyond the gym and evolved toward an ‘advisory’ role. Robert, as the physical education teacher, noticed that pupils responded to him differently than other teachers. When he is called upon to speak to students about some incidents outside of the gym, the response that he gets “is not the same response that they give to others.” Respectful and attentive teacher-student relationships can be important currency in a community context as well as in one-on-one relationships.

### *Dorothea*

Dorothea has taught physical education in various rural schools for over twenty years, including in Aboriginal communities. Dorothea claims that although she never saw herself as a natural athlete she loved sports and physical activities and worked very

hard at it. By junior high school she was critical of teaching practices that alienated young people and was determined to become a teacher who did things differently. After graduating with a degree in physical education and a teaching certificate, she started working with Aboriginal students in a rural community school.

Heavily influenced by white working-class parents of European heritage, Dorothea speaks fondly of their devotion, love and support. Her parents immigrated to Canada after World War II and both came from large families. They eventually settled in rural Manitoba and made a living in the agricultural sector. Growing up in a small family household where two non-English European languages were proudly spoken, Dorothea maintains that she was well parented and speaks fondly of a mother who listened well and a father who trusted and believed in her.

Dorothea speaks of her parents' hard work and enjoyment of their large garden where they spent a great amount of time and energy tending their crops. She says that they had a passion for gardening that has added quality to their life. Dorothea believes that supporting young people to find and unleash their passion is an important role of educators. She emphasizes that young people should not be made to "feel helpless." Instead, it is essential that they be regarded as "productive members of society" whether that productivity is experienced in the household, or in the workplace or in their broader social life helping people.

Taylor (1998) describes teachers who take positions in Aboriginal communities until teaching positions open up in urban schools. In contrast to these 'revolving-door' teachers, Dorothea made a conscious choice to teach in a rural Aboriginal community. When Dorothea started her career as a physical education teacher she did not hold the

conventional expectations described by other study participants. She approached her teaching position with openness to learning about the lives of the young people and the community. She arrived with an attitude of respectful curiosity and caring. Dorothea expressed interest in what her pupils did and a desire to learn more about their motivation. She immediately understood the irrelevancy of the curriculum:

Oh, I was very interested in the things they did. A lot of them were excellent hunters. A lot of them were dancers. A lot of them took care of little brothers and sisters. They would talk about how they [siblings] make you crazy and some strategies you can do with your little brothers and sisters. A lot of them watched a lot of TV or were very interested in modern music. That is why I brought in the music...So I was trying to bring in as many things close to home for them as possible, which is difficult because a lot of curriculum has no meaning to a lot of these kids.

Dorothea's interest in the day-to-day culture of her pupils and the community is in sharp contrast to the 'folklorama' approach identified earlier. Focusing on the real lives of her students rather than on 'museum' culture, she has enthusiasm to learn about their motivation. One aspect of Dorothea's social consciousness is her focus on the strengths of the pupils and the things they do well. She tries to incorporate these strengths into her curriculum. She has been able to clearly see the irrelevancy of the mainstream curriculum to her students and has adapted her program to make it more relevant. Similar to another component of Ladson-Billing's descriptions of culturally relevant teaching practice, Dorothea focuses on students' strengths and bridges the gaps.

Dorothea shares the view that physical education is more than an academic subject and goes beyond delivery of a particular curriculum to include emotional health. She expresses concern that many physical education teachers feel ill equipped to handle many of the social and emotional challenges they are confronted with. As with other study participants, Dorothea is critical of the absence of this orientation in her post secondary training and speaks to the unpreparedness of physical education teachers:

Maybe it is social and emotional and teachers need to weigh it out but who is trained in that? Like, do they train you at the university for the social side or the emotional side? Not really. They focus on content, on classroom management skills but do not talk about how you empathize. Empathy training and conflict management, all that stuff, is crucial in today's society.

Dorothea's social consciousness extends beyond individual pupil relationships to include an understanding of the contribution physical education can make to quality of life in the schools. She is aware of, and expresses concern about, the lack of holistic training and supports for physical educators. Being conscious of the social benefits of physical education and activity, Dorothea is mindful that it is a particular type of training and support that is required. This is very strategic in regard to a community solidarity approach to physical education. However, although this goes beyond the superficiality of the 'folklorama' approach, in her interview, Dorothea did not make a connection with historical consciousness.

Like Robert, Dorothea articulated a skill development approach to teaching physical education combined with good communications in the student-teacher relationships. She believes that if you teach step by step with a focus on skill

development all pupils will have a chance to learn. She emphasized that the role of a physical educator is to talk to young people about their skill level, to provide explanations (information) as to why they are at that particular level and to encourage (coach) an individualized program of skill development. With good communication skills and knowledge about the growth of human bodies, physical educators can explain to a pupil, for example, that they are uncoordinated in a particular area and that this is how their particular body functions at this particular time in their life and that if they practiced in this particular way they can change this situation. Recognizing that maturing bodies don't always perform well, Dorothea explains:

We should have the knowledge to be able to tell these kids, 'You know this is where you are at but it is not a dead-end street. You are lacking coordination, or you are having some problems because of, and for the next three years it's going to be awkward. You will improve. Here are some things you can do, or this is what you can look for, or this is what you need to aim for.'

Dorothea's social consciousness is focused on content and is expressed in her concern for the quality of the learning experience for the pupils as well as the skills and knowledge of the physical educator. However, her perspective does not significantly transcend the social vacuum of the 'fix-the-individual' approach. This is similar to many health care professionals who focus on lifestyles as the key determinant of health rather than on social stratification and economic circumstances.

Dorothea describes an interaction with a pupil who stood up in a class and boldly expressed frustration and hopelessness about the racism towards Aboriginal people.

Again, consistent with culturally relevant pedagogy, she tries to affirm the knowledge of her pupils:

...kids are very aware of how they would be treated in society, that it was very tough. I remember this one guy, [Aboriginal pupil], he said: 'We are just looked at as drunks. I don't know if we can break through that.' And I said, 'That's a good point.' I remember I was always careful to acknowledge what those kids said and not say, 'Oh no! Don't say that! That wasn't fair.' If they were brave enough to tell me these things, it was usually important that I acknowledge that I heard them. And there could be truth to what they said. If we can't deal with the truth, we can't move on about it.

Dorothea's sensitive response and awareness of the courage it takes for young people to speak out about hurtful stereotyping is impressive. However, in the absence of critical historical consciousness, she was not in a position to engage her pupils in emancipatory dialogue. The absence of a critical framework renders many educators limited in their response to issues of racism and poverty. Does Dorothea's background equip her to effectively help her pupils understand who they are? Although not the case here, a limited response can sometimes serve as a disappointment to young people who look to the adults (Aboriginal or not) around them for guidance in facing life experiences.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, because of the relationships physical educators develop, there could be many opportunities to engage in critical discourse and build self-esteem.

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<sup>36</sup> Common sense understanding lets us assume that young people naturally look to their educators for information and assume that the educators are functioning in the young person's interest. Unless they have been seriously hurt by adults, there is no reason for them to mistrust adults, including teachers. Non-Aboriginal teachers walk into a classroom of Aboriginal young people cloaked in their accumulated ideology of 'isms' ('race', class, gender, ability) and see difference, whether conscious of this or not. Young people are more likely to simply see adults as adults.

Deep divisions in the society need to be explained and young minds expect an explanation. Unmet expectations only reinforce negative self-concept. Young people can be hurt when responses do not make sense or are inadequate to their needs. Racism, like classism, is a particularly complex issue for young people. If it is not placed in a broader critical framework it is likely to be internalized. As noted previously, this process is well illustrated by Giroux's reflections on his memories of class and race divisions in his youth.

Dorothea approached her teaching position in an Aboriginal school with openness to learning about the lives of the young people and the community. She arrived with an attitude of respectful curiosity and caring. This approach helped make her an effective teacher. Like Ladson-Billings's successful teachers, Dorothea has confidence in her ability to effect change and believes that she can make a difference. With this orientation, critical social consciousness could help her to become much more culturally relevant to Aboriginal young people, to be an even stronger ally. Aboriginal young people urgently need realistic explanations to make sense of their tough current and historical contexts.

### *Edward*

Edward was raised middle-class in a mixed heritage family where he claims an Aboriginal identity. He has been active all his life and claims to have started skiing at eighteen months old. He enjoys physical activity and went into physical education because he wants others to enjoy it as well. He had influential physical education teachers in high school and was attracted to the possibilities of creating a positive learning environment for students who would not normally be attracted to physical

education. One thing that he would like to see changed in physical education is the focus on skill development and the rigidity about gym attire. He is aware of the issues of body image and clothing for young people.

Edward is teaching physical education in a remote northern Aboriginal community. His previous work experience has been mainly with students from low social-economic demographics in an inner-city context. Edward recognizes a connection between poverty and skill levels:

These communities do not have the financial resources to help their skill development so they are not as skilled as students from higher income families... They have to deal with problems such as poverty and substance abuse.... They are often so malnourished and tired from their personal lives that they do not have the will or energy to pursue success in the classroom or gym. The programs that I have worked for and been successful are those that have offered breakfast and lunch programs for the children.

Edward finds that the Aboriginal students that he teaches or coaches tend to want to just "play the game" rather than go into skill development. He states that, "Playing and immediate gratifications with wins or successes are two of the most important outcomes for Aboriginal students." Recognizing that many Aboriginal students have "larger problems" to deal with than whether or not they can make "10 - 15 free throws," he tries to create a friendly and supportive environment in the gym. Edward believes his students "need the enjoyment of winning or succeeding in the gym."

Edward perceives himself as an ally to young people and says that: "I am able to learn from them as much as they learn from me." He sees himself as a good role model

and aims to develop relationships with young people and take a genuine interest in their lives.

Like most of the other interviewees, Edward is an example of a conscientious teacher who wants to be a strong ally and who has a culturally relevant orientation, but does not have the critical historical knowledge and consciousness needed for liberation pedagogy. His observations related to immediate manifestations of poverty and social demoralization provide dramatic testimony in support of the proposition that teachers need to develop critical consciousness in order to meet the learning needs of Aboriginal young people.

Edward believes that there is a need for more “Aboriginal athletic role models on television” to help students “see the benefits of physical activity.” He then says that the inability of his students to “see the benefits” ... “is due to the segregation of Aboriginal people from ‘European’ values and communities, which has caused problems in the Aboriginal way of life.” It is obvious that Edward has never been exposed to even basic understandings of historical content of the type sketched out in Chapter 4. In other words, he has not been equipped to connect his admirable desire to offer a meaningful physical education program to his Aboriginal students’ paramount social change needs.

### *Aggie*

Aggie grew up in a predominantly white rural farm community where she currently teaches physical education. Upon graduating from high school, she attended university to study physical education and acquired her teaching certification. She speaks fondly of her high school physical education teachers who were major influences on her career choices. She loved to be active and “played everything.” She became involved in

all the team sports that her school offered. The physical educator, who influenced her the most, had an inclusive style of interacting with young people. Aggie described his attitude and approach to young people: "They were all his kids" and he acted pleased about that. He was respectful to young people and believed they were capable:

Well, I think he introduced you to a wide variety of sports, and, like I said, he had that kind of happy-go-lucky personality and he tried to push you further than what you would normally do. Made you think about what you were doing, and he treated you like you were people. And if you had a sister or brother he didn't make you feel bad if you weren't the same as that person. He always treated you as an individual. You know you could just go up to him in the hallway and talk to him as a regular conversation, and he wasn't looking down on you because he was a teacher. I think that influenced me a lot and I try to do the same to my kids too.

Aggie taught physical education in an Aboriginal community briefly until a teaching position became available in her hometown, where she currently lives and teaches. Her current school has a very small population of Aboriginal students. Aggie comments on some of the dynamics that she noticed while teaching in an Aboriginal community and how she contributed to some changes:

I noticed a big difference between the girls and the boys. Girls were kind of always meek and off to the side. They would never participate with the boys; that was one thing that I did see definitely. And one way that we worked around that is that we divided the kids up. We had a girl's physical education class, and we had a boy's physical education class. It seemed to work much better, because the

girls actually felt more comfortable participating, and the boys were more competitive at that point in time and they felt like they weren't being hindered to do their own thing. So that is something that we changed when I was there, that's because I noticed that a lot. They are excellent athletes most of them, but they just don't have the social skills or the consistency to come to practices and things like that to keep going, and that I find frustrating.<sup>37</sup>

Like Bonnie, Aggie's perception that the absence of "social skills" is the main barrier faced by Aboriginal students suggests an absence of critical social consciousness on her part. So, once again, we have an example of a dedicated and flexible teacher up against a challenge that is way beyond what she is prepared for. When she vacated the position and left the Aboriginal community another physical educator was hired.

I know that they had a physical education teacher in the high school for the last few years who did so much for them. He would take them to games everywhere. They were at provincials for basketball and everything, and he actually quit. I think he is gone somewhere else. So they're starting again.

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Aggie, like several of the other teachers, observed differences in the lives and behaviour of girls and boys, including the lesser participation of girls and their "low self concept." She made program changes to facilitate the participation and learning of the girls, including classes separated by gender. Bonnie, perhaps aware of the violence so many women face, taught self-defence to girl students while Robert, seeing fewer opportunities for girls to participate in sports, made a special effort to support girls' involvement in hockey. Several teachers recognized the role that gender discrimination, if not subordination, played in their own lives. Susan remembers not wanting to conform to the expectation that girls would focus on "dating boys and going to school dances and wearing the nicest clothes." Robert remembers his family stressing education for the boys and marriage and child rearing for the girls. My own experience of harassment on Pembina Highway would have been different had I not been a woman. As I explained in Chapter 4, one of the outcomes of European colonization for Aboriginal communities was the undercutting of the status of women – a form of inequality that remains pervasive today. Teachers wishing to practice a liberatory pedagogy must recognize gender subordination, provide counter knowledge about women's roles and history, and design programs in a way that seeks to empower young women.

This may simply be an example of the commonplace de-stabilizing, outside-teacher-turnover syndrome discussed previously. However, she might also be saying 'see how hard it is to teach these kids, I am not the only one who quit' [my words].

Aggie describes what she means by the "social skills" that she says are lacking in the Aboriginal community where she taught:

I just don't think they know how to act in an environment off of the reserve. Like, say you go to a shopping mall, they would probably all group together because they didn't know what to do, or they didn't know how to ask somebody a question. That's what I see as social skills. They just couldn't survive outside of it, and that is something that I think really needs to be changed on the reserve. The kids that come here, I find, it is hard for them to adjust to, because they don't know how to act. But maybe we are looking at it different too; maybe we see social skills differently than they do, I don't know. But when they have been here a while they seem to understand. You know [they ask], 'Can I do this?'

Effectively, Aggie is operating with the 'cultural deficit' mentality. The "social skills" that she speaks of are confined to behavioural skills, leading directly to behaviour management as a hugely simplistic and untenable answer to the challenges faced by Aboriginal students and their teachers. When she ponders whether or not "we see social skills differently than they do," Aggie is not talking about understanding the workings of macro social relationships. Instead, she appears to be searching for "cultural" differences abstracted from historical context and systemic social inequity.

Seeing the group dynamics from a community solidarity lens might shed light on important social support models that young people cultivate in the face of racism and

poverty. Critical social consciousness can help teachers recognize aspects of collective culture that need to be nurtured and affirmed. People supporting each other are not in opposition to independent functioning or individuality. Aggie appears to be unaware of how perceived Aboriginal failures in Canadian society are often a direct attack on collective or communal behaviour patterns. The undermining of collective patterns and identity is an assimilation strategy that continually gains ground on many fronts.

For example, recently CBC Radio broadcasted the views of a prominent Winnipeg lawyer who advocated dismantling of the Indian reserve system. Naomi Levine argued for the relocation of Aboriginal communities to Winnipeg. Obviously, Levine has never visited Lord Selkirk Park in inner-city Winnipeg. It is a public housing complex that is populated by hundreds of very poor Aboriginal families who migrated to the city in search of better opportunities. It is basically a refugee camp with few options. Levine failed to recognize that the reserve system effectively maintained the collective ownership of land. Separate from issues of quality and location, collective ownership of land is important as a cultural value and identity. It does not cause poverty, although some have argued that it blocks individual business development.

Aggie describes the relationship that she has built with an Aboriginal student over a two-year period. Greg arrived from a northern community where he was not attending school, was causing problems in the town and had become a gang member. He became a foster child because his mother was in trouble. Aggie was not aware of the details of the family situation and claims that the only way she could keep him in school was to give him 15 minutes of physical education and then 15 minutes of academic work. She said that he did this all day long, initially:

And actually, he is a changed kid right now, you should just see... Greg comes into the gym but not as much as he used to, because he is starting to do more work. He won't come into the class as much; he does sort of a lot of work on his own. But he is doing work, which is a big plus. Yeah, he is one of the main ones. Last year was his first year. I was telling you how much he had changed this year; it is unbelievable.

Aggie explained how he is doing a lot better, in that his attitude has improved, he is on the volleyball team after school and goes to the games.

Aggie talks about two other boys who arrived at her school this year from another northern Aboriginal settlement. Neither wanted to come into gym. One, a grade 8 student, came to the gym and would sit out and not participate. Although not acceptable, he wore his hood up and the other students did not "bug him". After two weeks he decided to participate. She states that, "We just let him do that because I think that is his comfort zone. So he participates in gym now. He won't do the warm-up but he will do all our skills and the games and everything and the kids always include him in all the stuff."

The other, a grade 7 student, is much more challenged. Initially, he would not go into the gym and would hide out somewhere in the school. And now, he is in the gym and he is watching but he still won't participate yet. "He is still not at that step. We are trying to get him to go there, but not yet. He's actually not even speaking. He won't even speak in school yet. So in that respect it is a little bit harder." Aggie tries to facilitate connections between Greg and the two new students. She encourages Greg to talk to those boys: "I ask him to participate with them. He will go there right away

without question. Which is nice to see for him too because he [Greg] had no social skills when he came either, and now he is being involved with them.” Aggie's respect for young people is expressed in her relationships. On the one hand she can allow them to have the space and flexibility they need to adjust and is able to stay connected or intervene in various ways at the same time.

More complex is the absence of connection with students on the home front. Aggie is vaguely aware of problems at home but is really operating in a vacuum. She explains how little she knows about the family, which leaves her guessing:

But we don't know the whole story about them either. We don't think one has a mother or a father, but we are not sure... There is not a lot of clues to tell us. And that is about all that we know. So it is hard to say what is going on with them two. And you don't want to push them any further if they are having trouble adjusting family-wise too. Because, actually we had heard that [one of the boys] the mother was killed in a car accident, but we don't know if that is true. I think we have asked for a counsellor to meet with them or something, but I don't know if that has happened yet. We share a counsellor with two or three schools so. We were just talking about that, because we don't know what is going on inside his head. Maybe he is not talking because there is another reason. So pushing him into Phys Ed might even make it worse. But, hopefully, somebody will do something soon.

These passages are very telling in that they show that even elementary, contextually relevant knowledge about personal and family context – let alone global historical consciousness – is blatantly inadequate for the task at hand. This is in spite of the fact

that teachers like Aggie recognize the need to understand where their students are coming from in relation to school programs. Aggie's concern that, "pushing him into physical education might even make it worse" is just the 'tip of the iceberg' when it comes to consciousness of the challenges facing front line victims of racialized social oppression. It underlines the need for teachers to acquire culturally relevant thinking and practice.

Aggie seems somewhat embarrassed about her lack of information and knowledge about local Aboriginal people. She admits to knowing very little, if anything, about the history of the people in either of the schools where she taught or about the region where she grew up. When asked about what she knows, her response is as follows:

Not a lot, unfortunately. Not more than what I learned in school. Not even university, only from what I learned in high school. The only thing I think I took in university is cross-cultural education, but other than that, this kind of thing was never taught in university. Yeah, it probably should now that I think about it because in Physical Education and Education there really isn't a lot and if you are going to a reserve school, people should be prepared for what is happening. And I don't think I would have known if I would have taught there either, so that would be something that everyone should know.

So here we have direct acknowledgement of the need for teachers to be educated about the history of Aboriginal people. The next step would be awareness of a need to better understand the historical roles and context of non-Aboriginal people. In the meantime, as implied by Aggie, the prevailing orientation of 'cross-cultural education' does not even come close to filling the historical consciousness void.

The notion of being “prepared for what is happening” refers to the social crisis in many Aboriginal communities. Aggie has no understanding of colonial history or oppression. From her point of view, poor “social skills” seems to be at the heart of the problem. However, she also shows awareness of the deeper issue of “self-concept”, a notion that is closely linked with the self-esteem focus of my community solidarity perspective:

Like I said, I think a lot has to do with self-concept with Aboriginal people too and I don't know if it's being accepted as a white person coming into teach, maybe they see themselves differently. That would be something to ask the kids, how they feel with a white person teaching them as opposed to an Aboriginal person teaching them. I have noticed that their self-concept is very low, especially the girls....Just because they don't really want to be in front of people, they are always in groups. They would say that they are not good at sports. That would be something that came out of their mouths right away, when in fact they are wonderful athletes. But nobody is taking the time to teach them to get better. They didn't notice how good they were, maybe it's because people told them that they were never good enough to be good athletes.

When Aggie was asked how she thought that Aboriginal students might have gotten the message that they were not good enough, she stated:

You're asking me tough questions. I don't really know. I don't know if it was their parents or if it came from white people telling them that they were no good. I am not sure, and that is why I would like to know with me teaching them if they

had a different experience than having an Aboriginal physical education teacher teach them.

This leads us back to the significance of teachers knowing, or not knowing, the everyday culture and social-historical context of their students. Aggie has excellent conventional teaching practices as she demonstrates in her relationships with students. However, she still is not equipped at this point to deliver a culturally relevant program because she believes the culture of Aboriginal students is the problem. She is blocked by the Eurocentric assumptions that she was saddled with in her own socialization. For example, she speaks of her “wonderful” concerned father who also holds racist attitudes: “I will just say that my dad is a redneck. He has issues with that [Aboriginal people’s behaviour]. He told me not to teach on the reserve, but I did it anyway.”

Aggie has done her best as a teacher of Aboriginal students, but does not have the critical social consciousness needed to be a more effective ally. Aggie wants to be really useful as a teacher. How can this happen without “unpacking the inner landscape” and a culturally transformative pedagogy?

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusions

Throughout my dissertation I have used the term 'ally' because it implies a holistic, supportive relationship and is not totally focussed on subject matter. Teachers generally have not been conditioned to think about their relationships with students in terms of solidarity and alliances. On the other hand, if questioned, most teachers would likely agree that being an ally is consistent with effective teaching. I believe that to be effective educators of Aboriginal students, teachers need to see themselves as allies of young people that are struggling in the face of social inequities that continue to undermine Aboriginal communities.

I began this study with acute awareness that in most Aboriginal communities and inner-city neighbourhoods, schools operate in the context of social crisis and for the most part, Aboriginal students are not doing very well in school. Many Aboriginal young people emerge from our schools with low self-esteem and confidence. It is in this context that I recognize the need for allies and believe that many teachers are at a loss in addressing this context.

The study explores dimensions of social consciousness in relation to the ability of physical educators to be effective allies to Aboriginal students. Teachers as allies require social consciousness. Social consciousness means awareness of how society operates. The focus of the study is on social consciousness as a key ingredient to effective teaching. The predominant focus of teacher training is on subject matter and techniques. Subject matter is important. But if subject matter is not related to the pressing needs of young people it can become irrelevant or out right alienating.

The evolution of my thesis began with my recognition that Aboriginal students face crisis conditions and are in need for allies. This led to the recognition of the need for teachers who understand what Aboriginal young people are up against and the need to cultivate social consciousness among Physical Educators. My three-fold research process included (1) an examination of critical pedagogy, (2) an examination of historical knowledge and (3) interviews with eight physical education teachers. The process led to the construction of a pedagogical framework that is in solidarity with Aboriginal communities.

In order to investigate the impact of social consciousness in applied pedagogy, I began my inquiry by asking the following questions: (1) How do physical education teachers interpret the effect of their own teaching practices on the performance of Aboriginal students? (2) What knowledge do teachers have about the historical social and economic backgrounds of their students, and how does this information impact on their relationships with Aboriginal students? (3) What is involved in critical social consciousness applied to teaching? (4) How is critical social consciousness important to being an effective ally to Aboriginal students? With these questions in mind I explored critical pedagogy and perspectives of physical education teachers who have worked with Aboriginal young people in Manitoba. This is the process that led me to craft a community solidarity approach that I believe can help physical educators to be strong allies of Aboriginal students.

Key aspects of my community solidarity pedagogy explained in previous chapters, are listed below. Each component represents a different dimension of social

consciousness and each component stands on its own, as well as in relationship to the others. Each of them can help teachers to be effective allies to Aboriginal young people.

1. Understanding that healthy self-esteem is essential to positive sustainable outcomes in school and throughout life.
2. Recognition that individual self-esteem is inseparable from community identity.
3. Understanding that aboriginal students need to make sense out of their social circumstances if they are to develop positive self-esteem.
4. High degree of respect for students and for their ability to learn.
5. Curriculum flexibility in regard to particular circumstances of students.
6. Historical consciousness in regard to Aboriginal communities.
7. Understanding that colonial relationships have been undermining the self-reliance and resilience of Aboriginal communities for centuries.
8. Understanding that inequitable economic relationships generate social crisis.
9. Understanding that individuals can act as agents of social change.
10. Understand that deep-set assumptions and attitudes related to colonization and other forms of oppression act as barriers to critical social consciousness and to one's ability to act as an ally to others.
11. Consciousness of immediate, social power dynamics in student-teacher relationships.
12. Understanding that schools can be sites for social transformation.
13. Use of students' everyday culture as a vehicle for learning.
14. Recognition and promotion of skills, knowledge, wisdom and leadership of Aboriginal students and their families and communities.

15. Understanding that structural “racism” is a primary social reality for aboriginal young people.
16. Awareness and avoidance of adult assumptions and behaviours that pre-empt responsible leadership and self-actualization among young people.
17. Avoidance of predatory competition that works against positive and sustainable self-esteem.
18. Recognition that oppressive social relationships are multi dimensional and that everyone is affected.
19. Encouragement of “counter knowledge” as a means of developing multiple perspectives and historical consciousness.
20. Recognition that educational programs need to be supportive of community connections if they are to benefit Aboriginal young people.

The analysis of the information and interpretations gleaned from my conversations with relatively successful physical education instructors of Aboriginal young people was informed by my community solidarity framework and also added to it. I believe that this on-the-ground case material strongly affirms my thesis proposition that social consciousness is important in relation to the ability of physical education teachers to be useful allies to Aboriginal students. It also validates the importance of the community solidarity framework.

The interpretations stemming from the interviews indicate that the physical educators in the study have social consciousness that contributes to their ability to be flexible and inclusive in their teaching practice with Aboriginal students. In varying

degrees, they are aware of the immediate context of students' lives and they are aware that Aboriginal communities are in crisis. The teachers understand that students suffer from poor self-concepts and lack of confidence. At the same time, the teachers' lack of critical social consciousness is marked by how the crisis is understood. It is often individualized and perceived to be caused by individually poor choices, lifestyle, and poor parenting. In general, the physical education teachers in the study appear to be responding to individuals by demonstrating a high level of flexibility in the program offering. However, they were not equipped to go beyond this level of analysis and most of them had little or no meaningful knowledge of the historical, social and economic backgrounds of Aboriginal communities.

The social consciousness of the interviewees was sufficient to motivate them to adapt program goals to meet the needs of students and to focus on participation as an outcome. In this sense, the teachers were successful. However, the absence of critical social consciousness limits their ability to effectively engage students in affirming positive identification with their own identities as Aboriginal students and their own communities. It also means that the teachers are not in a position to involve Aboriginal students in transformative dialogue. It appears that teachers are lacking in knowledge and understanding needed to help Aboriginal students, and themselves, make sense out of the social dilemma that they all face and to deal with it. Critical social consciousness involves situating individuals squarely in the context of their root communities.

Consistent with my community solidarity approach, critical race theory, cultural relevant pedagogy, and critical pedagogy in general, I believe that individual self-esteem is inseparable from community self-esteem. The arguments and illustrations presented in

this dissertation support the proposition that critical social consciousness can be a vital ingredient in promoting physical and mental health of Aboriginal students and the effectiveness of their teachers. All of this supports the thesis that social consciousness is an important factor in determining how far physical education teachers can go as allies of Aboriginal students.

The following is a summary of key observations regarding current gaps and opportunities that confront physical educators in this study. It is followed by recommendations for physical education teacher training programs.

*Observations: Gaps*

- (1) Physical education teachers are not adequately prepared to understand and teach in contexts of inequality, poverty and racism.
- (2) Physical education teachers need to be equipped to address the connection between colonial history and poor health conditions from the Aboriginal/colonized perspective. As Browne (2003) says, health problems cannot be “glossed over as lifestyle, behavioural or cultural issues;” rather, they represent the complex interplay of historical, social, political and economical determinates that influence health status and access to equitable health care. (p.27)
- (3) Similarly, the poor health condition of low-income populations requires a more complex explanation and understanding than just; “people make bad choices.” To respond effectively, physical education teachers need an understanding of the ‘big picture’, which includes the social and emotional challenges they are confronted with when working with marginalized youth.

### *Opportunities:*

- (1) Due to the interactive nature of the physical education program (e.g., traveling on a bus to a game), physical education teachers have significant opportunities to initiate dialogue that can affirm or undermine Aboriginal students' confidence and cultural identities.
- (2) Physical education teachers who are confident, flexible and can question their own teaching practices and philosophies, including the relevance of the curriculum, can create openings for Aboriginal students to succeed.
- (3) Physical educators who focus on the value of caring, respectful relationships with Aboriginal students and their families can eventually develop quality teaching environments.
- (4) Physical educators who value young people in general, and the skills and abilities of Aboriginal young people in particular, can be effective allies. It is important to focus on a student's strengths and community assets.

### *Recommendations*

- (1) The community solidarity framework constructed in this thesis should be used in the development of training programs for physical education students, physical education curriculum and methodologies, and support programs for physical education teachers. Some of the more specific implications include:
  - (2) Physical education teacher-training programs should incorporate a holistic perspective that emphasizes the social and emotional development of young people.
  - (3) Physical education teacher-training programs should provide students with opportunities to learn Aboriginal and colonial history.

- (4) Physical education teacher-training programs should provide students with a critical framework that will enable them to address young peoples' lives more effectively, particularly in response to issues of racism and poverty.
- (5) To be effective allies, physical educators need to value and respect the competence and cultures of Aboriginal young people. Teacher training programs should support this objective.
- (6) Greater efforts should be made to recruit, attract, support, and train Aboriginal students in physical education and teacher training.

#### *Future directions*

Some physical education teachers might react to this thesis with the opinion that critical pedagogy and my community solidarity framework go way beyond the boundaries of the physical education curriculum. – Are physical education teachers being asked to share responsibility for the social predicament of Aboriginal students? – My response would be to suggest that if critical social consciousness is not pursued and integrated into physical education programs, then physical education programs run the danger of being one more waste of time, or even a set back, for young people who are consciously or unconsciously fighting for their lives as individuals and as a people.

#### *Recommendations for further research*

Patti Lather's (1991) interpretation of "catalytic validity" asks to what extent do the participants in the study gain self-direction and self-understanding. It is evident from the interview material presented in the research findings that the interview process did prompt the interviewees to explore their own thinking. However, due to my own external priorities (related to community work) that constrained my involvement with the research

project, participants in this study were not given the opportunity to engage in dialogue beyond the initial interview conversations. Future research could incorporate dialogue around interpretations, perspectives, and early experiences that could support greater self-understanding and self-direction.

This dissertation focused on dimensions of social consciousness. However, I believe that (1) social consciousness is just one of at least four key factors that determine the ability of teachers to be effective allies to Aboriginal students. (2) Knowledge of course subject matter is another, fairly obvious example. (3) Passion for teaching a particular subject and for teaching in general, is another. And, beyond all of these, I have learned that knowledge and analysis alone have no practical value without (4) psychological “free space”; that is, having the presence of mind to stay focussed on the needs of students and specific tasks at hand. Therefore, from my point of view, it would be very valuable to more fully explore the capacity of educators to “unpack their inner landscapes” and to support each other in dealing with internalized “distress patterns” that have the potential to shut down one's thinking and to negate the capacity of teachers to be good allies to students and to each other.

The issue of psychological free space is very challenging but there is no escaping its fundamental relationship to all aspects of human endeavours, including teaching. As critical educator Jennifer Gore (1993) reminds us, to be allies, teachers need long-term institutional and peer support, so that they can avoid the frustrations expressed when they find themselves, despite their best “emancipatory” intentions, “repeating the very expressions and practices that typify the kinds of teachers we vowed we would never be” (p. 155).

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## Appendix A

### Glossary

<b>Adultism</b>	The conscious or unconscious pre-emption of leadership and self-actualization of young people. (p. 18)
<b>Colonization</b>	Control of people and natural resources in the interest of an external centre of power. (p. 17)
<b>Counter knowledge</b>	The term is used in critical race theory and refers to knowledge stemming from perspectives that are in opposition to the status quo. This can include non-academic, community-based thinking, as well as academic scholarship. (p. 20)
<b>Critical social consciousness</b>	Implies depth in terms of knowledge and analytical understanding of power relations. It posits an understanding of the historical social and economic relations within and between different groups of people and it includes an awareness of the impact of these relations on everyday individual lives and communities. (p. 16)
<b>Internalized oppression</b>	The negative beliefs that people have about themselves. Through their socialization, people come to accept (and often act on) the negative beliefs they hold about themselves. (p. 17))
<b>Oppression</b>	Refers to social relationships that involve the intentional or unintentional exercise of power by one group of people at the expense of another. (p. 17)
<b>Self-actualization</b>	Refers to a process whereby people come to terms with who they are and position themselves in a way that leads to positive engagement with the world around them. Inherently, this involves notions such as sense of purpose, self-respect, curiosity, creativity and peace of mind. In turn, this is heavily related to emotional and physical health. (p. 18)
<b>Social consciousness</b>	Knowledge and awareness of relationships between people. The depth and breath of social consciousness depends on the intellectual and emotional make-up of a particular individual in regard to particular circumstances and issues. (p. 16)

## Appendix B

### Factors Associated with Aboriginal School Drop-outs

- Difficulty with English language skills
- Getting poor grades on school exams and tests
- Being kept back one or more grades
- Failing one or more courses in school
- Falling behind with homework
- Not paying attention in class
- Unable to do the work required by the teachers
- Getting into trouble with the teachers/principal
- Teachers failed to understand students
- Teachers do not encourage them
- Teachers pick on them unjustly
- Parents have little interest in how well or badly they perform in school
- Parents do not encourage them to remain in school
- Parents and teachers do not talk to each other enough
- Too little communication between school and home communities
- Many friends have already dropped out
- They have few or no friends at school
- They do not expect to finish high school
- They do not care whether they finish high school or not
- Lack clear plans about what they will do after leaving school
- Most school subjects do not interest them
- Feel that school is of little importance to their lives
- Seldom took part in sports or after-school activities
- School seems to be too big and impersonal
- They had to bus for quite a long time to and from school
- They had to live away from home
- Many teachers could not engage their interest and participation
- Too many pointless school rules
- No professional guidance counselor with whom they could feel really comfortable
- No professional guidance counselor, just a regular teacher who did some counseling
- Insufficient career counseling at school
- The school did not really care about Native students
- Much class work was pointless
- They had to study courses that had little to do with their lives outside school
- No courses of specific cultural relevance to them as Native people
- Non-Native students made them feel unwelcome
- They were discriminated against by others in school
- They skipped school and classes quite a lot
- They left school to get married and /or have a baby
- They left school because of financial problems at home
- They left school to go on welfare

Source: Mackay and Myles, (1998).

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

#### Questions:

##### *A. Building rapport questions:*

1. How long have you been teaching and where have you worked?
2. How is it that you came to be teaching physical education?
3. Why did you specialize in physical education? What attracted you to the specialty or field?
4. What has been your experience in the field? What would you like to see changed?

##### *B. Understanding Aboriginal community issues questions:*

5. What is your experience teaching Aboriginal students?
6. How do you explain the experience of Aboriginal students in the school system in general?
7. How do you explain the experience of Aboriginal people in general?
8. What is your understanding of how these issues of colonization/oppression effect students in the gym?
9. How did you come to this understanding? What influenced your learning about Aboriginal people?

##### *C. Relationship questions:*

10. What is your earliest memory of Aboriginal people? Or how or when did you become conscious of being an Aboriginal person?
11. How have these early experiences influenced your teaching practice?
12. Describe your early life experience with adult relationships in particular?
13. Reflecting on your early memories, could you describe a relationship with an adult that you would consider an ally?
14. How has this relationship, or the absence of such, influenced your life?
15. Do you consider yourself an ally to young person / people?
16. Describe what you think is the role of an ally?
17. Can an adult be an effective ally to young people?
18. What is required to be effective?
19. How would you describe your relationship with aboriginal students?
20. How do you perceive their needs?
21. What do you need to be more effective?

## Appendix D

### Situational Prompts

1. A recent study investigated the experience of physical education for Aboriginal students in Manitoba (Champagne & Halas, 2003). In a series of focus group interviews with Aboriginal students, a number of issues arose related to the aboriginal students' experience of physical education. I've constructed three scenarios that arose from this research and I'd like you to tell me how you would respond to these situations if you encountered them in the gym.
  - a) A group of Aboriginal students never change for physical education. In one school, if you don't change you can't participate, which directly affects their academic progress. How would you address this in your program?
  - b) During a fitness unit, a small group of Aboriginal girls are standing together in the corner of the gym. They are not participating but they are also not disruptive. How would you address this situation?
  - b) A new student has arrived from an Aboriginal community up North and immediately signed up for the boy's hockey team. After two practices he was cut from the team. He considered himself to be a good player and doesn't know why he was cut from the team. His friends say it's because he's "Native". What do you think happened here?

## Appendix E

### Call for Participants

Invitation to participate in a study on teaching practice in physical education

#### "Becoming Allies to Aboriginal Youth in Physical Education Programs"

- Do you consider yourself an "Ally" to young people?
- Do you consider yourself a Physical Educator who has been successful teaching Aboriginal students?
  - Are you willing to reflect on your teaching and share what works well for you?

If yes, please consider collaborating in a study that could be useful to you and other educators. The study involves sharing your experience and knowledge through a series of interviews amounting to approximately 120 minutes. You will have the opportunity to tell your teaching stories to an interviewer who really wants to hear them. Your participation is highly valued and your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.

Please call Louise Champagne at \_\_\_\_\_ or e-mail [umchamp5@cc.umanitoba.ca](mailto:umchamp5@cc.umanitoba.ca)

(Closing Date)

Research supported by the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation Studies and the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Manitoba

## Appendix F

### Participant Information Sheet

- Research Project Title:** "Becoming Allies to Aboriginal Youth in Physical Education Programs: A Critical Analysis of Social and Historical Consciousness as a Factor in Effective Pedagogy"
- Researcher:** Louise Champagne  
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation Studies  
Faculty of Graduate Studies  
University of Manitoba  
Phone: (204)  
E-mail:
- Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Joannie Halas  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation Studies  
University of Manitoba  
Phone: (204) 474-6061  
E-mail:
- Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to understand how physical education teachers can become better allies to Aboriginal students. Through interviews with successful teacher of Aboriginal students, I seek to investigate their perceptions and interpretations regarding the effectiveness of their teaching practices on the performance of Aboriginal students in the gym. In particular, I ask the questions: What knowledge and understanding do teachers have about the social and economic history of Aboriginal peoples and how does this impact on their relationships with students?
- Procedures:** First, you are invited to participate in a 60 to 90 minute individual interview session which will be audio taped and transcribed into text. All names and identifying characteristics will be changed to provide confidentiality and anonymity. All data will be secured and only the researcher will have access.
- Secondly, you will receive a draft summary of the researcher's analysis and interpretations and be invited to respond. Your response will be of your own choosing. You can choose another 30-minute individual dialogue session either in person or by email. You can also choose to participate in a dialogue group, which will be approximately 30 to 40 minutes, audio taped, transcribed and incorporated as text. The size of the group depends on how many

are interested in this option. All identifying characteristics will be changed. Data collected will be kept secure and in confidence.

**Risks:** Risk factors are minimal. Participants may feel uncomfortable emotions related to re-living or re-telling past experiences, and will be able to pass on any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

**Recording:** All interviews will be audiotape recorded and some hand written notes will be taken during the interviews.

**Confidentiality:** Participant confidentiality will be provided as much as possible.

**Findings:** Participants will be given a copy of the final report on request.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please indicate your consent to participate by reading and signing the attached *Informed Consent Form*. Remember that you are free to withdraw at anytime and for any reason. If you have any questions or need further clarification please feel free to contact either my advisor or myself.

The University of Manitoba Ethics Review Board approved this study. If you have complaints or concerns about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this information sheet and consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

## Appendix G

### Informed Consent Form

**Project Title:**

**Becoming Allies to Aboriginal Youth in Physical Education Programs: A Critical Analysis of Social and Historical Consciousness as a Factor in Effective Pedagogy**

**Researcher:** Louise Champagne  
Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation Studies  
Faculty of Graduate Studies  
University of Manitoba

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I have received information about this study including the purpose and procedures. I understand:

- that I may ask questions at any time and have them answered to my satisfaction
- that my participation is voluntary
- that I can withdraw at any time for any reason or without reason
- that all information gathered will remain confidential
- that all findings reported will not identify participants
- that the information will be used to inform teaching practice
- that upon completion of the study, I may request a summary of the findings

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, sponsor, or involved institution from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

**Principal Researcher:** Louise Champagne, Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor / Advisor:** Dr. Joannie Halas, Phone: 474-6061 or \_\_\_\_\_

The University of Manitoba Ethics Review Board has approved this research. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the **Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date