

**LIVING WITH RESERVATION:
A "SPECIAL" EDUCATION
FOR FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN**

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Abstract

This thesis represents an interpretive exploration into the experiences of First Nations' children who were receiving special education services and who had a history of receiving special education services. My purpose was to discover "What is a 'special' education for First Nations' children?" I began with the stories which brought me to this inquiry and the literature which connected with those stories. Then through open-ended interviews, eight First Nations' children gave stories that spoke of their experiences. My interpretations of their stories were reflected within the context of my non-Native culture, knowledge and experiences. The interpretations were offered as possible ways of seeing and knowing the experiences of the First Nations' children and as possible ways of opening oneself to respecting an-'other' way of seeing and knowing. My exploration led me to see anew what a 'special' education might be for First Nations' children.

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A 'SPECIAL' EDUCATION FOR FIRST NATIONS' CHILDREN

Every day children enter the classroom and with them they bring 'diversity.' This diversity manifests itself in a variety of ways. However, within this inquiry the focus was given to two contexts of diversity: diversity in culture and diversity in learning abilities. As teachers, we are given the challenge of attending to the diverse nature of children through the daily design of programs within our classrooms and from this design, we teach.

Finding Ground

A little over three years ago, I requested a transfer from the regular classroom to any special education position that became available within the district. Shortly thereafter, the principal of an elementary school approached me with the offer of a half-time special education teaching position and a half-time Native education coordinator's position. I had previous experience as a special education teacher, but the Native education coordinator's position would be new to me. I accepted the offer with an enthusiasm for teaching in the area of special education again and with an excitement for venturing into new teaching and learning

experiences in the area of Native education.

During the summer, my graduate courses focused on Native education and then during the first months of the school year I researched resources, curriculum and program design for Native education. For the most part, I found Native education was defined by: a) the study of 'North American Indians' in the grade four social studies program, b) the occasional reference to an elective course for Native students in culture and/or language (mainly at the high school level), and c) the occasional Native dance performance. From this investigation I ended up with a list of things we could do:

1. have Native dancers perform
2. eat traditional Native foods
3. have Native elders tell stories
4. have Native speakers in the grade four class
5. offer Native language classes...

One day, I stopped and looked at the list of 'things' and I grimaced when I felt its emptiness. Within all this research and preparation, the Native education program struggled to come alive within the first few months of school.

My design of the Native education program was initially guided by 'authoritative others' found primarily in educational texts and documents. My understanding of 'authoritative' was reflective of "Gadamer's account of the

dogmatic recognition of authority" (Warnke, 1987, p. 155) and of Freire's "authoritarianism" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 91), whereby those who hold the power in making educational decisions are assumed to be the 'authority.' Their authority is recognized within the dominant social structures as having or being able to attain knowledge, but it is not necessarily an authority embedded in critical and reflective thought, nor in understanding. At that time, I had assumed that educational institutions held the knowledge, skills and beliefs needed to guide and determine curriculum and program design. For example, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (1990a) directed me to consider that "teachers should strive to ensure inclusion of First Nations' values, beliefs, role models, and experiences, both historical and contemporary, as an integral part of their Language Arts program" (p. 37). Researchers also influenced my work with the presentation of "recent studies of North American [Native] education and numerous position papers by [Native] organizations in Canada strongly recommending recognition of Native culture in the school curriculum" (Wyatt, 1978-79, p. 17). Although I did not initially recognize them as such, these 'educational institutions' were representative of "the dominant group, the EuroAmerican middle class and upper class [who] design the structure, organization, instructional strategies, and curriculum contents of schools to conform to their values,

interests, learning styles, and needs" (Grossman, 1991, p. 23). In a sense, I became like them, an 'authoritative other,' imparting their 'authoritative' design; imparting "the dogmatism of social norms and practices [which are] adhered to, or pursued in, [sic] an unreflective, ungrounded way" (Habermas cited in Warnke, 1987, p. 135). I became an 'authority' who coordinated a program with little knowledge of Native education, an authority whose program design was not necessarily embedded in the critical and reflective thought needed to fill the 'emptiness' (p. 9, this thesis).

The research tended to pose problems rather than solutions for me;

Get parents involved... How?

Teach culturally relevant curriculum... What is it?

How do I find out?

Use appropriate resources... What are they? Where can I find them?

Among these practical questions other theoretical questions lingered;

What is authority?

Who has authority and from where does this authority come?

What is important to teach and how can I find out what is important to teach?

These questions continually challenged me as I tried to design a Native education curriculum and program.

When I finally turned to the Native community for guidance, the Native education program began to breathe. In a sense, I had found 'an-other authority.' The Native people had the authority of lived experience; they held the knowledge, skills and beliefs, and the critical and reflective thought necessary to create a Native education program. Native parents and elders began coming to the school with their children, all children (Native and non-Native) were learning the Native language, all children (Native and non-Native) were learning about the Native culture; cultural connections were made with regular curriculum and program design. Through their presence, the Native education program began to breathe. The next two years were filled with incredible learning experiences.

New learning experiences were also present in the special education program with the 'integration' of children with special needs into the regular classroom.

'Integration' of children with special needs had recently been mandated by the British Columbia Ministry of Education, but their mandate allowed for the "least restrictive environment" crack through which many children with special needs fall. When they land, they usually find themselves back in segregated education programs and/or settings. However, the belief that children belong together with their learning differences was integral to the sustained effort

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and the passion with which I worked to have all children included within the regular classroom. Many of the children with whom I worked in special education were First Nations' children. These First Nations' children were primarily placed within two special education categories: *learning disabilities* (hereafter referred to as *learning differences*) and *behavior disorders* (hereafter referred to as *behavior differences*). I passionately worked toward their integration into the regular classroom.

I became increasingly aware that it is through an 'authoritative' stance that educators tend to define relevancy and meaningfulness for curriculum and program design. It is not through children. It is my belief that the ability to design curricula and programs and to teach children of another culture with learning and/or behavior differences needs to be grounded in an understanding of the experiences of these children. In the research and writing of this thesis, I hoped to continue to hear and look to Native children as those who have 'an-other authority.' It was my wish that they teach me of their experiences as Native children who were receiving special education services and who had a history of receiving special education services.

Nature of the Inquiry

Within this inquiry I attended to the following

question; What is a 'special' education for First Nations' children?

In attending to this question, I spoke with First Nations' children who were receiving special education services and who had a history of receiving special education services. My purpose was to understand their experiences as a way of informing the design of special education.

CHAPTER 2

AN-OTHER VIEW OF THE REVIEW

Designing Curriculum and Program

Most educators and researchers do not distinguish between *curriculum* and *program* and the terms are often presented interchangeably. However, we can envision the curriculum as the frame of a picture and the picture is the program that is carried out in classrooms on a daily basis. The curriculum provides the theoretical support and guidance for the design of the program. It becomes the frame of the picture which is created through the design of the classroom program. The teachers and the students are the creators of this picture within their schools and classrooms.

I see how the picture I created during my teaching years has changed. I initially thought the curriculum and the program were the same and therefore I waited for the government to do its job and tell me what to do. When the prescribed textbooks arrived, I interpreted the textbooks as the direction for which I was waiting and my picture filled with basal readers, science textbooks and workbooks of all sorts. Gradually, my picture changed when I realized that teachers didn't all teach the same things and we didn't all

use the same textbooks and workbooks. So I branched out and tried other resources to accomplish the curriculum goals which I now interpreted as a prescribed set of skills that every child had to master in order to succeed as outlined by a list of learning objectives. Now my picture was not only filled with textbooks, but also with resources, checklists and skill objectives. But again, I watched the teacher down the hall who was doing wonderful things in the classroom and I thought, "if the government saw what that teacher was doing with the curriculum, she'd be out of a job. There is no way that she's going to be able to cover three countries and all three areas of the sciences this year if she doesn't quit doing travel brochures."

Finally, after many years of teaching, I dusted off a curriculum guide and read it. I did not find the words 'Ginn' or 'Exploring Science' or 'Phonics Workbook C,' and I did not find 'must complete all the chapters in the math textbook.' Instead I found words like 'creative,' 'critical,' 'communication,' 'culture'... and now I began to create another picture; children were no longer peripheral to this picture, they were the picture.

Each child who enters this picture is unique and special. Their specialness is shown in many ways, and one of these ways is through culture. Children of Native cultures bring to the picture a unique texture and as educators, teachers need to feel and appreciate this texture

as integral to the creation of the picture.

In the past, those in charge of First Nations' education tried to eradicate this texture or tried to paint over it by using the same brush stroke for all. This was done in the name of 'assimilation.' Although the methods and practices of assimilation have changed [ie. teachers do not beat Native children for speaking their language or practising their traditions (Jensen & Brooks, 1991, p. 39)], my experiences have shown me that educational institutions continue to assimilate First Nations' children (ie. denial of a place for First Nations' languages and cultures within school programs). Shirley Joseph (in Jensen and Brooks, 1991) referred to this as "the age-old crusade... to assimilate Indian people into Euro-Canadian society" (p. 66). The picture remains black and mostly White and I am still hard pressed to see the colorful brush strokes of other cultures within schools and to feel the textures they create.

Although curriculum policies may be inclusive of cultural differences, much of the practice within classrooms continues to deny cultural differences, and the "rhetoric surrounding issues of cultural diversity far outweigh the efforts to implement change in the educational and instructional methods used for diverse populations in educational settings" (Briscoe, 1991, p. 14). Perhaps, "political rhetoric and policy changes are not sufficient to

change longstanding structural relationships" (Perley, 1993, p. 125).

The importance for teachers to include a culturally relevant program in an integrated way is reiterated throughout the formal literature (Briscoe, 1991; Correa & Tulbert, 1991; Cummins, 1986; Fradd, 1991; Gilliland, 1987; Price, 1992) with suggestions that culturally relevant curriculum relates to improved achievement levels, self-esteem, and behavior amongst children of another culture. "Students need to see some of their own cultural values reflected in the curriculum... to see themselves as desirable and integral members of the school community" (Correa & Tulbert, 1991, p. 24).

To construct a program that invites the plurality of cultural heritage into the classroom challenges the present structures which maintain the status quo of the dominant Western-European culture (also referred to as the Euro'centric' culture, referring to the 'centre' of Western culture which has been influenced and modeled from the culture of European colonizers creating a culture of European ideologies and ways). Bopp, Bopp and Lane (1984) suggested that in order to change the present colonizing structures "each part must give up considering itself the centre" (p. 15). The idea is not to erase one culture with the other nor to have the other culture become the dominant one, but to find a way that cultures can exist with mutual

respect. "Every child has the chance to benefit from the cultural heritage of others, as well as from his or her own" (Winzer, Rogow & David, 1987, p. 538). I ask myself, "What are the ways of including culture that speak to the respect and dignity of the children of that culture?"

Another View of the Review

Storytelling is also the cornerstone of the teaching profession. Great teachers, from Homer and Plato, through Jesus, Li Po, and Gandhi have used stories, myths, parables, and personal story to instruct, to illustrate, and to guide the thinking of their students. (Zabel, 1991, p. 22)

Throughout the following text, I have included stories¹ within the text of the literature review. These stories represent a review of my personal literature during the years in which I was a special education teacher and a Native education coordinator in a small community in central British Columbia.² They connect me to this inquiry.

1. The use of the word 'stories' instead of 'narratives' is purposeful. For some, the preference is to use the word 'narrative' as it somehow appears to have more credence in being true, and as the word 'stories' may lead one to think the writing is a fictional account. However, learning through story has long been the tradition of many First Nations' cultures. First Nations' people have told their 'truths' through stories and find them to be "powerful tools used for teaching and discipline in Native North American cultures" (Caduto & Bruchac, 1991, p. 11). Stories are an "important channel for interpreting and communicating personal experience" (Ridington, 1982, p. 219). To consider stories less credible than narratives is part of a larger cultural interpretation of what and possibly who, holds 'truth.'

2. Pseudonyms have been used within the stories to ensure anonymity.

Together with the formal literature, the stories are presented as a way of bringing meaning and understanding to the inquiry. They come together as another way of viewing the literature.

Echoes of Learning

Lyle was an elder on the reserve and he lived in a small green house with his wife Elsie. Through the efforts of Mary, the Native Liaison Worker, Lyle became one of the volunteers to work with a group of grade 5/6/7 students during our two day camp out at the reserve. He was given the group of students who wanted to learn more about the sweatlodge and how to build it.

On the first day of the camp out, Lyle's group met him at his back door where he had gathered the willows to make the lodge. All day the children watched and helped out a little as willow after willow broke. It was very quiet as neither Lyle nor the students said very much. At the end of the day only a skeletal frame of the lodge stood.

The next morning the students sat on Lyle's backstep waiting for him. From a distance, Mary and I discussed what we should do, as the students had waited almost an hour. We decided to go and knock on his door. As we headed across the field, that was the backyard of the community, Lyle walked out of his house.

"Good morning Lyle," echoed the children. A soft smile lit his face as he went straight to work, picking up the next willow and piece of twine.

I stood quietly and watched. Mary went quietly over to speak with Elsie.

After a short time, Mary returned and we walked to another house where another group of children were making moccasins with another elder. Mary told me that the past three days were the only sober days that Lyle had experienced this year and that last night was the first night in a long time that he was able to find sleep.

At the end of the day only a skeletal frame of the lodge stood.

I worried about the program worthiness and the educational value of the experience for the students. But worries dissipated when the children returned their group-evaluation sheets. I read:

We learned to be patient.

We learned that if you listen to the willow, it makes a special sound just before it snaps and tells you to "lighten up." We learned that Lyle would like us to come back.

The silence that was present within that group of children was noticeable. There was not much noise like there is at school. It was strangely, and yet soothingly, silent. As I stood there, I thought of how little silence there is at school and that if the Native children come from this quietness, the noise at school must be invasive. Phillips (1983) cautioned that the child who comes from an environment where learning occurs through visual rather than verbal styles, may be alienated in a classroom where talking is the way of showing your ability.

The story of Lyle and the sweat also speaks quietly of the traditional ways in which some Native children learned. In the past, the elders of the Native community played a central role in the education of the children, teaching the skills, knowledge and attitudes that contributed to the community and the culture as a whole. Children watched and when they felt ready they entered into the learning. In this way the children learned through self-directing, self-reliant and self-disciplining ways (Pepper & Henry, 1986).

However, today schools tend to use a 'transmission model' (Cummins, 1986) to teach. Through a hierarchial structure, the transmission model permeates the teaching profession in the delivery of curriculum moving from one

level to the next: from the government (ministry), to the school district administration, from the district administration to the school administration, from the school administration to the teacher and finally from the teacher to the students. Authoritative others direct and impart knowledge and skills to those on the rung below them. Teachers use the transmission model to be authorities within their classrooms; to direct and discipline and to impart knowledge and skills to children. This teaching model promotes and sustains the hierarchical structure within a Eurocentric society and disempowers the students.

At school, children are usually expected to move at a similar pace, and readiness to learn is often only a consideration at the kindergarten level, if then. After this, many children just 'get left behind.' The students' role is one of being outside of the learning. These teaching and learning roles, institutionalized in schools, are very different from the teaching and learning roles within many Native communities.

Lyle's story also speaks of the way in which a "relevant curriculum may improve the outlook of the community as well as that of the school" (Gilliland, 1987, p. 9). Lyle had disengaged in consuming alcohol and engaged in work with the children. It was apparent that the childrens' presence and engagement in cultural learning, provided Lyle with a different sense of involvement and

participation with the students and their education.

An-Other Sideshow

As I approached Terry and Theo in the hallway, I greeted them with, "Hi! I missed you two at the performance yesterday."

A passive sounding "Yeahhhh" trailed them down the hallway.

It was the distance in Terry's voice that caused me to turn and inquire, "Are you feeling okay?" Terry stopped and repeated, "Yeahhhh."

"You missed a fine performance. The drummers and dancers were excellent," I pursued.

Terry offered, "Mrs. Pearson, we decided not to come to school yesterday because it's kind of like a sideshow. You kind of get tired of it after awhile."

Particular to the understanding of a Native education is to attend to the interpretation of Native education as more than a "token recognition in the form of crafts and songs and stories" (Wyatt, 1978-79, p. 18), more than a disconnected 'sideshow' with the curriculum. Some schools have tried to provide Native language electives and/or Native studies electives. For many First Nations' children these represent another provision of a separate, 'reserved' course. Teaching about cultures through a 'tourist approach' gives children the shallow message that the Western-European culture is the dominant and normal one, and that other cultures are secondary. "A child's culture must be integrated into every part of the classroom... educators must develop curricula [sic] that create an opportunity to learn other cultures" (Teacher, 1994, p. 14). Changes to

the education of Native children often tend to be peripheral to the Eurocentric curriculum and program. How do we get past the 'tourist' and 'sideshow' approach to including other cultures? How do we design programs to include other cultures in a meaningful way?

At issue here are the notions of a) including the Native culture into the dominant culture curriculum, or b) including the dominant culture into the Native culture curriculum, or c) including both cultures within the curriculum in a way of mutual inclusion. The first two notions represent subtle contrasting differences in the way most educators think about cultures existing in classrooms. If we cannot find ways for cultures to be together in classrooms as suggested by the third notion, then one curriculum and program will always maintain a place of dominance in relation to the other.

With Reservation

It was October of 1991, and I still felt fairly new to my school surroundings and to my position as special education teacher and Native education coordinator. Much to my delight, our school was trying to practice total integration with children and subject matter in most of the classrooms. On this particular day, I was in the regular grade six classroom.

It was a Monday morning and much like any other day of the school week, Robert slouched invisibly at his desk. His lowered head and his blank eyes appeared motionless in their usual manner. His pencil scratched letters against his page.

The teacher repeated, "Does anyone else have a 't-i-o-n' word? We only need five more 't-i-o-n' words to complete our spelling list for this week."

I moved silently and slowly up the aisle until I

stood beside Robert. I gazed down to his page where he had scratched the letters 'r-e-s-e-r-v-a-t-i-o-n.' I nudged him and whispered, "Good word. Raise your hand." He hesitated, but then slowly he slipped his hand into the air as the teacher repeated, "Does anyone have another 't-i-o-n' word? We still need three more words."

Robert remained with his eyes and his head lowered, but his hand was up.

"Thank you Craig. Another one?" The teacher's eyes canvased the room.

I think I saw Robert's hand slip downward ever so slightly, but it was still in plain view for all to see.

"Come on Vivian. You've certainly got a word. Imagination! Excellent! Alright, one more word."

"Conservation - Thank you Hazel. Now, if you'll take out your..."

Robert's hand sunk to his desktop.

At that moment, my mind whirred, trying to understand what had just happened. I searched for a voice to release the silent scream that was caught in my throat, but I found no words. I gently squeezed Robert's shoulder for his support and mine and the silence was swallowed by the din of the recess bell.

During the next two days I remained consumed by thoughts of that spelling lesson. Dumbfounded, I searched for a way to broach this topic with the classroom teacher. How could she see and attend to the Native students in her class who were, by the way, also the special education students?

I approached her two days later with my version of what had happened in that spelling class and she honestly appeared to have no recollection of Robert's hand being in the air. She expressed that "often these children don't really like to be called upon... and if they have the wrong answer it can be quite embarrassing." She also assured me that as a "concerned teacher," it was in their best interests that she would just work quietly with them when the others got to their work. I pleaded with her to give the children a chance to be wrong or right - at least when I was present. Reluctantly, she agreed.

In the following months, whenever I walked into her class it became a signal for her to attend to the Native children, the special education children.

Hesitantly at first, she began to call on the children and often a raised eyebrow and a small smile would show her surprise. Robert began to sit with his head up and his eyes up and every once in a while he put his hand up too.

One day the classroom teacher came to me and

acknowledged, "these children seem to be catching on."

Included in this story are the lessons that teach of the effects of teacher expectations and teacher attitudes on the learning of First Nations' children. Briscoe (1991) cited that "educators have tended to have lower expectations of success for diverse populations than for mainstream populations, and the educational programs offered these learners have often been less than rigorous" (p. 14). The success of many children whose cultural background differs from that of the dominant culture is influenced by teacher expectations and attitudes, as is their placement into special education programs (Briscoe, 1991; Fradd, 1991; Grossman, 1991; Harrison, 1981).

Another notion that this story addresses is the stereotypes that are generalized to Native children. The teacher in this story interpreted the lowered eyes and lowered head and passive learning stance of the Native child as a 'cultural thing.' However, upon learning of this culture and its dynamic nature, she discovered that the lowered body posture was not the "Native way." Robert was not becoming White when he started to participate and he was not betraying a Native stature amongst his community. He was still Native.

A Rainbow of Learning

It was the third week of school and I was about to work with my first group of special education students

in the grade five class. I had been in the classroom during the past two weeks to become familiar with the program, the students and the teacher. I knew most of the students by name now and the routines of the class were also familiar.

As planned, I quietly went to the round table at the back of the room and waited for the students who I would be working with that day. One by one the teacher called out the names of the special education students, and one by one, four Native boys and one non-Native girl joined me at the table.

In special education, educators are to attend to the diverse spectrum of learning abilities of children. This spectrum of learning abilities is often represented by the gifted/talented children on one end and the children with varying degrees of handicaps/disabilities on the 'other' end. Another way in which this spectrum can be represented, which is not often seen, is by those of the dominant culture on one end and those of Native cultures on the 'other' end.

What happened in this story was not unique to this classroom, as most of the children I worked with in special education were Native children. It was also not unique to this school as "Native Americans are grossly overrepresented in special education programs for the severely emotionally disturbed, learning disabled and retarded, and they are underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented" (Grossman, 1991, p. 20). Not only do Native children occupy one end of the spectrum more than the other, they also represent a disproportionate number of children on that one end of the spectrum (Briscoe, 1991; Maheady, Mallette & Harper, 1991; Reilly, 1991).

Another concern is that Native children in special education programs do not experience the same success as their non-Native peers (Brady, 1991; Briscoe, 1991; Gilliland, 1987). "The average Native student fails about half of all school courses" (Winzer, Rogow & David, 1987, p. 536) and "when minority students are placed in special classes, they are indelibly branded and rarely transferred" (p. 546).

What's the Difference?

Marianne was the Liaison Worker hired by the Willow River Band to work with the schools where children from the Band attended. She was youthful and quiet spoken. With her presence, she conveyed a special regard for the children and their education. We would meet at least once a month and it was during one of those meetings that she asked about books that could be purchased so that the Native children in special education could practice their reading at home. I noted that the books I would recommend would be a general collection of high interest/low vocabulary books, also recognizing that books with Native content were hard to find.

The next part of the conversation became obscured for me when Marianne said, "We want to help the children catch up and work at their grade level." My mind thought this would be great for Kevin and Mark, but what about Gary and Calvin? So I asked Marianne; "What about children who are learners who take longer to learn or those learners who may never catch up?" Marianne seemed surprised by this comment and we sat for a while longer discussing the concept of learning differences. When she left that day, I had given her some books and a video on learning differences.

This story illustrates the dilemma in recognizing whether a child is experiencing difficulty through a learning difference or a cultural difference. I thought

Marianne's expectation of the children to 'catch up and work at grade level' was appropriate for many of the Native students whom I worked with in special education. However, there were students who I felt had difficulties that were possibly related to learning differences. If a child has a learning difference, then that learning difference will be present with the child at home or at school. When the child experiences these difficulties only at school, then educators need to look at their perceptions and understanding of learning and cultural differences.

The dominant culture's attitude towards learning differences is perpetuated and accented in the notion of finding and labelling these differences as 'disorders' or 'disabilities.' These characterizations and labels imply that differences in general are disorders or disabilities, and unwittingly suggest that cultural differences are cultural disorders or cultural disabilities.

Many Native children with perceived learning differences have been misplaced in special education programs. Consider the outrageous tale that Gilliland (1987) tells of a principal who requested that ninety-eight per cent of the students in his reservation school be classified as mentally handicapped. Recent litigation has brought the question of special education placement of culturally diverse children into the foreground of the classroom picture (Platt, Cranston-Gingras & Scott, 1991).

However, once learning differences are dismissed, the Native children have no assurance that something will be done to meet their 'special' cultural needs.

An 'appropriate' education is a foundation of special education curricula and program designs. These designs usually attend to children who experience learning differences, behavior differences, gifted and talented differences, and physical differences. However, if a child's difference is a cultural one, cultural teaching and learning are not usually part of the 'special' education for Native children. Winzer, Rogow and David (1987) acknowledged that "special educators have been slow to develop awareness of the role of cultural differences" (p. 549). As special educators, we have tended to keep cultural education separate from special education or we have not tended to it at all.

If a child has learning and cultural differences then teachers need to attend to both in an integrated way. How do special education teachers and regular classroom teachers include "students' language and cultural differences as well as their academic and social learning needs" (Fradd, 1991, p. 39) in the design of their programs?

Missed-Behaving

It was the middle of the school term and Vance would be arriving any day now. A letter from his previous school preceded his arrival, letting us know he would need special services as he had 'severe behavior

problems.' He was termed 'aggressive' and 'abusive,' and his old school could no longer manage him.

His teacher-to-be was hesitant about taking him and insistent that she would need extra help. We agreed to give all the help we could spare from other children in need of assistance, but knew we wouldn't have much redirected time. We awaited Vance's arrival.

Vance appeared quietly. He had a tall, handsome stature. He had great difficulty with reading and writing. We designed a program at a level at which he could succeed and he was able to work alongside his classmates. He became a leader at Native cultural events (like the time we took fourteen grade six and seven students up to the Lahal games). He knew his Native language and had no difficulties participating in the Native language classes.

We waited for his 'aggressive' behavior, his misbehaving.... As we waited, he appeared happy and friendly. One day we just stopped waiting.

Children are socialized within a cultural context.

Schools tend to be places where social behaviors and expectations are defined by one cultural context and that is the cultural context of the dominant culture. "Certain behaviors that might be considered normal in a minority subculture may be viewed as aberrant when contrasted with the White middle class" (Reilly, 1991, p. 50). When those behaviors and expectations are viewed as aberrant at school, the Native children in this situation are often perceived and misclassified as behaviorally different and then referred to special education programs (Correa & Tulbert, 1991; Grossman, 1991). Special education programs however, reemphasize the behavioral norms and the cultural context of the dominant culture. Thus if Native children are placed in special education programs for behavior differences, these

behaviors do not usually disappear because they remain incongruent with the dominant cultural context found within the special education program.

In An-Other's Interests

I quietly moved about the room, assisting where needed. When I moved my chair beside Trevor, I quietly asked him to tell me what he was working on. He was trying to read from a textbook; a page on the 'Government of Canada.' Together we tackled the page. He read in a halting and laborious manner. At the end of each paragraph, I would quiz; "Now, who is the leader of the country?... What do they call the people who are the leaders of the provinces?" Trevor would search the page, focusing on the telltale boldface words and then he would guess the answer by pointing at a word.

I pondered what to do, and how to teach Trevor to read; to comprehend. I wondered; "What is special about his special education?"

That very afternoon, I returned to Trevor's classroom (now in my Native education coordinator's role). To coincide with the unit on government, we arranged for two guests from the 'Chief and Council' to visit the class. Josie and Peter were from the Willow Creek Band to which most of the First Nations' students belonged. They engaged the children in a discussion about the Native system of government and shared diagrams and a few notes. At the end they asked; "Who is the leader of the Assembly of First Nations?... Who are the leaders of our Band?... What are the responsibilities of the Chief and Council?"

Trevor copied the diagrams and notes and he knew all the answers to their questions.

I pondered, "How was Trevor able to comprehend?" I wondered; "What is special about his Native education?"

This story speaks of the relevancy and meaningfulness of the program offered to Native children. Price (1992) suggested that if we speak of meaningful and relevant curriculum, we need to attend to the right to have one's culture reflected in that curriculum. Brady's (1991) study

of schools in northern Ontario documented one of the fundamental problems inherent in the education of Native children; the irrelevance of the curriculum. Price's and Brady's concerns regarding the importance of including culturally relevant curriculum are repeated throughout the literature (Briscoe, 1991; Fradd, 1991; Gilliland, 1987; Gleason, 1991; Green, 1990; Platt, Cranston-Gingras & Scott, 1991). However, actual inclusion of Native cultures in school curricula is still limited.

Kohn (1993) suggested that "much of what is disturbing about students' attitudes and behavior may be a function of the fact that they have little to say about what happens to them all day. They are compelled to follow someone else's rules, study someone else's curriculum, and submit continually to someone else's evaluation" (p. 10). Within the context of the school, the 'someone else' whom Kohn speaks of is representative of the Euro'centric' authority. As we move from this 'centre,' we also move further from the relevancy of the rules, the curriculum and evaluation. Kohn also suggested that the further removed students are from what happens at school, the greater their sense of "powerlessness" (p. 10).

When a child's difference is a learning difference, the assumption is that a relevant education is one which attends to the child's learning difference. When a child's difference is a cultural difference, it is reasonable to

assume that a relevant education is one which attends to culture. However, regular and special educators have attended to learning differences at the exclusion of cultural differences. How do we create a relevant and meaningful education for First Nations' children in a respectful and accepting way, and include learning and cultural differences that the children bring with them to school every day?

Al-Ways Present

I remember the social studies lessons of the early 1980s when I stood in front of the class and taught the children how Canada was no longer a bicultural country, it was now a multicultural country!³

Today, I see how those lessons were part of the text and oral discourse of education that have denied the existence of First Nations' people: 'bicultural' referred to the French and English cultures; 'multicultural' referred to people who had immigrated to Canada.

Associated with these lessons was the teaching of the *melting pot*. In this concept, Canadians were all placed in the same pot, Canada, with the expectations that in time, a homogeneous culture - one based upon Western-European

3. This story was an earlier experience, but it was remembered through its relationship to the other stories presented in this review.

notions, would be formed. McLaren (1988) referred to the melting pot as a "brewing racist cauldron" (p. 54) which suppressed cultural diversity and professed assimilation. Today, when one reads within educational documents, "two events in the twentieth century [the influx of immigrants after World War II and the emergence of a federal multicultural policy in the late 1960s] have been instrumental in transforming British Columbia into the truly multicultural province it is today" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 10) one can still hear the denial of the predominant multicultural nature of the Native people. The British Columbia Ministry of Education's notion of "transforming... into the truly multicultural province" denies the all-ways present Native cultures.

I ask myself: "Why is it that we now begin to recognize diversity?" Perhaps it is the powerful cultural infusion associated with the increased mobility of populations, and/or the reorganization and liberalization of immigration laws (Winzer, Rogow & David, 1987), and/or the development of national multicultural policies (Teacher, 1994). As children from many different countries enter our classrooms, murmurs within society draw attention to the educational experiences of children with cultural differences. "This new focus on cultural plurality has helped shape educational policies that not only tolerate, but actively encourage cultural differences" (Winzer, Rogow

& David, 1987, p. 529). This new multiculturalism may also be inadvertently opening the doors for attention to First Nations' cultures and their contribution of "rich cultural and language traditions to the school and classroom environment" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990b, p. 28).

The multicultural diversity within classrooms mirrors the diversity within society. We might find multicultural programs accented in schools where children of different cultural backgrounds come together. The purpose of a multicultural program is to teach children to appreciate cultural diversity and to relate with children of different cultures. The intent "is to demonstrate that cultural differences are a positive thing, and that they should be recognized and respected" (Price, 1992, p. 10). By exploring cultural diversity within classrooms, we become more open to the possibilities of learning to value differences and to the possibilities of recognizing the inherent worthiness of all cultures.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) suggested that "within the institutions of western education we are trained as spectators or commentators, to absorb experience, not to act on it" (p. 25). It appears to me that in educational discourse, 'diversity' is often a word to be spoken by spectators or commentators who are unable to find meaning through action. When there is a sense of the difficulty of

the action, our discourse repeats like a broken record. Discourse becomes an evasive means of acting upon what we are discoursing about. Candace Jane Dorsey (University of Lethbridge Seminar, March 25, 1994) stated: "We can change the rhetoric, but it's the same underneath." It is like a mass procrastination, with discourse being the tool of procrastination. The hope may be, if diversity is talked about long enough maybe it will go away or be forgotten or the pendulum will swing back and we will not have to deal with it. Through inaction, existing curriculum is maintained and sustained and along with it, the "one right way" ideology.

McAndrew (cited in *Teacher*, 1994) recently addressed several hundred people gathered at the Fifth National Conference of the Canadian Council for Multicultural and Intercultural Education (CCMIE) and shed a light upon the concept of "interculturalism" (p. 12). She shared that "interculturalism replaces an anthropological definition of culture with an ethical one" (p. 13). In interculturalism, diverse cultures relate to each other with mutual respect and integrity rather than in dominance. I view culture as a way of being that is evolving and yet it is a way of being that is historically grounded. I think it is the historical grounding which creates 'diversity' in cultures and influences the evolution of cultures. It appears to be within interculturalism that culturally diverse 'beings'

relate to each other with mutual respect and integrity rather than in dominance. The curriculum question of "What is important to teach?" inherently encompasses the question, "Who is important to teach?" It is important to teach all children and to teach them in ways that honor and respect their cultures and ways of learning.

Mixed Beliefs

Toward the end of the first month of school, two young non-Native parents came to my office to speak with me about their concerns regarding the Native education program.

After polite introductions, one of the parents informed me that they belonged to a local church and that just last Sunday, the Native program had been the topic of the minister's sermon. Clueless as to the direction the conversation was heading, I sat and listened as the two of them explained that the Native language is a very spiritual language and that Native words do not just have a literal meaning but they have a deeply rooted spiritual meaning. To me, this sounded complementary. They continued, "Many of the Native traditions were also of a spiritual nature." This still sounded complementary. But then as they continued to speak, the uncomplimentary nature of their purpose surfaced; "They practice pagan and heathen ways... they worship the spirits of animals... they don't worship the true God... their medicine people are like witches... children shouldn't be exposed to this in our schools." I was taken aback and I floundered with some rhetorical comeback; "for language to have spiritual meaning it would have to be connected to the spiritual being of the child... certainly some ceremonies could be likened to such 'Christian' celebrations as Easter or communion... there is the traditional belief in the Creator." I felt illiterate in this moment of circumstance and disbelief.

All did not fathom well. At the end of the meeting I resolved to welcome them back to school for an opportunity to experience a Native language class or participate in any part of the Native program so they could learn that the Native program was not a threat to their religious convictions. Assuring me that they brought their own children up as 'good Christians' with

a belief in God, the two parents left with a loud vow to "remove the Native education program from this school!"

(Within a week, the two parents withdrew their children from the Native language program; one parent did so by physically dragging her grade one child from the room as he screamed in resistance; he did not want to leave. Initially, both parents insisted that their children be excluded from all Native 'cultural' learning. However, over time, one of these parents allowed her children to take part in the cultural learning, but still not in the language program. It was on the condition that she was informed of what was happening and when it was happening so that she could attend with her child. I always felt that it was the children who influenced her to change.)

This story took place in 1990 and yet its theme is reminiscent of residential schools where the Native language and cultural traditions of the Native people were suppressed. Here it was, 1990, in a public school, and the Christian ideology had resurfaced as the dominant and 'right' ideology and the Native language and traditions were reframed as 'pagan and heathen.' In a sense the Native education program at Clayton Elementary School challenged this "one right way" ideology through the presentation and action of another curriculum. It was a presentation of another way and this was unsettling to the members of this community church.

During that particular meeting with the two parents, I tried to present the Native education program as an opportunity for all the children to learn about each other. While speaking of the need to recognize global interdependence, Vonnegut (cited in Baker, 1989) felt that:

a first grader should understand that his or her

culture isn't a rational invention; that there are thousands of other cultures and they all work pretty well; that all cultures function on faith rather than truth; that there are lots of alternatives to our own society (p. 299).

My argument with the two parents included, if we can extend our understanding to one more culture, we help to prepare children and ourselves for the multicultural and global world in which we will encounter people from many cultures.

Her-Story

When Angela was a child, she went to a residential school for her education. She doesn't talk much about her experiences in that school and I don't ask many questions.

Today Angela is the mother of four grown daughters and the grandmother of many grandchildren (twenty-three at last count). I have asked her to meet with me regarding one of her grandchildren.

"Jackson has already missed the equivalent of one year of school in his five years of schooling." I show her the sheet on which each grade and the number of days missed is recorded. The grand total of 197.5 days in five years (including kindergarten) sums it up at the bottom of the right hand column.

At first Angela sits for what seems like a long time. As I have met with Angela before I know to sit and wait patiently. Sometimes I think I can see her working the words in her mind as she prepares to speak.

"I did not get up in the morning to send my kids to school. They would say they wanted to stay home and I let them stay home. They didn't finish high school. They moved back to the reserve and got married." She speaks about the second oldest of her daughters as being smart and she could have finished high school. She adds, "Maybe she will go back to high school if they have a program for adults next year."

She, too, doesn't know what to do about Jackson's absenteeism.

In 1989, I wrote a paper entitled "The Impact of the Church and Residential School on Native American Education."

The efforts of the church had been to 'save' the Native children from the 'pagan and heathen' ways of their culture and to instill in them the 'right' Christian way to be. The church was given the mandate to "acculturate the Native people to the Christian religion" (Green, 1990, p. 36). To achieve their goals, children were taken from their homes and communities, and placed in residential schools.

The residential school was the predominant place of schooling for Native people until as late as the 1970s. Within its curricula and program walls, the dominant society dominated and the ideals of the White European were taught as the 'right ones.' It was in the residential school setting that Native children were expected to leave their culture, language, families, friends, and communities; it was there that they were expected to leave their Native identity.

Angela and her daughters are representative of the children of the residential system of education. They are the parents and grandparents of the Native children within today's classrooms. They have lived the history of residential schooling and from this repressive experience, they have become cautious and hesitant, particularly in relation to schools. The presence of today's schools are disheartening recollections of a history which influences the involvement of Native elders and parents in the education of their children and grandchildren.

When Angela was relating her experiences as a parent, she was offering me insight into her grandson's situation. Absenteeism was what happened on the surface; if I looked deeper I might see that her experiences with school created an undertow that influenced the ways in which she tended to her daughters, and her daughters now felt the pull of this same undertow.

In the story of Angela, I am also reminded of how I learned to be patient and wait for her to speak. Usually what she had to say was never a quick or direct response. She would relate a story or an experience that would show me and teach me.

Sima7:⁴ Home and School Relationships

Again I spoke with the Native Liaison Worker about having someone from the Native community come into the grade 1/2 class to teach about salmon and fishing. Again she suggested I contact Judy.

Over the next few weeks I contacted Judy four times and asked her to consider coming to the class, reminding her that three of her grandchildren were in this class.

Amid muffled staffroom and hallway whispers, "if they really cared... they'd help out... never help with homework... never bother with parent teacher interviews... take an interest," I stopped asking Judy to come to school and the class finished their unit on salmon and fishing.

Two weeks later Judy phoned to let me know that she would be in town tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. I welcomed her to come and as soon as I hung up the phone, I ran down the hall to tell the classroom teacher. "No problem, one o'clock would be fine," the classroom teacher reassured me.

4. Sima7 is a Shuswap word meaning *come together*.

I met Judy just before class the next day. She was an elderly woman and very soft spoken. I had to listen carefully and watch her lips to hear her words.

We went into the classroom and the teacher had the children gather around her. In the quietest voice, Judy told the children about when she was a little girl. She got to go fishing at the Fraser River with her mom and dad and other relatives. After making sure that she was safe, she would dip her net into the swell and wait patiently as the water swirled. At the tug of her net, she would quickly scoop up her net and.... At the end of a long day, they would take the fish home for cooking, drying, canning and eating.

When she finished her story, the children asked her questions and told their stories, "What was the biggest fish you ever caught?... I love fish... I have fish in my aquarium... I love salmon too..."

As Judy and I walked down the hall, I thanked her for coming and sharing with the children. She replied, "I have not been in a school since the Mission school." After a few steps of silence she smiled and said, "I will bring the class some salmon next week and I'll show them how to cut it for drying and then we can cook it." She laughingly added, "And then I'll show them how to eat it."

Educators recognize the need for parents to be involved with the education of their children (Briscoe, 1991; Cummins, 1986; Fradd, 1991). What they may not recognize is that for some First Nations' parents and elders, attending school with their children and grandchildren is a brave and courageous reopening of a wound which is crusted with deep scars; "scars developed over generations cannot be healed in a short time" (Klassen, 1993a, p. 17). When your experience with education has been one of alienation and disintegration, then how do you come to participate in it with your children and grandchildren? I sensed the need for continued efforts to invite Native people into the classroom and continued efforts to ensure that they felt welcome in a

way that recognized and respected the culture they bring with them.

Connecting the Past

In this review, the formal literature accompanied personal stories as a way of illuminating further interpretations of them. In living the stories, I often felt there was something missing in the design of the special education program for First Nations' children; something - 'special.' I was often left with the questions: "What is special about special education?" - "What is a 'special' education for First Nations' children?" I came to these questions through my past experiences and stories, and I continued to explore these questions through an interpretive inquiry engaging the stories of eight First Nations' children.

CHAPTER 3
METHODICALLY SPEAKING

This inquiry was an interpretive exploration into the experiences of First Nations' children who were receiving special education services and who had a history of receiving special education services. Through this exploration, I endeavored to research the question, "What is a 'special' education for First Nations' children?"

Method

Kirby and McKenna (1989) described 'marginalized people' as those who live in the margins, away from the centre. The centre is where one finds those who are representative of the dominant Eurocentric culture. In the Eurocentric culture, all children live in the margins and as we extend further away from the centre we find the children with learning and behavior differences. Extending even further, we find Native children with learning and behavior differences. These were the children with whom I engaged in this research.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) also advised that to learn from a group of people living in the margins, the

methodology employed in the research project needs to be congruent with the people and their culture. Thus the nature of this study took me from the centre and I searched for a congruency of research methodology with the research question and the research participants.⁵ As I moved toward the margins, I moved toward qualitative research.⁶

Throughout the graduate program, I had asked other students who had completed thesis or project work, "What did you learn from your work?" and usually I heard something along the lines of "I learned what I already knew." In this research I hoped to learn something new (phenomena). Barritt (1981) suggested that "phenomenology means the study of phenomena, or [lived] experiences" (p. 125) to reveal themselves anew.

I found that I was "advocating a descriptive phenomenological approach... quite simply, for relevance and meaning in educational research" (Barritt, 1981, p. 133). Phenomenology is a way of research that seeks to find

5. The researcher was also considered a participant in this research. The possibility of each participant having a voice was important and I anticipated the opportunity to recognize and value the contributions of each participant.

6. In contrast, quantitative research is the research methodology of the dominant culture; of the centre. It relies on a 'significant' majority, usually defined by formulas which have been formed by an elite few; authorities of the dominant Eurocentric culture. It has specific formulas that transform people and their experiences into numbers. For me, there was also an incongruence in the nature of the research and the use of a quantitative research methodology in which the notion of 'majority' dominates.

meaning and understanding in the lived experiences of the research participants. The nature of the understanding is to "understand not better but differently" (Palmer, 1969, p. 233) through the interpretation of the participants' text (data). In this research the text was created from the experiences of eight First Nations' children. Their texts were contextualized by the researcher as a way of finding a deeper understanding of their experiences as First Nations' children who were receiving special education services and who had a history of receiving special education services. "The phenomenological view is difficult to summarize, but in general it proposes that ordinary everyday experience is the fundamental component of all knowing" (Barritt, 1981, p. 125). Phenomenological research represents an exploration of phenomena as they present themselves to our consciousness.

A phenomenological approach offered; the possibility of a deeper understanding of another, an accompanying deeper understanding of self and the possibility of understanding through language (Smith, 1991) [and I would suggest, inherently through culture] the experiences of the research participants. Doors could be opened which challenged some of the basic assumptions of the dominant culture and a phenomenological approach provided the possibility of "revealing structures of domination that link our lives with the other" (Barnes, 1992, p. 155).

The Four Worlds Development Project (1985) proposed that a phenomenological approach supported finding an understanding of the lived world of Native children. Through interpretation a "hermeneutic imagination has the capacity to reach across national and cultural boundaries to enable dialogue between people and traditions superficially at odds.... mediating meaning in the midst of cultural difference" (Smith, 1991, p. 195). Schleirmacher (cited in Smith, 1991) described understanding and interpretation as creative acts. Through the re-creation of the experiences of the Native students there was the possibility of informing and re-creating pedagogical praxis.

Setting

I carried out this research with Native children from within the public school system in an urban setting in southern Alberta. In every school within this public school system, Native children were registered, and in every school there was at least one Native student receiving a modified program or a special education program.

The school district had a system of categories in special education and this study concerned itself with the experiences of Native children who fell into the categories of learning differences (disabilities) or behavior differences (disorders). The school district presented their categories numerically, anticipating that this would

be a way of reducing the labels that were attached to children. Categories and numbers were applied mainly for funding purposes, and the direct application of the label to the child was avoided. The school district also had a Native Education Project and one of its primary concerns was the development of a Blackfoot language program.

Initially, I contemplated doing this research with children who were part of the schools from nearby reserves. However, my previous experiences with Native education - the ones that connected me to this inquiry - were situated within a public school system, and my interpretations were grounded in that context. The public school system was also the system which I would most likely teach in the future and where I would most likely use the understandings attained in the course of this inquiry. The public school system was also where the majority of Native students were still educated, and where the need for understanding remained great. It was also my hope that those who read this inquiry would not interpret what was learned as "only applying to the reserve schools."

Participants

After an initial meeting with the Director of Special Services, I approached the principals of two elementary schools she had recommended. These two principals put me on

the track of two other elementary schools, and eventually the track also led to one junior high school and one junior-senior high school.

With the research proposal as my outline, I explained to each principal the nature of my inquiry, described the desired participants and the way in which I anticipated carrying out the research. The principals went through class lists, noting the names of Native students who were receiving special education services or who had a history of receiving special education services. These students subsequently received consent forms to take part in the inquiry. The forms were to be signed by a parent or guardian giving permission for the student to take part in the inquiry. I received eight consent forms back from four schools. The students who agreed to participate in this inquiry were Colleen, Gloria, Evelyn, Theresa, Jamie, Selena, Rose and Jeremy (see Table 1). These First Nations' students were from the upper elementary or junior high grades. I purposely invited students from these 'upper' grades as they had a history of special education services to bring to this inquiry.

Pseudonyms were used in any reference to; a) the participants, b) friends and family members, c) teachers, and d) schools.

Table 1

Participants

<u>Pseudonyms</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Number of Interviews</u>
Colleen	16	9	Kentwood	2
Gloria	15	9	Kentwood	3
Evelyn	15	9	Kentwood	3
Theresa	13	8	Thickwood	6
Rose	12	6	Arrowwoods	7
Jeremy	12	6	Arrowwoods	7
Jamie	12	5	Grassyview	2
Selena	11	4	Grassyview	5

I initially invited First Nations' children who received special education services or who had a history of special education services to this inquiry. Through the inquiry, I learned that all these participants had a history of receiving special education services and that all of them were receiving special services at the time of the study, either in the form of a modified in-class program, special class pull-out services, tutoring or remedial classes, or a special school setting for students who were having difficulties in their neighborhood schools.

Procedures

Throughout the inquiry, I attended to the question of how to enter into the lives of Native children with respect

and thoughtfulness. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested that the research methods be "embedded in cultural and historic contexts" (p. 8). I recognized that respecting the cultural and historic contexts of the research participants was vital to the quality of this research and as a non-Native person, my cultural and historic context also needed to be part of my consciousness in doing this research.

Initial organizational meetings with the students were held during class time. The agenda of each of those meetings included introductions, the purpose of the research and arrangements for the next meeting. I also explained that I would bring a tape recorder to the next meeting as indicated on the consent form. I never audiotaped these initial meetings; instead I kept field notes. (I felt uncomfortable with the presence of the tape recorder at first and my initial shyness was marked by a worry about its intrusiveness in dialogue. During a couple of the final meetings, once again I did not tape and I relied on field notes. In a sense the tape recorder represented a 'formal'ity in an in'formal' context.)

Our organizational meetings were followed by mutually agreed upon meetings at lunch time for the elementary students and during the school day for the junior high students. This arrangement was acceptable to the school administration, teachers, students and to myself. With the elementary students, meeting at lunch time also provided an

opportunity to occasionally move from the school to a nearby park with the permission of a parent or guardian. For most of our final meetings we went to a nearby food facility.

My original intent was to invite Native students from the same school to meet with me as a small group. As it turned out, I met with the students individually or in pairs, depending on attendance and the number of students participating at a certain school.

We began meeting during the last half of April, 1994. Our meetings ranged in length from twenty to sixty minutes. I initially planned to meet with the students on four occasions, however, as Table 1 indicates, I met with some students as many as seven times and with other students as few as two times. For Colleen, Gloria, Evelyn and Jamie, whom I met with on only two or three occasions, absenteeism from school was the greatest influence on opportunities to meet (See Appendix 1; Attendance Records for Colleen, Evelyn and Gloria). I met with Theresa, Rose, Jeremy and Selena on more than four occasions. The decision to continue to meet after the fourth meeting was made by the students. The closing of our meetings was marked by the closing of the school year; the end of June, 1994.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) began their book on qualitative research with their personal stories and their "hope that once you know something about each of [them], you will more fully understand and interpret [their]

perspectives in the text that follows" (p. 1). This spoke to me of the need to attend to the initial finding of 'rapport' with the students.

I began the interviews/sessions with open-ended statements and questions such as those that follow:

Tell me about your day at school... Start from the beginning.

Tell me about the first day of the school year.

Describe your best/worst day at school.

What is your favorite part of the day?

What is your most memorable day at school?

Describe a favorite cultural event that occurred at school.

What changes can you suggest for your school day?

Tell me about your experiences in special education.

I reviewed the audiotape of each meeting prior to the subsequent meeting for the purpose of making notes and questions to bring with me to the next meeting. I was also conscious of letting the students discuss subsequent meeting dates, times, places and topics as a way of including them in organizational decisions and as a way of discussing and choosing whether they wanted to carry on with the research. This consciousness came from a meeting with a Native boy who chose not to enter into the research.

Toward the end of our talk, I again asked Rick if he had decided to take part in the research. After a long

pause and a look which I interpreted as discomfort, he repeated, "Maybe."

I said to him that if he wanted to take part in the research or if he didn't want to take part, I would understand. I added, "It would be helpful to me if you only take part, if you really want to take part."

We were quiet. Then Rick repeated, "Maybe."

I asked him if he could tell me why it was difficult for him to make up his mind. He hesitated in thought and said, "Well if I say no I might offend that person or I might hurt their feelings."

"I am honored that you care about how I might feel, and I care about how you might feel. I will not be hurt if you say no."

Quietly he said, "I don't do this sort of thing."

This is a very special person who cares about the feelings of others. For one to care so much about another's feelings, and come to this honesty, I did not feel hurt.

I initially carried along pictures, poetry, some photographs and some writing as possible ways of inviting the students to share their stories. The relevancy of these things did not surface and they were not used.

I suggested to the students that if writing, drawing and/or doodling was something they would like to do as we met, then they were welcome to do so. However, during the research meetings they did not choose these options and we usually sat together, talked, listened, and shared a lunch.

I invited the students to share their stories as First Nations' children with learning and/or behavior differences; to "allow the students to speak from their own histories, collective memories, and voices" (Giroux, 1988, p. 175). I was also encouraged by Zabel (1991) who emphasized that one of the richest uses of stories is "enhanced cultural

awareness, the glimpse into another peoples' world view" (p. 33).

'Sensing' as a Way of Data Analysis

I initially felt as if I were swimming in mire and mud as I looked, listened, read and felt for the themes, the threads, and the patterns of the participants' data. I reviewed the field notes and journal entries, and the audiotapes and the transcripts simultaneously. I questioned over and over: "What am I supposed to learn from this? What am I learning about the experiences of First Nations' children who receive special education services and who have a history of receiving special education services?" I looked for comfort in the guiding words of Glesne and Peshkin (1992): "categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data you have collected" (p. 127).

I began writing the stories from the experiences of the research and my interpretations or 'sense' of those stories. Again I found meaning in the words of Glesne and Peshkin (1992): "writing gives form to the researcher's clumps of carefully categorized and organized data" (p. 151). As I interpreted the tapes, field notes and journal entries, I became aware that the very selection of *what I interpreted* was an interpretation. "What we tell and how we tell it is a revelation of what we believe" (Carter, 1993, p. 9). I

became aware that my interpretations of these texts were embedded in my experiences, my non-Native culture and the way in which I view the world.⁷

The interpretations provide possible ways of making sense of the experiences of the Native students. Understanding another way was through one's own way; through one's own experience. To see another's culture was a way of beginning to take notice and see my own culture. As the stories unfolded, I was often reminded of past experiences, many of which I reviewed in the previous chapter. Gradually, the patterns of 'absence and presence' began to emerge from the students' stories. Later the pattern of difference became part of this weave as the formal literature, the students' stories and my stories were untangled and woven together to create a 'different' picture of a 'special' education for First Nations' children.

7. Palmer (1969) referred to this as the "horizon of the interpreter" (p. 207).

CHAPTER 4
ABSENCE, PRESENCE, AND DIFFERENCE

What Does it Mean to be Absent?

When I began this inquiry, one of the first questions to puzzle me was: "Where are the Native children?" This question returned to me throughout this inquiry and I began to hear the Native childrens' stories as stories of absence, and I came to the questions of "What does it mean to be absent?" and "What does it say to the dominant culture when one is absent?"

The word 'absence' is derived from the word *ab-esse*; 'ab' meaning away and 'esse' meaning *be*; absence meaning "a being away" (Onions, Friedrichsen, & Burchfield, 1966, p. 5). From the beginning and throughout this inquiry, stories of 'being away' were told.

Opening the Gates

The people and the institutions which give permission to carry out the research are referred to as the 'gatekeepers.' In this research, the parents or guardians were also gatekeepers, as they gave consent for their children to pass through the gates and enter the inquiry. I

had the opportunity to meet with a parent; 'an-other gatekeeper.'

An-Other Gatekeeper

I received a phone call that made my heart feel heavy and a voice inside me surfaced to say, "Oh no, what am I going to do?" The phone call was from a parent who had received a consent form and she wanted to know more about what I was doing. From the consent form, she felt that to have only Native children was discriminatory; "Why do you only want to study Native children like they're the only ones with problems?" She said she has seen the research with Native people and was disturbed by the ways in which that research portrayed them.

As her words rumbled through my head, I explained my intent was in no way to be discriminatory toward First Nations' children and that if she had read that in my consent form, then I needed to know this and that I needed to address the words that made her think this way.

She said that she was very cautious and that she had experienced discrimination in her life. She did not want to let her child be part of something that would hurt.

I said that I too did not want to hurt her child. I also noted that I wrote a proposal that tells more about what I am doing and that I would appreciate if she would read it and watch for discrimination. Again, I said that I needed to know if my research was discriminatory and that I appreciated her comments and "suspicions" as a way to keep me mindful. She agreed to meet me at the school at 1:00 p.m. the next day and I would give her a copy of my proposal.

We met just inside the school office. I introduced myself and she stood and returned an introduction. I thanked her for offering to look at my proposal and I said, "If there is discrimination or words of prejudice here, I need to know." We agreed to meet again the following Monday.

We met at the office of the school and then went to the library where there was a quiet space. She carried the papers. I noticed how worn they looked.

We sat side by side and she placed the papers on the table between us. She said that she had read it and written comments of her thoughts on the pages. I suggested we turn the pages and go through the comments together.

The first comment was about working with only Native students and she explained that she made the

comments as she read and that she found explanations to some of her questions and comments later on.

Her next comment was on curriculum and program design and she asked, "What did I mean?" I shared a story...

I was working with a grade one teacher on a unit about nutrition. Most of the primary grades do a unit on nutrition and for this unit there was a focus on the five food groups (cereals and breads, meat and meat by-products, and... the other ones). I arranged through the Department of Health and Social Development to receive brochures and posters that showed the Native Food Guide with lists of Native foods found under each food group (my story continued)....

When I finished she smiled. Then she told a story about when she was a young girl.

Her mother sent her to school with bannock in her lunch because that was all she had for lunch that day. Other times she would have sandwiches like the other kids....

She said she understood what I meant by curriculum and program design.

When the stories were told and the pages of my proposal were turned, one last page lay on the table. It was the consent form with her signature for her child to take part in the inquiry.

(Appendix 2; Letter of Consent)

Bopp (1989) wrote that "the hardest type of prejudices to recognize are our own prejudices. To us they are not 'prejudices,' they are reality" (p. 45). It was difficult and striking to hear words such as 'prejudice' and 'discrimination.' My panic subsided as we listened to each others' stories and I felt thankful to have someone watch my writing and offer to show my prejudices.

This story also returns me to the notion of authority, as the gatekeepers 'authorize' the research. Hirsch (1976) suggested that "authority is normally derived from socially

accepted institutions" (p. 111) rather than from a relationship of experience and a relationship to the nature of the inquiry. In Hirsch's picture of 'institutional' authority, the hierarchial and dominant structures loom and those who are at the top are the authority. When this Native parent gave consent for her child to take part in this inquiry, I was in the presence of 'an-other authority.' She was 'an-other authority' with a relationship to the inquiry that reflected the authority of lived experience. When I was asked, "What is my authority to do this work?" I answered, "My authority comes from my lived experiences and the limits of these experiences."

The Absence of Native Children

Where Are the Native Children?

In this study, the Human Subjects Research Committee, the research committee, the school district administration, and the principals were gatekeepers whom I encountered. The pattern of absence began with the gatekeepers.

As I sat across the desk from the principal, I watched his finger scroll the registration lists. "Humm... Well Jeff is a Native student, but he hasn't been here during the past month. Humm... well Darren too." He looked up from the lists and suggested, "I won't bother identifying the students who have poor attendance. I'll just write down the names of those students who attend more frequently." He returned to scan the lists. (I wondered: Where are Jeff and Darren? Where are the Native students?)

Eventually, we had a list of seven students and he called them down to the office to meet me and to receive letters of consent. Three of the seven students were absent, and I met Colleen, Gloria,

Timothy and Carol.

A week and a half later, Colleen and Gloria joined the inquiry as well as Evelyn, one of the absent students. I picked up their consent forms and I arranged a day to come back to meet with the three students. As I left the school, the principal suggested that I call his secretary before coming to school and "she can check the attendance sheets to make sure they are here."

It became fairly routine to call the school around eight-thirty and ask, "Did Colleen, Gloria or Evelyn make it to school today?"

It also became routine to hear the same response, "No, none of them are here." I thought of the mechanized telephone operator, "This is a recording, none of them are here. This is a recording, none of them are here..."

One day, Gloria returned. She had been absent for over a week and I thought that I would not meet with her during classtime on her first day back after such a long absence. I intended to meet with her the next day.

When I called the next morning, I asked, "Did Colleen, Gloria or Evelyn make it to school today?"

"No, none of them are here."

(Appendix 1; Attendance Records for Colleen, Evelyn and Gloria).

Absenteeism was an issue with the education of many of the Native students within my past experiences. If I search further back, I find that in the history of Native schooling "truant officers and legal penalties compelled children to go to school. [Native] parents could be jailed or fined if their children did not attend. In fact, the federal department was given greater powers to enforce attendance among [Native] children than the provinces could exercise over non-[Native] children" (York, 1990, p. 24). I asked, "What are the circumstances of this history and the 'present' school situation that continue this pattern of

absence?"

Freda was the assistant principal at a large junior high school near the downtown area. When I presented my inquiry to Freda, she was very supportive but noted that had I been to Thickwood in September or October, she would have had at least a dozen students for me to give consent forms. Now that it was April she could only think of two students and one of those two students had just returned to school this month.

I asked; "Where are the other ten students?" (I wondered: "Where are the Native students?")

Freda offered possibilities, "Some were transferred to a school where students who aren't successful in the junior high setting go, some probably went back to the reserve and some probably just dropped out."

Freda didn't know where the Native students were.

I asked some of the gatekeepers, "Where are the Native children?" They offered their theories; "It's their home environment - it's their living conditions - it's their age - it's social services responsibility - it's the Native Liaison worker's territory." These gatekeepers did not look to the educational structures or institutions for the difficulties the Native children had with attendance. The accountability and responsibility were placed outside of the systems and institutions which they administer. Without consideration for the possible ways in which educational structures and institutions contribute to the absenteeism of Native children, responsibility for change within the educational system itself is removed.

In Freda's story, an astounding number (more than eighty percent) of the Native students with learning or behavior differences left the school. This is reflective of

the high percentages of Native students throughout Canada who leave schools every year (Abi-Nader, 1992; Gilliland, 1987).

Where Were You?

When I asked the students "Where were you?" the students answered with stories of being present elsewhere.

After about two weeks of daily morning phone calls Evelyn returned to school. She arrived late, but she arrived. I didn't wait for the day to slip by and I asked if it would be alright to get together with her.

We met at about 9:15 a.m. During our conversation, I asked, "Why haven't you been in school?"

Evelyn explained, "Mostly, I was at the reserve for a whole week and then I always have to babysit, because my mom and dad have to go to this workshop and if they don't, they won't be able to get family allowance cheques." She described her week at the reserve as a time of walking around with her cousin and as a time of babysitting her younger cousins.

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I asked Theresa about her attendance and she said, "Sometimes I just missed.... Sometimes if I get up too late my mom just tells me to just stay home or sometimes she tells me to help her.... It's like, somedays I tell my mom 'I don't want to go to school'."

"What does she say?"

"Nothing."

I asked Theresa if she had missed much school. "I don't know how much school I missed. I think I missed a lot last year."

"So if you miss a lot of school, what's 'a lot' of school?"

"Like I'll just miss one or two days out of the week. I don't miss three or four out of the whole week."

The culture in which a child grows influences the way they interact with their environment. Children of different cultures experience different childhoods and yet when they

arrive at school they are educated within the dominant cultural context of 'childhood.' Traditional child-rearing practices within many Native cultures are self-directing, self-disciplining and self-reliant (Pepper & Henry, 1986). In the Eurocentric culture, the dominant view is that children need to be adult-directed, adult-disciplined and adult-reliant. The behavior management and conflict management programs practised in schools are part of this view. Inherent in this view is also the belief that children can be forced to attend school. If a class is missed (skipped), the last place the Western-European child goes, is home. Through punishment or negative reinforcement we make our children go to school when they do not want to go and we keep them there as long as we can. For many children of the Eurocentric culture, it is fear that deters them from missing school. This fear was not present in the Native children with whom I spoke.

Perceptions of 'a lot' were different for Theresa and me and I asked myself, "What are a child's experiences at school that just one or two days out of the week are not perceived to be a lot?" and "What are my experiences that I perceived just one or two days out of the week to be a lot?" Possibly perceptions of a situation are reflective of our experiences in that situation.

When I hear Theresa say that she 'just stayed home' or when I hear that Evelyn was out at the reserve or

babysitting instead of attending school, I ask, "What are the Native parents doing?" Locust (1988) assured educators that Native children are counselled in a positive manner and in a cultural way. She described how some parents counsel their children at home as a way to help them with the negative experiences they have at school. In this way the parents avoid becoming part of the negative situation and they avoid creating an unhealthy situation of disharmony. This avoidance of school is often viewed by the people of the dominant culture as an absence of 'discipline' and a presence of neglect rather than an attention to health and harmony.

Eurocentric perceptions of the child-rearing practices of other cultures are often misinterpreted as 'the parents do not care.' This suggests that the Eurocentric way of child-rearing is the right one and that other ways such as those described by Locust (1988) are unacceptable and not recognized as care. I assumed that care was a basic human ethic and that it would be universally acted out. It leaves me awed to awaken and see how care is socially and culturally constructed.

Selena's cousin came to her room to pick her up. "Like my cousin, she just came into the classroom and she told me 'Selena, let's go. We're in a hurry.' And I go, 'Okay.' And the next thing Mr. Jones, he stopped me. He goes, 'You're not dismissed yet and you can't go out of this classroom without permission.' Darlene, my cousin, goes 'Why?' He goes, 'Because I haven't dismissed her yet.' So he went up to Darlene and she goes, 'Holy, well be like that.' Mr. Jones pushed

her out of the room and shut the door."

To be physically removed by a teacher from a place leaves a deep impression of rejection and absence for that child. When the child comes from a cultural grounding other than the dominant Eurocentric culture, then the depth of this impression may be different and unrealized.

The day that Selena told this story, I returned to the university. I went down the university hallway and popped my head in to say hello to those who had their doors open. (I interpreted an open door as a welcome.) I ended up speaking with a colleague about my interviews from the morning, in terms of what I was and was not finding (which in a sense was finding too). After sharing Selena's story, my colleague said, "Oh Native children don't like to be touched." My mind thought 'Where did that notion come from?' and 'What does that have to do with a child being pushed out of a classroom?' I suggested, "Many of the Native children with whom I worked gave hugs in the morning when they arrived at school and often again at the end of the day. I don't think any child would want to be pushed out of a classroom." I excused myself to do some work. I left. I felt 'pushed out.'

When I left my colleague, I didn't feel that I was being heard. I puzzled over this person's way of seeing this story; his interpretation. We see in ways that come from our experiences. When interpretations of a situation are different, it is difficult to hear. We were not hearing the same story, we do not have the same experiences. I felt I was not being heard and I just left. Is this what the Native students are doing? Just leaving?

What are the experiences of that situation and how is it interpreted by the school and by the child? Children who

are exposed to a different culture may naturally show some emotional and social differences. The behaviors that accompany this experience may be interpreted as behavior differences or as abnormal behaviors. However, we might also consider that these perceived abnormal behaviors may be natural reactions to a "process of acculturation" (Correa & Tulbert, 1991, p. 21). Difficulties due to acculturation and difficulties due to social and emotional differences are difficult to distinguish. The Native student may experience the school as a Eurocentric instrument of domination and may become alienated or disengaged from it. If one is absent from schools, is one absent from its dominance? Possibly absenteeism is the student's way of removing her/himself from the dominance they experience while at school.

Within the research, I looked for circumstances that discontinued patterns of absence and built on patterns of presence.

"Are you pretty good at coming everyday to school, or do you miss school?" I asked Jeremy.

"I used to before," he recollected.

"You used to miss school?" I repeated.

"Yeah. I'd go to the reserve with my mom and I didn't use to have a key. But now I stay in school," he explained.

Toward the end of May, Jeremy and I were talking about where he'd be going to school next year. Last week he wasn't sure if he would be going to Aspen Junior Senior High School or Maple Avenue Junior High.

Today I asked, "You're going to go to Maple Avenue for sure?"

"Yeah. I don't care if I get beat up, as long as I go to a school."

Lessons of the importance of school are repeated within

the history of Native people. Native people gave up much in terms of lifestyle and land to have their children educated based on the promise of acquiring an education as a means of acquiring a 'better' life. This commitment and this promise appeared to be repeated within Jeremy's story. I heard a commitment to attend school. I also heard the hesitation and the difficulties of being present.

The Absence of Native Parents

Within our conversations some of the students told of their parents planning to return to school or already having returned to school.

It was the end of the elementary years for Rose, and I asked, "What happens to you next year?"

She wasn't sure as her mom was thinking of moving out of province.

"Why would you move?" I asked.

"I think my mom wants to go to school out there."

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The Native parent (gatekeeper) with whom I met regarding this inquiry is now attending college. She wrote to me, "I know of some schools where they have academic counsellors who are so willing to give brochures, pamphlets to White students on universities all over the country and the U.S.A., but when a Native asks, 'I'm interested in ... what university would be a good choice?' the counsellor would say 'I don't think you can do it. University is for smart people. You should apply to a local college.' Being ignored during school, then told this when you are one of the few Natives to graduate high school, sure knocks your self esteem down. But I sure am proud of those students who were able to pick themselves up and go for it anyways."

I asked, "What is the experience of Native parents at school?" and "How might their presence at school affect

education for their children?" Educational planning and decision-making regarding the education of Native children are controlled by those in 'authority.' However, Native parents are not recognized as 'authorities' and for the most part, they continue to be absent from the educational system, where the language of the dominant social system prevails, and the curriculum finds relevance within Eurocentric ideologies. These ideologies assume a righteousness in domination, marginalization and denial of other cultures.

The Absence of Teachers

Stories of favorite schools were inevitably associated with the stories of teachers.

"So Kenton Elementary was the best school you were at. Can you tell me what was good about that school?"

In her quiet hushed voice Theresa recalled, "The teachers were nice to the kids... They didn't yell as much as some of the teachers here. The students were nice and friendly. Here, they're alright, except some of them are pretty snobby, you know."

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"Can you tell me why you liked that school the best?"

Without hesitation, Selena answered "My teacher, Mrs. Marrick, she was really really nice to me and the music teacher was really really funny. But here the music teacher is nice too, but she's not funny."

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"Remember you told me all the schools you went to, did you have a favorite school?"

"Glenstone Elementary," Evelyn said thoughtfully.

"Why Glenstone?"

"Because there was this one teacher, named Miss,

(she paused for a moment trying to recollect the name), I forgot her name, well she was really nice. After we finished at Glenstone, she bought us some Cabbage Patch Dolls... and she's really nice, she really used to like my sister, Agnus. She was just a nice teacher."

I asked her to try to tell me a little more about what nice teacher meant.

"I don't know... everytime you see her, like she always says 'hi' and she always stops and talks to us, stuff like that."

The teacher whom Evelyn spoke of had never taught her at Glenstone but she had taught her sister. Evelyn described her own teacher as "really mean." I asked her to tell me more about what really mean meant.

She sounded distraught as she recalled, "She'd be yelling. She'd always be yelling at someone."

"Did she ever yell at you?"

Evelyn paused, "Not that I remember."

The way in which teachers are present with all children appears to influence the school experiences of each individual child. In Theresa's, Selena's and Evelyn's stories they had described the qualities of a 'favorite' teacher in terms of teachers who extended personal connections with each of them. Through personal connections the students' presence is acknowledged and appreciated.

The common negative quality of the teachers of which the students spoke of was primarily one of 'yelling.' In recalling their stories of these teachers, both Evelyn and Theresa quietened, as if they were sensing the yelling again. When teachers yell or are not 'nice,' they do not know how their actions and tone of voice impacts on each child in their presence. I repeat, "when the child comes from a cultural grounding other than the dominant Eurocentric culture, then the depth of this impression may

be different and unrealized" (page 68, this thesis). If a child's experience at school is a hurtful experience, then removing oneself from school (being absent) may be an effort to remove oneself from the hurt.

"To work effectively with culturally diverse students, teachers require cultural sensitivity" (Grossman, 1991, p. 24). Cultural sensitivity can be seen as an awareness of the culturally diverse experiences of students. Teachers need to learn of the relationships and interactions between cultures, learning and teaching in order to respond meaningfully and politely to the children. Teachers may be uncomfortable or lack confidence in teaching children of other cultural backgrounds. That same discomfort or lack of confidence may be present with children who are learning from teachers of another cultural background. To be a teacher and ignore cultural differences is to be absent in the presence of the child.

The Absence of Native Teachers

I asked Selena and Jamie to recall which teachers they had during their school years and to tell me a little bit about them.

Selena began with "I don't remember my grade one teacher." She paused and then continued, "I don't remember my grade two teacher." She paused again and I noticed she raised her shoulders and head and sat back in her chair and her voice strengthened as she recalled, "My grade three teacher was nice. She was Native." Selena remembered the Blackfoot language lessons where this teacher would tell a story and ask the children for the Blackfoot words that go with the story. She fondly recalled some of the traditional Napi stories that her teacher told. "I'll tell you a

story," she said, and she proceeded to tell me the stories of how the beaver got its flat tail and of how the buffalo got its hump.

Reyhner (1994) suggested that high absenteeism of Native students is relative to the high absenteeism of "Native role models" (p. 16). Achievement and success have also been related to "appropriate curricula, Native run schools, and... Native people as teachers and teachers' aides" (Winzer, Rogow & David, 1987, p. 536). "Many educators are convinced of the importance of Native involvement in building Native curriculum programs" (Wyatt, 1978-79, 18). Selena's story spoke of the unique knowledge, skills and understanding that are related to a child's learning in a cultural way. This learning comes from the Native people. Theirs is the shared lived experience of the culture and the shared lived experience of their children.

If teachers (Native and non-Native) are to acknowledge Native cultural beliefs and values, then teachers too, need to listen and learn from the Native people. Within many Native communities, these teachers are the Native elders. Native elders have the authority of lived experience and they are able to teach from that experience. The children with whom I met taught me from their experiences; they were the authorities with their lived experience. When one accepts another as an authority with lived experience, there is the possibility of great learning. Continued efforts to invite and welcome Native people into the classroom and into

teacher education programs, may enhance educational programs for First Nations' children.

The Absence of Cultural Connections

Jamie and Selena were talking about Powwows and the Sundance. "Do you think most of the kids here at school know about the Sundance and Powwows?"

"Indians probably," Selena speculated.

"You don't think any of the White children know?"

"Maybe some." Jamie recalled, "That's how it was at my old school. You could just turn around and talk to them about Indian Days and they would understand, cause like, they know about it and there's like a whole bunch of Indians there."

"But even the White students knew about it?"

"Uh huh. Because we use to have Powwows at our school and stuff like that. My grandma use to cook fried bread and we use to bring it to the school. She cooked stew or sometimes Indian tacos too. The last time we had a bake sale, my grandma made these Indian tacos and she brought them to the school at lunch time and like a whole bunch of White people brought money and almost practically everybody in the school brought something at the bake sale. They're different here."

I heard another absence from schools and that was the absence of cultural connections; connective ways for the Native children to see and hear themselves at school. When Native cultural connections are absent from the child's educational program, I ask, "What does the child attend to when he/she is at school? What is present?" I answer, "The dominant Western-European culture." Decisions about curricula and program design are directed by the authoritative voices of those found within the dominant culture. Through their authority to design curricula and programs, the dominant culture is cultivated and other cultures remain underground. The debate over 'what is

taught' and 'what is valued' conceals the questions of 'who is taught' and 'who is valued.'⁸

When 'cultural connections' are absent at school then the child will also be absent from the learning. I cannot say that 'culture' was absent, as culture is a way of being that is not detached or separated from the child. Where the child is present then their culture is present. But denying a child's culture through the absence of cultural connections is a way of denying the child. Inviting a child's culture into the lived-curriculum through the presence of cultural connections is a way of inviting the child.

When educators speak of curriculum and program design it becomes commonplace to hear words such as *relevant* and *meaningful*. These words suggest connections between the students and learning.

Part of the 'special' program offered at the school where Evelyn was enrolled was to teach the students about resumes and how to make one. Evelyn said they were just beginning the lessons on resumes through discussion about what things to put in them. When the resumes were finished they were for the purpose of taking part in a one-week work experience program. I was impressed by what appeared to be connections and relevancy between learning and practice. Enthused, I asked Evelyn, "Do you know where you're going for work experience?"

"I don't really think I'll be able to go out

8. High absentee rates amongst Native students are related to the high presence of a "Eurocentric curriculum" (Reyhner, 1994, p. 16). Possibly absence becomes an escape from places of domination where Native culture and language are still disconnected from curricula and program design.

because I haven't been in school lately."
My enthusiasm faded.

I designed programs at one time which I thought provided relevant and meaningful avenues of learning: I included children in the design of the programs, I asked the children what their interests were, I asked them what we could do in our class to learn about these interests and I opened the avenues of learning to a variety of strategies, learning resources and techniques. But I came to see how these avenues were sometimes actually one-way streets; the program still reflected the lived experiences of the majority of the children who were of the dominant culture. Attention to inviting and including the child's culture in the design of the program was not consciously a part of my understanding of a relevant and meaningful program design.

Researchers (Brady, 1991; Briscoe, 1991; Cummins, 1986; Fradd, 1991; Gilliland, 19??; Gleason, 1991; Harrison, 1981; Kaegi, 1978; Pertusati, 1988; Price, 1992; Wyatt, 1978-79) suggested that the program design should invite learning about the cultures of the children within the classroom; learning about each other. I began to see how relevancy and meaningfulness in curriculum and program design are based on lived experience (Correa & Tulbert, 1991; Fradd, 1991; Shor & Freire, 1987). I also began to see that lived experience is inherently connected with culture. Children need the opportunity to integrate their own culture with other cultures as a way of meaningful and relevant learning. "A

child's culture must be integrated into every part of the classroom... educators must develop curriculums that create an opportunity to learn other cultures" (Teacher, 1994, p. 14). Although educational reforms to include Native culture appear to be relatively ineffective and Native children continue to have difficulties to find themselves within the mainstream curriculum, inclusive Native education may be a way of connecting the child, culture, curriculum and program.

The success of Native learners is also linked to the provision of relevant and meaningful 'instruction' (Correa & Tulbert, 1991). For many educators, meaningful instruction is interpreted as attention to teaching strategies and techniques - cooperative learning, group projects, direct instruction, manipulatives, whole language, peer tutoring, cross-grade learning and learning styles. For example, during the past decade attention has been given to the notion of learning styles (see Sawyer, 1991 for a critique of Native learning styles) in which children are classified on the basis of learning preferences. Children of the dominant culture are seen as having a variety of learning styles and no one particular learning style is suggested to be dominant for all the children within this group. However, the belief that Native children are hands-on, visual learners suggests that they learn better through seeing and actual manipulation of objects. When educators

assume one particular learning style to be culturally dominant, rather than as an individual preference, we generalize to create yet another 'stereotypical posture' (Pepper & Henry, 1986) for Native children. Researchers suggested that the use of teaching strategies and approaches which are sensitive and relevant to the students' cultural background and experience are important to the students' learning (Briscoe, 1991; Maheady, Mallette & Harper, 1991; Platt, Cranston-Gingras & Scott, 1991). The challenge is to build relationships within our programs by situating the teaching and learning within the cultural context of the child.

In regular classroom programs, "when educators do not adapt their educational approaches to [cultural] differences, students learn less effectively and are often referred to special education because of supposed learning and cognitive problems" (Grossman, 1991, p. 23). However, in special education programs, adaptations are also based on the child's behavior or academic learning differences without attention to cultural differences.

The Absence of History

"Do you know about residential schools?" I inquired.
Softly and thoughtfully, Theresa replied, "No."

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I asked a similar question of Rose and Jeremy. Rose said that she didn't know about them, but she had heard

of them.

Jeremy's words seemed to come from a distance, "They used to get strapped. They take their hand and get the strap and they whip you."

"For what?" I asked.

"If you don't pay attention or something. A long time ago, I think. I'm not quite sure about that."

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"Where did your mom go to junior and senior high?"

"I don't know." Rose took a long pause. "She doesn't talk about it."

For many Native people the past is characterized by an educational system in which the dominant institution was the residential school. The curriculum and program were designed to deny cultural identity. Native people were forbidden to engage in the traditions and beliefs found within their culture and their rich cultural heritage and unique history were suppressed. With increased exposure to the values and lifestyles of the dominant culture, connections with their own culture faded. The story of residential schools is a part of the history of Native people and yet it appeared to be a history about which the students had little knowledge. Their parents' and their grandparents' histories of schooling were unknown to them.

Today the history and story of First Nations' people continues to be denied within many classroom texts as Western-European history and story dominates and invades the printed page. Texts continue to be representative of the dominant culture (Jensen & Brooks, 1991; Pertusati, 1988) and they continue to reflect an attitude of assimilation.

As texts remain a "powerful source of authority in classrooms" (Smith, 1990, p. 160), "educators need to become aware of the curriculum and materials used in classrooms. Students' acceptance and motivation are likely to be limited if they never see their community (culture) in these instructional materials" (Correa & Tulbert, 1991, p. 24).

Teachers need to think about the historical text that roots the experiences of the Native children. In choosing texts to enhance the design of curriculum and programs, educators must also be cognizant of the history we teach and of the history we do not teach. Sometimes resource texts arrive at schools where they are delegated to a shelf and gather dust; their relevancy unrecognized, unknown and absent from the design of the program. The texts available to students within special education programs tend to be replicas of regular classroom texts in that they do not necessarily include a presentation of Native cultures. Teachers need to find texts which include Native history. However, texts which encourage the inclusion of the child's history and culture into program design are difficult to find. Looking back, I see how I could not go to a book and find the history and traditions of the Native people with whom I worked. Sometimes the younger people of the community did not know their history and traditions, and we turned to elders to learn. The Native people themselves were the text of their culture.

Mary, Isabel and Marie and I gathered at the small table in my room.

"Caren's class will be doing a unit on winter games. Are there any traditional Shuswap winter games or anything that we can tie into this unit?" I inquired hopefully.

There was a long silence as we searched for some knowledge.

Mary, who was the oldest member of the group spoke into the silence, "I think I invented tobogganning."

We all laughed.

We needed to look beyond our group to learn. Mary and Isabel offered to speak with some elders on the reserve.

We met again about a week later. Mary and Isabel learned that the winter was a time of survival. Seldom was winter a time of play and games. During a hunt, a deer hide with the hair still on might be used for travelling down slopes. Snowshoes were used for travelling on the snow. But survival was the key.

So it was for Caren's winter games unit that Mary and Isabel spoke to the children of the hard work that the Native people engaged in during the winter so that the people could survive. Today we could snowshoe and toboggan and not worry about having food for our bellies and hides for our warmth.

That afternoon we played in the snow with snowshoes and toboggans and we used an old deer hide to slide down the hills.

Within many Native communities, Native languages also faded in the historical context of residential schools, assimilation and suppression. The language of the child expresses the culture of the child (Initially taken from personal notes created from a presentation by Leroy Little Bear at the Learned Society Conference, Calgary, Alberta, 1994; References found later in Jensen & Brooks, 1991; Palmer, 1969). Today, struggles within Native communities to revive culture are also struggles to revive language and inherently, to revive the Native people. These struggles do not appear to be paralleled with the same commitment within

public educational settings. Although there is research support for the recognition and inclusion of language along with culture in the education of First Nations' students (Brady, 1991; Briscoe, 1991; Cummins, 1986; Fradd, 1991; Gilliland, 1987; Gleason, 1991; Harrison, 1981; Kaegi, 1978; Pertusati, 1988; Price, 1992; Wyatt, 1978-79), the experience for many Native children is that they have not had the opportunity to learn their language within their educational experiences at school.

Evelyn knows some of the Blackfoot language and would like to continue to learn it. Her mom, dad and grandpa and most of her family speak Blackfoot, but she figures what she knows, she learned mostly from her dad. She took Blackfoot classes in one of her elementary schools for a year and then once again in junior high, but the junior senior high school that she is in now offers it only to high school students and she'll have to wait until grade ten.

All of the Native students whom I met with did not take Native language classes at this time. Selena and Jamie said they thought the teacher of the Blackfoot language at their school was away having a baby this year. Now they had to take French, but they were quick to append that they would learn "Blackfoot" if it were offered at their school.

Jamie spoke, "My whole life before kindergarten, I spoke Blackfoot."

Selena remembers her grandfather. "He couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak Blackfoot. I couldn't understand it or anything. Here, they just talk French all the time."

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For Theresa, it was an option she did not opt to take.

"Do you take the Blackfoot class?" I asked.

"Last year, not this year. It was boring."

When Native children do not attend the Blackfoot language classes, it is seen by teachers and administrators as 'the students don't really want to take it anyway.' The class is usually tucked away in a small corner, possibly a converted custodian's room or an old book room. In the public education system, the Native language is seen as an add-on, giving it the status of a second class subject, a non-legitimate subject. To add a course on the Blackfoot language is a curriculum change which still exists within a framework of tokenism and gives it the appearance of a 'reserved' course. Teachers and administrators need to think about the ways in which Native languages are included within the dominant structure of education and challenge themselves to think of new ways to include Native languages where "emphasis is placed on integrating language learning with all aspects of the curriculum rather than treating it as an isolated subject area" (Wyatt, 1978-79, p. 21).

Native children are "at risk for school failure and placement into special education programs [with] their lack of English proficiency" (Correa & Tulbert, 1991, p. 20). Through years of domination, the English language has become the 'right' language. English semantic and syntactic structures are the codes by which language is judged. Knowledge and acquisition of these codes becomes the measure of a student's academic and intellectual ability. Non-

English language structures convey an inability; a language disability.

The structures of languages vary and influence the writing and oral speech of the child. I know a Native student who speaks and writes English expertly, yet when she is among family and community members she speaks with a dialect which might be interpreted by others as poor English or 'broken English.' Native children who write or speak Native languages or dialects may be considered to have inferior language skills. Teachers need to recognize that language and communication which is textually different is not a measure of the student's academic intelligence nor is it an indication of a language disability. This is not to say that Native children do not have language disabilities, but it is to highlight that educators' abilities to distinguish between a language disability and the acquisition of 'English as a Second Language' is inadequate without the knowledge of the semantic and syntactic structures of the child's language. It is critical to understand the differences between the effects of acculturation, second language learning and an actual language disability. A Native child with a language disability will exhibit the same difficulties in the Native language as in the second language. If the difficulties are only exhibited in one language, then the question of a language learning difference (disability) is not the

question that needs to be asked. Fradd (1991) recognized that "including students' language and cultural differences as well as their academic and social learning needs in special education settings" (p. 39) was integral to the design of a special education program.

One of the main theories behind learning differences is that students with learning differences may have a cognitive processing difficulty (Lerner, 1988, p. 186-187). This theory suggests that students with learning differences process information in a different way and they usually take longer. If a teacher asks a student a question such as "What is the capital city of Alberta?" the student with a cognitive processing difficulty may process the statement first to determine if it is a question or a statement. Then the student may determine the key words in the statement and possibly think, "Okay, I've got a question about a capital, a city and Alberta.... The teacher wants to know the capital city of Alberta." By the time the student has gone through this processing, he/she is ready to say "Edmonton." However, the teacher has usually already moved on to another student with the assumption that the student did not know the answer.

As I met with the students, I reminded myself to be patient and wait for the students to tell their story. I learned that if I was patient, the students usually spoke further than the responses of "yes," "no," or "I don't

know." Initially, when there was silence, I could feel myself wanting to repeat the question, rephrase the question or move to another question or thought. Possibly they were thinking of what they would say and they were taking the time to formulate their responses. This possibility of being thoughtful of the words one speaks is offered in contrast to the possibility of a processing difficulty. I think of how classrooms need to be places where Native children are given a chance and the time to relate.

Recent theories on writing in schools professed the notion of many drafts. We can write a draft and then edit it and draft again and edit again and draft again.... However, when I speak, the words can be rephrased, but for the most part they are as spoken. I do not speak and then edit and re-edit when I speak. Possibly a process of editing as I speak would make me speak hesitantly, slowly, or not at all and I would appear to have a poor grasp of the English language. This notion of editing speech is also offered in contrast to the possibility of a processing difficulty.

I see how I relate events and stories to: a) time, "When did that happen?," b) space, "Where were you?," and c) sequence, "Which school were you in first?" When I listened to the tapes and looked at the transcripts, I became aware of how much I rely on this frame of referencing in my language. It became evident that my questions about time,

space and sequence, placed stories in sets and categorized pockets. The Western-European way of language and communication is set and categorized; usually by time and sequence. The Native children did not do this. Their language and communication did not always flow in the Western-European sense of 'normal,' but rather it was often in the absence of time and sequence. As I listened to their stories, I came to hear how they related stories through the event and/or the persons in the event. Often their stories wove together by attending to *who* was in the story or by what was happening in the story.

"I was on the merry-go-round. There was a merry-go-round over there. It has red sand around it and those little rocks. My cousin was pushing me really fast and this time I fell off and my leg was dragging. My knee got dragging and a rock got into it, like right here, and I have a big scar now right here."

After further illumination, I realized that 'and this time' was the beginning of another event related to the first event by what was happening and by who was in the story (cousin). The second event took place on a scooter.

I also noted that quantification of time was inadequate to situate an event.

It was Tuesday, May 24 and I asked Jeremy what he did in reading today. He told me he was answering questions about a story he had read "a long time ago." Then he augmented, "about Friday" [May 20].

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At the research colloquium where I first presented

the thesis proposal, one of the professors posed the question; "Why should they [Native students] trust you?"

I felt a great sense of naivete slide into my mind, "Why shouldn't they? Why should they? Why shouldn't they? Why should they?..." I rationalized; "I hope they do. If trust is not given, then I have to be okay with that and work with that which the students give."

During the interviews, I kept cognizant of these thoughts. I was also cognizant of the respect Native children give to people who are older. With these thoughts in mind, I tried to let the students also guide and direct our conversations, and to ask questions of me. I felt there were two signals that the students were comfortable and trusting; when they started to ask me questions and when they freely responded to a comment and not a question. In a sense, this was when the students created the conversation. The students spoke with an openness which I interpreted as trusting. I came to see the question "Why should they trust you?" to be born of Eurocentric thought where the underlying assumption is 'mistrust.' I also came to sense that mistrust among the Native students is born of 'mistrusting' experiences.

I asked a fluent Blackfoot speaker if there was a Blackfoot word for the word mistrust. She said that there were similar words; *disbelief* or possibly *liar*, but there was no word for mistrust. Words such as 'retarded', 'handicapped' or 'disabled' are also not found within many

Native languages, the Blackfoot language being one of them. When those concepts do not exist, then there is no need for the words to exist.

I am once again taken to a story in my past.

The Shuswap language teacher and I were team planning with the grade one teacher. The grade one class was going to do a unit on 'The Ocean.' We were brainstorming Shuswap words and phrases that could be used in connection with the theme. I assumed, "Ocean would be a good word to teach the children. That way the teacher and the students could make reference to the ocean using the Shuswap word even when they weren't having their Shuswap language class." The language teacher laughed and said, "You think there is a word for ocean? I have lived here all my life. I go to the rivers (and she said the Shuswap word for rivers). I go to the water (and she said the Shuswap word for water). I don't go to the ocean (and she laughed again)."

The Absence of the Law

At an earlier meeting Selena spoke of a cousin who was now in jail. Today Selena talks about him again. "He's in another jail. He got beaten up in jail. He can't tie his shoe. He's so sore."

"Who beat him up?"

"I don't know. Someone in jail and he can't visit neither and he can't get out until September."

"What did he do? May I ask what he did?"

"I don't know."

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Theresa's oldest brother is in trouble with the law at seventeen years of age and is awaiting his day in court.

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Evelyn was witness to abuse and had to go down to the police station. They kept her there for most of the night and at six in the morning they told her she could go home. It was January and at six in the morning it was still dark out and it was cold out. At first they were going to make her walk home, but she told them she

was too scared to walk across the fields, so they gave her a ride.

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It was going to be our last meeting and we went to the Dairy Queen. We took our burgers and fries with us to a nearby park. We sat on a park bench enjoying our lunch.

I was attentive to the birds, the insects, and the woman and child on the merry-go-round; "Probably a grandma and granddaughter," I guessed. I was inattentive to the sirens and traffic noise in the background. When the police officer emerged from the side of the park building, he was unexpected.

"Oh. Police. Are they coming our way," I wondered aloud.

"Probably," Jeremy said quietly.

A paddy wagon had now appeared in the parking area and two more police officers were approaching us. In my mind, I was anxious and excited. "I don't know why they would be visiting us, but we'll let them."

Jeremy seemed to speak from way inside, "We're in trouble."

I said "Pardon?" but before Jeremy could speak, the tall blonde police officer called out, "Hello." He continued to approach.

I called back, "Hi," and Jeremy said, "Hi." Rose sat quietly.

"How's everybody today?" He sounded friendly.

Again Jeremy and I responded with "Good," and "We're fine." Rose sat quietly.

I added, "Can we help you?" By this time the three police officers were standing side by side in front of us. Again the tall blonde police officer spoke, "Well, I'm looking for, uh three people who were intoxicated and possibly heading this way and I can see obviously that you people are not the people I'm looking for. So I won't bother you further." But then he added, "You haven't seen three intoxicated persons stagger by this way?"

"Walking this way?" I rephrased, "No not at all."

"Okay, great, have a good day," and with that he was about to turn away. I noted, "There are three people over there. Maybe they've seen them, but we haven't seen anyone."

"Okay enjoy your day."

"Thank you," I replied. I noticed that he did not go over to the other people. All three police officers got in their vehicles and drove away.

We sat momentarily. Rose was the first to speak, "I don't like cops."

"You don't like them? How come?"

"I don't know, I just, like, I get scared, like I've done something."

Rose's quiet and removed disposition during the encounter now came to mind. I tried to reassure her, "I wasn't really scared when they came up because I knew we didn't do anything." Jeremy revisited Rose's fears with the story of the cops in Los Angeles who had beaten a black man. Jeremy continued, "They beat you up, like if you steal something, like one little piece of candy, they start hitting you with a club or they kick you."

Again I tried what I thought would be reassuring, "Did you notice that one police officer was Native though?" Rose noticed that the female police officer was also Native. This didn't appear to have the consoling effect for which I was hoping. Jeremy told another story of how his cousins were taken home by the police after they missed the bus.

We talked about a few more incidents and then travelled to conversations of summer holidays and weekends.

At the closing of our meeting we travelled back to our encounter with the police officers when Jeremy asked, "What's intoxicated?"

When we returned to the school, I told the secretary that the students would like to meet again, so I would be back next week. I also told her briefly of our meeting with the police and should either of the students' parents call, I left my home phone number. Her immediate comment was, "probably because they're Native and you've got that dark hair."

The police represent a social institution of the dominant society. As a child I remember those motherly and teacherly words: "If you need help, call the police or find a police officer." I am not threatened by them and I have been taught that they are there for my protection. When Rose tensed and said: "I don't like cops," I wondered what are the lessons she has experienced in the presence of the law? If she needs help, who will she call? Fleming (1988) characterized the racism which permeates the Canadian society through an example of how "police are slow to

respond to complaints from [Native] communities, seldom bother to investigate, [and] often treat nonwhites as potential criminals" (p. 187).

During one of our conversations, Selena said that she and her cousin, Darlene had been watching the news and they were talking about the Young Offenders Act. She said that her cousin "was really watching it." Selena wanted to know what it was all about; if she could go to jail at her age, what kinds of offenses were punishable, what were the punishments, could she go to adult court.

The same day that Selena and I spoke about the Young Offenders Act, the Lethbridge Herald had an article entitled *Native Input Shunned* (Helmer, 1994). In this article, a Native person raised the issue that the provincial commission assigned to review the Young Offender's Act was without Native representation despite the commission's own reports indicating that "thirty-one percent of the young people in the young offender system are aboriginal" (p. 1). The response from the chairperson was that they already had an "ethnic" person on the commission; a Vietnamese Member of the Legislative Assembly. This obstructed view of diversity and culture, also obstructs justice and the way in which Native people are seen within the law.

The Absence of Family Connections

At other times during our meetings, my heart ached with the students' stories of absence of family connections.

Selena told of going from one foster home to another until she finally got to stay with her grandma, who now

has to sign papers every six months to look after her.

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Rose's grandma is eighty one and she never sees her. "I see my grandpa, like he's always at the downtown restaurant and I see him there. He sees me and we say 'Hello.' Sometimes I ask him 'How is she?' He says she's doing pretty good and sometimes he says she's a little sick. After this I'll have no grandparents and I barely see them."

I ask her, "Where do they live?"

She answers, "I don't know."

I wait patiently and she begins to speak of her favorite restaurant.

The present disintegration of some Native families is a reminder of a disheartening part of history. The disintegration of families during the years of settlement and residential schooling had lasting effects. The structure of the residential school created a situation of separation. The children were separated from their parents, grandparents, elders, brothers, sisters and other family and community members.⁹

What does it Mean to Be Present?

What is the relationship of absence and presence? The word 'presence' is derived from the word *pre-esse*; "pre" meaning *before* and 'esse' meaning *be*; presence meaning

9. "Native Americans tend to conceptualize the family in very different terms... membership is often as significant as, or more so than, blood relationships (which is very frequently traced through the mother rather than through the father), and a clansperson or a mother's brother may be more important and significant in a child's life than his biological father" (Cunningham, Cunningham, & O'Connell, 1986, p. 4).

"being before" (Klein, 1967, p. 1238). In absence we are 'being away.' Yet, we are necessarily present (elsewhere). In absence, we are in presence. This was the relationship that I heard in their stories. The students' stories spoke of presence.

The students are the main gatekeepers, as they keep the gates open through their presence or they choose to leave the study and close the gates behind them.

The Presence of Racism

Colorful beads dangle from the top of the cradleboard
Warm breeze blows as mother gathers the long meadow
grasses
The sun shines down upon her labors
and the sweet scent of Mother Earth
and the songs of nature are celebrating Me!
I am beautiful
I am pure
I am a blessing before the eyes of the Great Spirit

We travel to town with our baskets
Tied across the bare back of the pony
Mother sets up her craft as I wander
Towards a group of kids playing stickball
Can I join? Can I play?
and their answer...
No, not today Squaw
Am I beautiful?
Am I pure?
Am I a blessing before the eyes of the Great Spirit?¹⁰

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10. From "Who I Am" by L. M. Hurst, 1993, *Winds of Change; American Indian Education and Opportunity*, 8(4), 66-67. Copyright 1993 by Lisa M. Hurst. Reprinted by permission.

"If your teachers did do some cultural things at school, what could you think of that they could do at school?"

"I don't know. (Selena paused). They could teach us Blackfoot. Like, I had a friend, she was in another town and like, in their class, it wasn't for dumb people, but it was like for Indians. They had this Indian class, and an Indian teacher taught them."

"Wasn't for dumb people, wasn't for dumb people..."

replayed in my mind. I heard Selena's qualifying of a stereotypical feeling and I asked myself where did those words come from? Clarifying "not the dumb class" was natural to the telling of her-story. Over the years, I have become more conscious of the stories I have heard that hold the expectations of lower achievement and failure amongst Native children. These expectations carry the shame of racism, based upon the assumption that Native children do not have the abilities to succeed. What is Selena's understanding of Native children in school that she needed to say these words? Was there an expectation that when the Native children are gathered, they constitute a 'dumb' class? Has the lesson to Native children been that they are dumb? How do you learn in a situation where your pre-sense is that you are considered 'dumb?'

Today when I met with Selena, I asked the question "Do you think it makes a difference if you are a Native person in school?" I was surprised by the defensive tone she voiced as she replied, "No. If anybody calls me that, I'll beat them up. If they get anybody after me, I'll get Darlene after them. And if they get anybody after Darlene, Darlene will get her friends. It's not like picking fights or anything, but if they're mean to me, I'll be mean back to them."

Many of the students' stories return me to the experiences of my past.

Ben and I had met once before and this was our second meeting. He was the Elementary Liaison Worker who was hired by the Band. Part of his job was to work with the school regarding difficulties that the Native children might be experiencing. We were waiting today for the social worker and the special services coordinator to show up.

As we waited he told me a story about his five-year old son. His son came home from school yesterday, upset because someone had called him an "Indian." Ben said, "Well you are an Indian." His son was still upset. He discovered that his son had learned a certain meaning and understanding of the word *Indian*, born of a stereotypical imprint.

What are Selena's and Ben's son's experiences that lead them to interpret 'Native' or 'Indian' as something they do not want to be associated with? What are their interpretations and experiences of these words? People who hold stereotypical views of 'Indians' need to know that young children recognize and know these stereotypes and that these stereotypes are hurtful to children. Stereotypes are the basis of prejudice and racism.

"On our Sport's day, after everything was just about over, I was playing Four Square and this girl hit the ball. It went out of the square so I ran to get it. This boy, Ronald, grabbed it and I go 'Here, pass.'

He goes, 'No.'

I go, 'Fine,' and I turned around.

He goes, 'What did you say to me?'

And I turned around and said, 'Fine.' (As Jamie told her story, Ronald's biting words and bitter actions resounded.) 'Do you want to say it again to me in my face?' he challenged.

I looked at him and I never said nothing and then he hit me in the face with the ball. I just said, 'Why did you do that?'

'Well do you want me to do it again?' he taunted.

'I never said nothing. Sally, Jennifer and Kenny,

I think, they all saw it and they told Mrs. Smith. But Mrs. Smith didn't do nothing about it. She said, 'Ronald, did you mean to do that?' and Ronald said 'Yeah.' She goes, 'Why?' and all this stuff. He goes, 'Well, God, why did you have to come to our school? She doesn't need to be in our class. Why doesn't she go to somebody else's class?'

Like I find these Whites in my class real prejudiced."

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"When I first came here all the girls in my class were like wickedly mean to me here. They were like, I don't know. (She hesitated thoughtfully and then recalled another school in a nearby town.) When I was in my other school, when I first went there, first day, I had like a whole bunch of friends, like the whole class were my friends and they didn't stare as much as they do here. (She returned to talk about her present school). This boy named Fred, he's like, 'Oh you again. I wish you weren't in my class.' He said, 'go back to your old school.' This boy, he goes, like we're in the library, he goes, 'So trying to get whiter everyday.' And he walked away. (I asked, "What did he mean by that?") Like, try not to be Indian. Like he goes 'So you're too dark. Trying to get lighter everyday like us whites."

These stories of the presence of prejudice and racism were heartfelt and shameful. Native children are continually asked to redefine themselves, their beliefs, their values and their practices (Briscoe, 1991) to meet the dominant cultural assumptions of what is right, good and best. "Some culturally diverse learners have felt that to participate in formal learning required a rejection of important cultural norms" (Briscoe, 1991, p. 14) and success was only possible "if they were willing to betray their class or ethnic background by trying to 'act white" (Grossman, 1991, p. 23). Watts (cited in Cocking, 1988)

invites those of the dominant culture to awaken and "give up the dream that you're going to make us into good white people, because what happens is that we end up being lousy white people and we end up being lousy Indians" (p. 6). Watts went on to say that "to turn us into white people" (p. 7) is part of a larger societal goal and part of a societal prejudice.

"Throughout the world, wherever Native people have become a minority, they have found themselves under great pressure to adopt the culture, values and way of life of the dominant society" (Gilliland, 1987, p. 4). Native cultural traditions, beliefs and languages have been suppressed through discrimination and prejudice. This suppression was part of an attitude of assimilation where the non-Native people who became the dominant group tried to make the Native person 'White.' This is a form of racism cemented within the foundations and structures of institutions such as schools: structural or systemic racism. The notion of developing mutual respect and understanding of one another's cultures is absent in the presence of prejudice and racism.

Systemic or structural racism underlies the existence of many children of other cultures being placed in special education programs. Recent litigation (Platt, Cranston-Gingras & Scott, 1991) challenged the placement of children in special education programs based on their cultural differences, referring to it as "unethical and improper" (p.

42). The question which relates is: Is it ethical and proper to place children of another culture in regular or special education classrooms without attending to their culture and language?

The Presence of An-Other Way of Learning

Difference is also present in 'ways' of learning. "First Nations education focuses on the well-being of the students. It is a holistic approach that prepares First Nations students for total living" (Flaherty, 1992, p. 17). A holistic approach to learning is natural to the 'way' in which First Nations' children learn (Fiordo, 1988); natural in the sense of seeing and knowing through relationships with what is learned and who is learning.

Another way to see holism is through integration. Integration is about relationships and the practice of integration teaches children to build relationships. When children are considered 'different,' the practice of segregation into special categories and special education programs or classes teaches children to sever relationships. It becomes a form of dis-integration and "subordination that creates inequities among different groups as they live out their lives" (Giroux, 1988, p. 165). The segregated nature of special education also conforms to the notion of isolating the 'abnormal' and grouping the 'normal.' It is born of the scientific theories which dominate the public

education system.

I am reminded of another story from my past.

I attempted to integrate the Native education program and the special education program with the regular class programs. When I worked with Native children in special education, I focused on their learning within the context of the regular class program. When I worked with Native children in Native education the focus was on their culture within the context of their regular class learning. In this way, I designed an integrated Native program and an integrated special education program, but I had not thought consciously to integrate them with each other.

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Rose had been out to a Powwow at the reserve on the weekend and I inquired, "Did you dance?"

"Last year," she recollected.

"Last year, but not this year," I repeated.

"No. I didn't want to," she spoke softly.

"How come?" I wondered aloud.

"I don't know, I felt like watching. I don't know very much about dancing, I just know fancy dancing." As Rose spoke, her eyes seemed to look into the memory.

"Is there anybody in town who teaches it?" I spoke my ignorance.

Rose spoke her insight, "I don't know, you just, sometimes you just watch and you just get on."

What came to me in Rose's words was that watching and directing oneself was the 'natural' way of teaching and learning, maybe not the 'normal' way as defined by the dominant culture, but the natural way. My question, "Is there anybody in town who teaches it?" came from the 'normal' way of teaching and learning. The expectation was that you could sign up for lessons and learn step by step. But I have learned that Native dancing entails much more than a choreographed set of steps. The feeling, the

spiritual sense and the rhythm are not to be captured in a transmission model of teaching and learning. Perhaps it is the feeling, the spiritual sense, and the rhythm that are not to be captured in the lessons in our classrooms.

The notion of non-interference as a traditional way of learning within many Native communities (Brant, 1990; Ross, 1992) also suggests that learning will occur in a natural way. However, the child who has learned 'non-interference' as a way of interaction, may also be seen as passive (Phillips, 1983). I have come to hear and recognize the stereotypical notion of the passive Native child, whereby the child sits quietly, watching and listening, often unnoticed. Without an understanding of an-other way of learning, Rose's, "No. I didn't want to," and just standing and watching may be misinterpreted as disinterested or passive. As teachers, we don't *really-mind* working with these students. They do not demand or dominate our teaching work, they do not challenge our teaching authority, and they appear managed. In this sense, they are ideal students for sustaining assumed authority within a transmission model where the "chain of authority ends in the passive, transfer pedagogy dominating schools and colleges around the country" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 76).

"The curriculum is treated as a collection of discrete content areas in which teachers move from one topic to another in lockstep fashion. As a result, lessons are often

developed in isolation from one another and fail to help students relate their new learning to what they already know" (Lewis, 1990, p. 535). Within many classrooms the approach to education remains a picture of disconnected pieces. The presentation of subjects in a disintegrated fashion may be foreign to the cultural being of Native children.

When Rose spoke of what happened at school this morning, she appeared confused and unsure.

"We had science." Then she added, "Wait. I'm not quite sure." She tried to figure it out. "We get Book Buddies at 8:30 to 9:00 and 9:30 to 10:00, humm, 9:00 to 9:30, we had an hour of something. After recess we had gym and then after that we had music. After music we had computers and after computers, (pause) math!"

Rose tried to think in segregated sequenced blocks of time and subject. Perhaps the disintegrated presentation of subjects and time made it difficult for her to tell what she had done that morning.

Selena doesn't have much to say about her classroom studies. But today she seems irritated by the morning's lessons. "And like, I hate kind of doing it over again, but then the teacher just says sit there and listen, like you already did it over again."

Special education program designs that use instructional techniques that involve concrete, step-by-step, repetitive drill and practice may be techniques which are also not complementary to the ways of learning in different cultural contexts (Grossman, 1991). This again is related to the notion of holistic learning as a way of learning that is complementary to the education of Native children (Gipp & Fox, 1991). Many special education

programs where Native children are overrepresented continue to teach using a transmission model. "Several investigators have suggested that many 'learning disabilities' are pedagogically induced in that children designated 'at risk' frequently receive intensive instruction which confines them to a passive role" (Cummins, 1986, p. 27).

The Presence of Abuse

Selena is the youngest of the Native children whom I met; she is eleven years old. The stories she shared were of experiences that fill a lifetime; stories of abuse, drugs and alcohol, family separation (parents and children), adoption, social workers, violence, police, foster homes....

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Gloria is fifteen years old and she speaks of when she was thirteen years old in grade six. That was when she first started to drink. For three months she missed elementary school everyday (November to January). When she finally returned to school, she got suspended for two weeks for missing too much school. Her mom said that she should "smarten up or she will have to send me to a boarding school." Alcohol seemed to consume Gloria's conversation.

I think of how Gloria was suspended when she returned to school. Her punishment for missing school was to be forced to be absent through suspension. I wonder how the punishment and reward system born of the behaviorist scientific theory is interpreted by the Native children who are or possibly 'are not' controlled by it.

Selena's and Gloria's stories remind me of another story from my past.

Brian was only ten years old and he had already lived a life of many abuses (sexual, alcohol and drugs, physical). At school he was part of the special education program because of his behavior and learning differences. We built a program that addressed his reading, writing and mathematical difficulties. (Reading materials, texts and assignments were matched to the abilities he had shown).

His behavior and consequence program managed the teachers' behaviors more than his. We struggled to find a program with which we could "manage" his behavior.

Some educators were of the opinion that if the home situation did not change then there was no way that things would improve at school. The solution was for Brian to be suspended from school until the home situation was altered. (He was to be removed from his present home situation and the Band was looking for foster parents).

Brian left our school and his community. After that, whenever I was in contact with the Liaison Worker, I would ask if he'd heard how Brian was making out. He told me that Brian had a stable home and people that took care of him. But school for Brian was still a hard place to be. Even with a change in his home environment, his new school only allowed him to attend three mornings a week in a segregated special resource room.

How can students 'be present' with the turmoil in their lives and how can teachers 'be present' with them? How do students relate to all of this and still find a meaningful relationship with school? "When the curriculum and teachers are distant from the experience understood by students, students perceive that they are not held in high regard. They perceive themselves as outsiders" (Schlosser, 1992, p. 137). It is difficult to attend to school when lives are filled with experiences that are distant (absent) from the experiences of school. Experiences with drugs, alcohol and other forms of abuse are found within many cultures and yet the experiences that each culture has with them are

different. Although these troubles have cycled through many Native communities and many Native generations, "traditional Indian families were not abusive" (Eiselein, 1993, p. 71). To say that children do not do well at school because of social, emotional and behavioral difficulties encountered away from school, dismisses the role that education plays in creating and sustaining these difficulties (these abuses), and in the responsibilities that may exist for ameliorating them. Dialogue and action on school change are averted by displacing responsibilities. Possibly changes to curriculum and program design in education are relative to changing cycles of abuse.

The Presence of Situatedness

Jamie reviewed the places where she had been to school. "I went to Kindergarten at the reserve for a year and then I moved [approximately 60 kilometres] to Fountain School. I was in Fountain for grade one and two and for half of grade two I was in Fountain and in the other half I moved to another town [approximately 100 kilometres] and then I moved. For grade three and four I was at Pinewood. Then for half of grade five I was at Pinewood and then I moved to Sprucewood Elementary School [same town] and I was mixed with grade sixes in class and for half of grade 5 and the other half I moved to Fountain again and then I came here [approximately 60 kilometres]."

When the students related the places where they went to school it felt like a constant shuffle between the city, the reserve and the small surrounding towns. Today movement from one place to another is negatively framed in the notion of 'transience' which gives an impression of aimless

wandering. This movement reminded me of trying to find a place to be. For me there was a sense of uprootedness and I was making sense of "the youth, lose a sense of secure identity - who they are, where they come from, where they should be going" (Klassen, 1993b, p. 20). However when I listened to Jeremy's story I found another interpretation.

They had been branding horses on the weekend. Later, they were going to release them over by his grandma's home. I inquired, "Where does your grandma live?"
Jeremy replied, "She lives on the prairies."

Many Native tribes were traditionally nomadic and usually with the changing of the seasons, came the purposeful changing of location. The return of a season usually meant a return to a 'seasonal' place. Native people "remain near their birthplaces and relatives.... When we say 'home', we don't mean the house we're living in; we mean our roots" (Watts in Cocking, 1988, p. 6). Perhaps the sense of being at 'home' is the sense of having relationships with others and our environment. And the notion of staying in one place all year is a notion of 'settlement.'

I am reminded of another story from my past.

When I started to let people know that I would be returning to University in September of 1993, they expressed that I would be missed and I shared their feelings of absence (I miss them today as I write). The Native language teacher offered that she too would miss me and one day she gave me a gift. As we sat together that day, she was very quiet. I indicated that upon my return to the district, there were no guarantees where I would be placed. That was part of the circumstance of taking a 'leave of absence.'

She spoke restfully, "This is where I was born and raised, where I grow old. White people come and go and they don't stay. They are gone. They stay two or three years and then move on. I have seen it for many years."

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Officially this was our fourth meeting and could be our last. "So is this our last meeting?" I am reluctant to say good-bye.

Rose gives the question back to me, "It's up to you." I think of what I will say. Before I respond, Jeremy says, "I think I'll meet one last time." (Jeremy, Rose and I met one more time after that "one last time").

This research represents another coming and leaving.

As the researcher, I entered the lives of these Native students for a period of almost three months (April - June). I found it difficult to close the research and move along. The end of the school year became the time when we all knew we would be leaving. My reluctance to say 'good-bye' emanated from the feeling that the end of the research represented the end of the relationships I had with the Native students; the end of their stories and their presence with me. However, today I think of the students and I still see them in each story as I read and write them. I look forward to the possibility of seeing them again; by chance walking down the street, at the mall, at the swimming pool...

The Presence of An-Other Way of Seeing and Knowing
Marie Battiste (1994) spoke of different ways of

knowing and informed us that Native students experience knowledge or ways of knowing related to their culture and their being. In schools, ways of knowing and seeing are defined by the dominant culture, and another's view of the world and the way things come to be in the world are absent. Recognizing and respecting differences in ways of knowing and seeing may open the door to recognizing and respecting each 'other.'

We talked about good days of the week and bad days of the week. Monday and Wednesday were good days because they got computers and Tuesday and Friday were good because they got art. Thursdays were not a good day. Jeremy remembered a jump he wiped out on with his bike. "It was a Thursday too. I jumped and fell off my bike. My bike flipped and hit me right here. Thursdays got bad luck."

Rose joined the conversation again, "Do you have any beliefs, like, you're not allowed to whistle at night and stuff?"

"No," Jeremy replied.

I redirected the question to Rose, "Do you have any beliefs?"

"Well you can't whistle at night, it brings bad spirits. Each time, your hair, like the moon changes, like the full moon, cut your hair just a little bit at the ends and it will grow healthy and stuff. Or like when the moon changes you wash your hair with tea, leftover tea and it is nice and fresh."

"Where did you learn those beliefs?"

"My mom. She got them from her mom I think."

Now Jeremy reentered the conversation. "Last night when I was sleeping, my radio was turned down, so I got up and nobody was up. Then the radio was turned loud."

"By itself?" I queried.

"Yeah, it turned loud and I looked. My mom told me to turn it down. That was the same day that my bike was stolen, probably just warning me that my bike was being stolen."

"Do you believe that sometimes things happen to warn you?"

"Yep."

 These stories appeared natural to the conversation of

Jeremy and Rose as they began to illuminate the presence of another way of seeing and knowing, moving beyond the Eurocentric thoughts in which things have a certain scientific understanding in a certain manner or sequence. Tribal knowledge and the ways of knowing amongst Native children have not been acknowledged or respected by the dominant Western-European society. Marie Battiste (1994) explained, "the mere fact that the inclusion of the fantastic, the supernatural, the irrational side of life does not necessarily delegate a narration to the realms of fiction.... Experiential truth or reality extends a considerable range beyond the realm of the objectively verifiable material reality of modern scholarship in Euro-Canadian terms" (1994, p. 3). In schools and classrooms, notions of the 'supernatural' fall outside the dominant realm of thought and are often disregarded as superstitions, coincidence, or "weird and strange" (Derrick, 1990, p. 17). When the mystical is presented in classrooms, it is discarded as nonsense or as an active imagination. Within the Western-European way, beliefs in the abstruse are severed from a relationship to self and "fall subject to active persecution and oppression" (Derrick, 1990, p. 17). They are usually kept from the dominant culture. Marie Battiste also spoke of "cognitive imperialism" (p. 8) as Western society's imposed knowledge base and the way of knowing forced upon Native children.

Selena told me some stories from the Sundance and then the following week when Jamie joined us, I had innocently and ignorantly repeated something from Selena's previous conversation. I was surprised to hear Selena say, "I wasn't supposed to tell you, but I did."

My surprise with Selena's comment was one of ignorance; I did not realize that Selena had shared something last week which she "wasn't supposed to tell." I did not recognize what was not to be told. At one time, Native people in Canada were forbidden by law to gather for spiritual worship in some of their traditional ways (Jensen & Brooks, 1991: Ross, 1992). "Many meaningful spiritual rituals, such as the sun-dance and sweat lodge, were for many years prohibited by Canadian laws" (Scott, 1989, p. 12). However, some Native people continued their practices in secret. Today many of these sacred cultural traditions and practices are still considered secret.

Most traditional practitioners are very reluctant to articulate the specific elements of either the ceremony or the locations. And since some ceremonies involve the continued good health and prosperity of the 'other peoples,' discussing the nature of the ceremony would violate the integrity of these relationships. Thus when traditional people explain that these ceremonies are being held for 'all our relatives,' that explanation should be sufficient. (Deloria, 1993, p. 34).

Fear that one's traditional practices and beliefs will not be tolerated and repressed once again by the dominant culture, or fear by the dominant culture that their beliefs and practices will be challenged, are possibilities for the secrets that exist between cultures.

Jeremy is about 6 feet tall and his physical stature lies in contrast to the soft and gentle words he speaks to describe what he did at recess today.

"I was just standing out there by the side of the school. I was watching to see the seagulls come up and down, up and down. They landed by this bunch of little kids. They were playing with the little kids. They went up and they went down. The little kids ran around them. I was watching them play."

To see the children and the seagulls at play is another way of viewing what was happening on the playground. Jeremy's story was an interplay of the seagulls and the children. His story reminded me of stories of the traditional ways in which Native people connected with the Earth and all that is; "all my relations." These words speak of the relationship that a human being has with all that surrounds him/her... people, the sun, the moon, plants, animals, rocks, spirits.... The actions of one will always impact on the life of the others (McLeod, 1993). Jeremy's story also reminded me of a continuing tradition of storytelling as a way of teaching how things are in the world and how they relate to each other.

Theresa was given three days detention for something she didn't do. I asked her if she was going to say something about her innocence so that she wouldn't have to serve the detention. She said, "No, I'm not going to bother."

Depending on how one sees and knows, in Theresa's story one could see and know a passive child or one could see and know a forgiving and generous child. Locust (1988) suggested that when the beliefs of the Native culture and the dominant culture are in conflict, often those of the

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dominant culture are unaccepting of the others' beliefs.

Rose's cousin was at a Powwow. He was watching the clouds. They looked like those "funnel clouds, only bigger, like a tornado. An Eagle appeared and circled around it and on top of it. And that tornado stopped and it went the other way."

In an intuitive sense, Jeremy added, "When the Eagle circles around them, it seems like they were building clouds."

"To many First Nations, the Eagle symbolizes great achievement and accomplishments" (Archibald, 1993, p. 38). The Eagle is strength and power and is often seen as the Hermes of Native culture - as the messenger of the Creator (Verrall, 1988). (Long Standing Bear Chief (1992) offered that non-Native people could possibly think of the term *guardian angel* as a way of understanding the relationship of the Eagle to Native people.)

Within the Western-European context, time moves, it's always moving and we're always running out of time or we're always racing against it. Within some Native cultures time is seen and known as something which we move through. Time itself does not move, so there is no sense of running out of time or having to race against it. Time stands still.

What Does It Mean To Be Different?

To Be Different

I did not have the opportunity to meet with George personally, but I spoke with him on the phone a couple of times. He worked at the district office and I was directed to him to find answers to a couple of questions. When I asked George, "How many Native children are in this district?" I was told: "We don't

distinguish between the Native and the non-Native children. We treat them all the same."

When I asked him, "How many Native children are receiving special education services?" he repeated, "We treat them all the same."

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I asked Jeremy and Rose about cultural differences and they too suggested that it's all the same. "Do you think it is any different to be a Native student than a White student going to school?"

Respectively they answered, "I don't think so," and "Not really." They felt they were treated the same as others in the school.

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Theresa was quiet and shy. She was contained. I often wondered why someone so quiet and so shy would agree to get together for the purpose of telling stories. Building rapport took a long time and we talked about a lot of surface things.

As I reviewed the tapes over and over, I asked myself what am I supposed to hear? see? learn? from Theresa. Eventually, I came to see and hear and learn 'no difference.' Our talk was usually absent of Native culture and cultural connections.

One day I asked her, "Is school different for Native children?" It was almost like she had waited for the question as she responded quickly with, "No. I don't think so." She went on to describe that she didn't see a difference in the reserve schools and the public schools either. "They're the same. They do the same math. They use the same texts. They have the same classes." (As she spoke, I felt it was somewhat tragic that the Native schools were perceived as continuing in the same mould as the Western-European public schools, with appendages to reflect Native history and culture).

I asked myself: "Treat them all the same as who?" I shared this experience with an instructor at the university, and he suggested that the "who" I was looking for was representative of the dominant culture and the notion that "we treat them all the same" was in reference to "we treat

them all like White, male, middle-class Caucasians."

Within this realm of Eurocentric authority, the message is one of sameness. The notion of "emphasizing similarities - rather than differences -- among cultures" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990c, p. 362) directs the education of children and suggests that educators and authoritative agencies continue to support a structure of intolerance for the differences of people from other cultures. Section 15.1 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that;

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Although the intent may be to serve everyone equally, I also see the implication to serve everyone to the same rules, standards and laws of the dominant culture.

The children in this inquiry taught me that they are not just like everybody else. Amidst individual differences, there was also the presence of their cultural difference. Being Native did not appear as a piece or speck of their differences, but rather it rooted and encompassed their differences. When I heard their stories I asked, "How can we treat everyone the same when our experiences are not

the same and when those experiences come from one's culture, history, traditions, beliefs, values and the color of one's skin?" The notion of not treating Native children any different is the notion of not seeing Native children. It is the continued practice of assimilation; it makes one invisible if he/she is not the same as those of the dominant culture who maintain this ideology. To say that we are all the same is a denial of difference; a denial of an-other.

Most educational programs, be they special education or regular education programs, do not take into account the cultural differences of Native students and in this way we treat them all the same; we 'treat' them all to a Eurocentric 'special' program where cultural differences are predominantly stifled or ignored. However, when the childrens' cultural or learning differences are such that the dominant culture cannot comprehend them or can no longer ignore them, then these differences are looked upon as needing treatment. Treatment is the foundation of many special education programs and much of the special education research. The notion of treatment is born of the Western-European scientific behavioralist thought. The words 'treatment' or 'treating' conjure up the scientific notion that we can provide a treatment and consequently cure what ails them. The assumption behind "treating" Native children like all children creates the ill-usion that we can cure them of what ails them; the ill-usion that we can cure them

of being Native.

Aoki (cited in Hinds, 1994) also spoke of this notion as "equity" (p. 10). He cautioned that the danger in equity is that "it hides the differences between teacher and students." I share Barth's (1990) "vision of a good school as one that respects differences.... I would prefer my children to be in a school in which differences are looked for, attended to, and celebrated as good news, as opportunities for learning" (p. 514). The way in which all teachers (Native and non-Native) teach (not treat) may make a difference for First Nations' learners.

I find meaning in the words of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992), "if cultural identity does indeed play a role in how a child learns... as a teacher my responsibility goes far beyond treating people as equals" (p. 107). "What is fundamentally needed, Watts said, is for non-[Native] teachers, as well as society as a whole, to recognize that Native Indians are a different people" (Cocking, 1988, p. 6).

With Theresa I only touched the surface. However, one day she started opening and I saw, heard and felt another glimpse of her.

Theresa's best friend Marie "is half Native" and I asked Theresa if they ever "talk about being Native or about Native cultural things." She explained to me that she was the fairest in her family with European ancestry going back a couple of generations. If it wasn't for her last name, she didn't think anyone would really know.

Although Theresa spoke little about her Native

heritage, her words spoke loudly to me about a situation that encouraged the disappearance and absence of a Native identity. There was a sense of controlled silence in Theresa's story. Possibly at school, Native children do not want to be recognized by their Native heritage. Your being cannot be separated from your culture, but it can be smothered as the surface thickens. This is part of the controlled silencing; part of the history and continuation of assimilation in which differences are smothered. When differences are not acknowledged then the onus is on the students to comply to uniform expectations of the dominant culture. The focus is on sameness and the acceptance of sameness. It is an avoidance of differences that serves to accentuate an inability to accept people with their differences.

Theresa said she would like to meet again on Wednesday. She noted, "No one else really talks with me about being Native."

To Be Normal

During another conversation with Rose we were talking about St. Paul's (an old vacated mission school). Rose said, "It was just like a normal school."

"Normal:" it appeared obscurely within Rose's words.

Being normal is the turnkey criterion in deciding access to special education status. Tests for special education placement are 'norm' referenced. The integration

of special needs children was led by the notion of 'normal'ization (Cartwright, Cartwright & Ward, 1985). The general label for children with differences in special education is now 'atypical;' it used to be 'ab-normal.' This was the normal way; the dominant Western-European way. Through this research, I have grown to see and think about the assumptions of "What is normal?" and to recognize that I do not know what *normal* is within a Native context.

That which is interpreted as normal becomes the assumed. Assumptions are based on what one perceives as 'typical' or 'normal' and assumptions are rooted in the cultural ground from which we grow. When one learns about another culture, one begins to see one's own assumptions; some become more firmly planted, some begin to sprout, some continue to blossom, others get uprooted. I live with assumptions, ideals and values and with the need to find a relationship with the assumptions, ideals and values of the students whom I teach.

In education, departures from the 'norm' or from what is 'normal' are often seen as achievement and behavior problems rather than as cultural differences. Through 'deviance from the norm,' Native children are "frequently referred to special education, and are often misclassified as learning handicapped" (Correa & Tulbert, 1991, p. 22) or "behavior disordered" (p. 20). A repetitive cycle of placement in special education with attention paid to

achievement and behavior problems and the absence of culture is a pattern found in the special education of First Nations' children.

Some children function normally within their cultural setting and yet at school they are categorically labelled 'abnormal' (Winzer, Rogow & David, 1987). It is important to understand the beliefs that Native people have toward children with different needs in order to understand how Native communities would see the special programs that are offered to their children. Recognizing the diversity of cultures "from tribe to tribe and from clan to clan" (Locust, 1988, p. 317), Locust described beliefs which span the majority of tribal members. Of these she speaks of wellness through the harmony of mind, body and soul, and explains that traditionally, within many Native communities, children with differences in mind and body were still seen as whole children (Locust, 1988). They were accepted into their communities and given a purpose that was meaningful to the community and within the capabilities of the children (Locust, 1988). "Traditionally, teaching children who learned at a slower pace than others was as *normal* as teaching children who learned faster than others, and little difference was shown in the way they were treated" (Locust, 1988, p. 326, [italics added]). I find that Locust gives another meaning to the word 'normal'; one of being present with difference.

To Be Evaluated

Rose had just described a science unit test that she was preparing to study for during the next week.

I inquired, "Do you have any other tests coming up?"

"Ya, we have this really big test that goes in our files," and with a deep breath she added, "for life. Like I think it's a provincial one. It's some kind of test that is going to be there for life, in our files for life," she repeated. "That test is going to be the same week as our science unit test."

"What if you do really well or really poorly on that big test?"

"I don't know, [pause] it just goes in your file, that's all I know."

"What do they do with your files?"

"I guess, um, I'm not quite sure. They probably pass them down to each teacher, like to see if she'll fail or if she's going to go to the class that gets help and stuff."

"You think the test will tell them that?"

"Yep. Probably."

About a week later I met with Jeremy and Rose at lunch time. It was the same day that they wrote their Provincial Exam. Rose described the particulars of the test and Jeremy described how he went to the principal's office to write the test. When I asked him, "Why?" he said, "Because people won't cheat." Two other students in his class were given other exam writing locations; Charlie went to a small resource room upstairs and Carl went to the vice-principal's office. Jeremy, Carl and Charlie are the special education students in the class.

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In early June, I spoke to the assistant principal about Gloria's, Evelyn's and Colleen's attendance. He had no idea what was happening with Gloria and Colleen, but he suggested that Evelyn had to stay home and babysit a lot. He concluded that they would for sure be around for final exams from June 22 to June 24.

I kept in contact. All three students were absent from final exams.

Earlier I spoke of a principal who requested that ninety-eight percent of the students in his reservation

school be classified as mentally handicapped (in Gilliland, 1987). The classification of these children was based on a group mental ability test. The 'standard' way to be referred, classified and placed into special education is through failure to achieve in the regular program and failure of one or more 'standardized' tests. These tests are usually standardized according to the cultural and language standards of the dominant culture with an emphasis on White middle-class values and experiences. As more and more culturally diverse populations come through the school doors, it becomes evident that the standardized tests which once appeared suitable and representative of the 'normal' population are inappropriate (Reilly, 1991) and biased (Gilliland, 1987) measurements for children of other cultures. These tests are considered foreign in nature to children who are not part of the dominant culture.

Children with cultural differences are "most affected by the process of standardized testing" (Reilly, 1991, p. 51). Cummins (1986) suggested that until the cultural text of Native children is found within these tests, they will continue to legitimize the mislabelling of culturally different students as 'learning disabled' or 'slow learners' and "legitimize the disabling of minority students" (p. 29). This issue has been addressed in part through the creation of standardized tests for culturally different children (See Winzer, Rogow & David, 1987, p. 548). However, with

cultural diversity from one tribe to another (Locust, 1988), a generic 'Native' test is not going to suffice.

The extent to which cultural and linguistic differences impact on test performance remains undetermined (Winzer, Rogow & David, 1987, p. 542). It becomes important to be able to understand the linguistic and cultural determinants in the child's behavior and learning in order to ascertain whether there is a learning difference.

In the absence of understanding another culture or the influences of another language, "professionals may erroneously refer children to special education" (Correa & Tulbert, 1991, p. 23). The referral process itself is seen as a major factor in contributing to the disproportionate placement of culturally diverse/minority children in special education classes (Reilly, 1991). Cultural influences must be considered when children of another culture are being considered for special education placement. Nevertheless, these tests continue to provide the main and sometimes only determinant in whether a child is enrolled in a special education program.

To base educational placements of children on standardized tests also reflects the inherent belief that the problem is within the child's learning rather than in the situation, the test or in the teaching.

Earlier I asked Jeremy what he did in his special education reading class that day. Jeremy related how he was working on unit four and the two other students in the resource room were working on units five and

six.

"Ah... I just read about a turtle that races with a bear. The turtle went to see what was under the ice and the bear was slipping on the ice." Jeremy let his fingers race in one place across the tabletop to show the slipping action of the bear.

Rose turned the conversation slightly, "My scholastic books, like you order books from school, I got them today. I got Goosebumps and Horror Tales after the Midnight Hour." She expressed how she really likes reading horror novels, especially the Goosebump series. I asked Jeremy, "Do you ever read those kinds of horror stories?"

"I read Stephen King," he said.

The words came out, "You do? You read Stephen King?" But my mind was wondering how a student read a unit four story about a turtle and a bear at school, and then read Stephen King novels at home?

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Theresa always had a stack of books with her for her next classes. Amongst those books there was always a novel from the library.

Jeremy's, Rose's and Theresa's stories again reminded me of the lowered expectations held for Native children within school settings. Grossman (1991) suggested that lowered expectations by educators is a "form of conscious or unconscious prejudice in schools that is found in society as a whole" (p. 21). Children react to prejudice in many ways. At school, it may appear in various 'aberrant ways;' disruptive behavior, withdrawn behavior, tardiness and absenteeism, refusal to do homework, and/or dropping out (Grossman, 1991). Teachers and school administrators may not see the childrens' reactions as reactions to prejudice but rather as poor behavior and/or poor learning abilities. In this way, Grossman (1991) and Briscoe (1991) suggested that prejudice is another factor in the significantly

disproportionate numbers of Native children in special education programs. Grossman (1991) also informed us that "elimination of teacher prejudice is the first and most important step educators can take to ensure that only students who require special education services are referred to and accepted into special education programs and that once accepted, they receive culturally appropriate special education services" (p. 23).

To Fail at School

"I went to Lanzer school for one year in K5" [Selena explained to me that 'K' was for Kindergarten and '5' was for five years old]. "Then I went to Poplarwood for grade one and then I failed so I went there again.... Then I moved to Cardston again and that's when I went to Thickwood Elementary and then I failed again and my grandma put me back in grade four... and then we moved and I came here." Selena hopes to be in grade five next year, but she doesn't know if she will pass this year.

If the Native students' personal stories at school were not ones of failed grades, then they related stories of sisters or brothers who had failed.

Theresa and I were sitting side by side. We were under the shade of the big old poplar tree at the front of the school. It was a hot day and we began with talk about pink grapefruit slushes that could be purchased from the games and billiards place where Theresa spends most of her lunch hours.

That day we found ourselves in a discussion about failing at school. "Did you ever fail any grades?" I inquired after we talked about how hard she works at school.

"No. But my older brother and my older sister failed."

"Both of them?" I think the surprise was evident in my voice.

"Yes, they both failed grade seven."

Her older sister who is eighteen is now in grade eleven and her older brother who is seventeen years old is no longer at school. He was enrolled in grade ten this year and Theresa says her mom hopes that he goes back and finishes "because he can't go to the public school if he's over nineteen."

The story of education for First Nations' children is marred with similar tales of failure. Educational achievement rates average two to three years behind for children of Native heritage and staying in school usually increases this lag rather than shorten it (Bopp, 1989; Gilliland, 1987). Along with consistently lower educational achievement than non-Native peers, Native students also experience higher dropout rates (Brady, 1991; Briscoe, 1991; Correa & Tulbert, 1991; Courtney, 1986; Elofson & Elofson, 1988; Gilliland, 1987; Maheady, Mallette & Harper, 1991).

Perley (1993) suggested that a course of failure is set for Native students as the "education system adopted by the dominant group has not been geared to allow the colonized Aboriginal member to succeed in that system" (p. 125). If children come to school already feeling that they are dominated or inferior, they are predisposed to school failure (Ogbu, cited in Cummins, 1986).

To be in receipt of special education services is often interpreted as a sign of failure in the regular school system. Education often moves along at a certain pace determined by the majority of students in the class. Children who are not part of this majority and children who are absent often fall further and further behind.

Eventually and inevitably they are referred for special education services or they fail or drop out.

Where to go for junior high posed a dilemma for Jeremy. First he was going to go to the junior high school just down the road (Maple Avenue Junior High) and then he was going to go to Aspen Grove which is a school for students who have learning needs that are not met within the regular school. Aspen Grove has a proportionately high Native student population. He recently visited the school and the principal with his mom. But today, Jeremy was going to go to Maple Avenue again.

"Why do you think you'll go to Maple Avenue instead of Aspen Grove?"

"Well Aspen Grove is a pretty good school, because they start you off where you were before, so if you're stuck on math you have to go there for math, if you're stuck on language you could go to take language. It's the same thing at Aspen Grove and Maple Avenue."

A week later, Jeremy said that he would now be going to Aspen Grove. His mom had just signed some papers.

Jeremy's story brings into question the educational settings that are presented to students with perceived learning differences. In a recent special education newsletter (Scott, 1994), I read once again a plea for segregated special settings for those children who do not "meet the expectations of the regular school setting" (p. 14). Scott described these children as those "who fail to succeed... and who have an unacceptably negative impact on the school at large" (p. 14). Scott advocated a detached setting in which "their inevitable blunders become learning experiences" and where these students have "an opportunity to experience failures and successes in a safe and tolerant environment" (p. 14). Inadvertently, Scott had described the regular class setting as failing to be safe and

tolerant.

Instead of changing the foundations of intolerance and unacceptability found in 'regular' educational settings, Scott (1994) was advocating for a change in the physical setting. This change will not affect the foundations of an education embedded in intolerance and unacceptance. "Even the most sensitive of segregated situations contains a hidden curriculum of disempowerment" (Marsh, 1993, p. 129). Battiste (1994) proposed that changes to the foundations of schooling need to be based on openness, caring, introspection, spirituality and humbleness. In this way, we leave the dominant-dominated relationships which at present stifle the tolerance, acceptance and mutual respect of diversity. When we change the foundations of domination, then the inclusion of all children in regular classes may be realized and Jeremy's placement would not be a dilemma.

Cummins (1986) suggested that children who are not in harmony with their own cultural values and cultural identity are especially at risk of failure. More than twenty years ago, Whetung (1971) also suggested that improved achievement levels were seen when a culturally relevant curriculum was offered. A decade later, Harrison (1981) repeated Whetung's words and suggested that public education had remained a system of failure for Native children, through the continued denial of culture, values, customs, language and history.

Still another decade later, we hear these words echoed by Brady (1991), Briscoe (1991), Correa & Tulbert (1991), Fradd (1991) and Gleason (1991).

Cummins (1986) described a framework which enhances or disables students from dominated groups. Within this framework, the factors which influenced whether students were in enhancing or disabling relationships were the extent to which "the students' language and culture were incorporated into the school program." (p. 25). Cuban (cited in Correa & Tulbert, 1991) stated that "many culturally diverse students are failing in school because the dominant school culture ignores and devalues the students' own cultural backgrounds and seldom adapts to students' individual differences" (p. 22). "In order to reverse the pattern of widespread minority group educational failure, educators and policymakers are faced with both a personal and a political challenge" (Cummins, 1986, p. 33).

I see the failure of a Native child relative to absence; absence of the child, absence of culture and absence of language. Learning about one's culture in relation to another's in a mutually respectable way may provide opportunities for children of different cultures to succeed in schools. With the knowledge of the importance of cultural inclusion, educators are encouraged to reassess and redesign their programs and open to the possibilities of success for Native children.

To Learn From the Stories of Others

The stories of teaching, holism, learning, knowing, behavior, evaluation, failure, norms, family, law, abuse, racism, belief systems, language, culture, and history were the threads of this research. Through the writing and interpretations of the stories, the threads were woven together and patterns of absence, presence and difference were created. These patterns created an understanding of the experiences of the Native children who received special education services and who had a history of receiving special education services.

I have one more story to tell...

The student asked a question of the Native professor and the Native professor began to tell a story from his life. As he related his story, his voice soothed and rhythmically filled the classroom and his story became an envisioned dance upon the air.

When he was silent, the same student asked the same question that began the story. Others blinked to hold the moisture in their eyes and others wiped the tears from their cheeks.¹¹

The patterns of absence, presence and difference connect through the way in which each of us is being (away or before).

11. This story comes to me from a Native education class, University of Lethbridge, 1988. It is presented to illuminate the possibility of finding different interpretations and other ways of weaving the threads.

CHAPTER 5
THE THREADS COMING TOGETHER

Coming Home to My Learning

"Who are you?" someone asks.
"I am the story of myself," comes the answer.
(Momaday cited in Caduto & Bruchac, 1989, xvii).

The Native students' stories and my stories from past experiences were the re-collections and re-presentations of experiences that came together and the writing evolved to create a new story. It was a story that included learning about my culture; my self. It was a way of "being able to see oneself, one's own values, and one's society in a new light" (Baker, 1989, p. 303). Aoki (cited in Hinds, 1994) insightfully related, "whenever I write a story, I not only produce a narrative but I'm reproducing myself. The very narrating acts upon me, and I'm changing" (p.10). I attend to changing myself to act differently in the world.

Through this interpretive inquiry, I was given the experience of presence; 'being before' the Native children. From this experience I was learning to be open to other ways of seeing, knowing and understanding, and to be open to the possibilities of learning about and from Native children as a way to begin to design anew, a 'special' education for

First Nations' children. I would not know in other ways had these children not given these experiences to me; this was the *lived-curriculum* of this research.

Being present with the Native students was teaching me to be 'more' thoughtful and watchful of my words. This is a lesson which I need to continue to learn and practice in a conscious way, for the language I use is 'normally' the language of my culture; the Western-European culture. Now I try to find a language other than a language of dominance "to equalize power among us... to keep ourselves in check in whatever ways we have privilege" (Adair & Howell, 1993, p. 18). Despite best intentions, it is easy to fall into a language of dominance and it is hard work to "create a context which embraces diversity, in which no one is marginalized; [it is] a conscious and ongoing effort" (p. 18). Without being conscious of my words, it is difficult to hear what is so ingrained historically and within daily living.

I was also learning to attend differently to what I read. For example, in the statement which began with "the commission recommends that where Native children are enrolled in schools and/or school districts, Native peoples and school authorities [*italics added*]" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 58)... I read that the school has authority. Although the intent may be to work together, the way in which they work together is shadowed in a written language of dominance

where the implication is that the school has authority and the 'other' ("Native peoples") does not.

By attending and listening to the spoken language of others, I was also learning to attend and listen to my spoken language. "We see the world through the language that we speak" (Eiselein, 1993, p. 116).

Selena was late for school that morning. Her cousin, Darlene woke her late and once they were ready to leave they went by her uncle's to see if he had something with which they could make a lunch. They eventually got to school just after the morning recess.

I recalled, "You got there late, you missed recess, is that right?"

"Uh huh."

"But you got there. *That's a good thing.*"

Selena paused. "Uh... Oh... Yesterday, maybe Thursday, my cousin..."

I began to listen for my assumptions within my language. Words in this story like '*That's a good thing*' hold many assumptions. "For those in the dominant culture, traditional practices are simply commonsense assumptions about what is best, right, and good" (Briscoe, 1991, p. 13). Now, I reconsider saying '*That's a good thing,*' as I am hesitant to judge another's experience; hesitant to make the commonplace assumption that getting to school is a good thing. (Perhaps it is not a good thing for Selena.)

I also began to attend to how language controls, categorizes and judges. Saying '*That's a good thing*' did not allow for discussion, I was judging the situation and passing it off. When I said '*That's a good thing,*' I assumed that the child agreed with me and that I was right.

I did not attend to other possibilities for understanding this situation and I did not attend to the possibilities that would challenge my assumption. Another example is found in my writing. Throughout this thesis as I wrote 'our classrooms,' it was intended to be inclusive of the teacher and all the children in the classroom; 'our classrooms' did not mean the *teachers' classrooms*. If the word *our* was interpreted in the sense of 'teachers' then it was misinterpreted as a language of control and dominance.

I also began to see how we *show* the world through the language that we speak. I question whether our actions speak louder than our words and suggest that it may be easier to see our actions than to hear our words. There is the possibility that if we listen carefully to the words we speak we will know and see our actions.

A week after Jeremy shared that his grandmother passed away we had arranged one last meeting. It was a hot day and our idea to celebrate at the Dairy Queen turned out to be a great idea. "Nice hair cut," I commented as we walked from the school.

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I sensed a tone of disgust in Rose's voice as she told of her friend who played a role in a video entitled *Where the Spirit Lives*; "They cut off her hair and only gave her seventy-five dollars."

I recently read that in many Native communities a person's hair may hold special meaning and sometimes the cutting of one's hair is done in connection with someone's passing. With exasperation, I paused when I read this. "I

didn't know." But this is my point. My consciousness is set by the limits of my knowledge and my culture. To act in a conscious way is to act in a way to expose and expand one's knowing and one's ways of knowing.

At times, I was 'being in the presence' of my own ignorance. I came to see "the discontinuity between values embedded in the curriculum and those of the Native culture" (Pertusati, 1988, p. 12) and I came to acknowledge how little I am "versed in the values and practices of the Native American culture" (p. 12). To act in a conscious way is to act in a way that recognizes one's ignorance. I became cognizant of the privilege of seeing and knowing this ignorance and learning from it.

Reorienting Myself to the Question:
What is a 'Special' Education for First Nations' Children?

I began this inquiry with a desire to inform program design for a 'special' education for First Nations' children who received special education services and who had a history of receiving special education services. In the beginning my picture was filled with children framed within the present practices, knowledge and structures of special education.

This research invited me to stop and carefully reconsider the strategies, techniques and resources which I brought to teaching in the context of whether they were considerate of Native children. However, I found no 'new'

prescription - no new tricks, strategies, nor techniques - for the 'special' education of First Nations' children. Knowing more facts, applying a new technique or a new resource was not going to be the way of designing a 'special' education for Native children.

The Coming Together of the Threads to Create A New Meaning of a 'Special' Education for First Nations' Children

I came to see special education as a cultural (and social) construct of the dominant culture. Special education is formed and acted out of a certain way of knowing and seeing children in the world. I recognized special education as a construct which finds meaning in an unaccepting and disrespectful way of being with children. I questioned whether a world view of respect and acceptance for children would create the categorized and marginalized way of special education that we have today. Today's issues that encompass our practice of special education (ie. issues of inclusion, integration and segregation) would be non-issues in a different way of seeing children.

In doing this study, I eventually stopped and abandoned the notion of special education as a set or separate program, class or curriculum for learners with learning or behavior differences. The threads of program design which were woven in the previous chapter showed me that the design of a 'special' education program for Native children needs to invite Native children into the classroom (picture) where

the expression of one's culture and oneself is celebrated. I am enlivened to see and understand a 'special' education for First Nations' children in this different way.

Through this research, I also came to see how it would be natural and holistic to have the regular, special and Native education programs weave together to become one. I also came to see that as educators we work against this natural weave of learning when we create separate frames and pictures of education. Perhaps a woven texture of educational programs will make education 'special' for First Nations' learners.

I came to see a-new 'special' education for First Nations' children as one which would recognize and respect their presence and their differences. Respect is a way in which we relate to one another. It comes from seeing and accepting each others' differences. To recognize, accept and show respect for Native students is acted upon through welcoming and valuing their presence. Listening to their stories is one way of showing respect; of attending to their presence.

We learn from experience (Correa & Tulbert, 1991; Fradd, 1991; Shor & Freire, 1987) and each of us has experiences which are different.

I remember a Native speaker who recalled her grade four teacher who taught all about the Haida Indians, thinking that the Native children in her class would really have a connection with the lessons. However, the Native students in the class were predominantly from the Chilcotin tribe.

She commented that the teacher might as well have been teaching about the Greeks.

A 'special' education for First Nations' children needs to be guided by a consciousness that Native childrens' experiences are different and by a sensitivity to see and understand those experiences and differences. An awareness of what is taught, an attunement to the diversity that exists within Native cultures and an understanding of one's own pedagogic experiences with Native children are also needed in the design of a 'special' education.

Jeremy was going to a Powwow this weekend out by the reserve with his mom and his grandma.

Later in our conversation, Jeremy related that his grandma passed away and relatives were preparing for her funeral. I said, "But this is another grandma, not the one you're going to the Powwow with?"

"This is her," his words flowed.

"This is her?" I repeated with question, "but (I hesitated and then questioned again) did she die?"

"Yep."

In an effort to make my sense of this, I asked, "So how will she be with you at the Powwow then?"

He reassured me "she'll be with us... she'll be around... she'll be there. Cause everytime I turn around I always feel somebody, behind me, I turn around and there's nobody there. Or else I feel somebody, like my arms get pretty... (he seemed to leave that thought), like I get a feeling that somebody's behind me, beside me or in front of me, around me."

"This is your grandma," I asked.

"Yeah," he affirmed.

I was initially a bit confused within our conversation. My confusion came from not knowing Jeremy's beliefs that the spirits of those who passed away were with him. Diversity through cultural learning should include an understanding of the beliefs that the Native cultures hold in the context of understanding their educational experience.

There is a need for reframing what a 'special' education is. This reframing must extend the boundaries of learning differences to include cultural differences and in the same breath, extend the boundaries to include respect and acceptance. Should we change our way of seeing and knowing special education, the picture will change to meet the unique needs of First Nations students and they will be present.

To the Educators of First Nations' Children

The words which close this research are e'special'ly for educators:

- be open to learning from those who have the authority of lived experience. They are our teachers.
- listen to the stories of First Nations' children. Zabel (1991) teaches that children who come from different cultural, ethnic, or language backgrounds will "feel a sense of welcome and acceptance when stories from their lives become a part of the daily routine, and we will all be the richer for the shared history we experience" (p. 34).
- be aware that teachers within the dominant culture relate to children from that place and be sensitive to learning how that place relates to the First Nations' children.
- challenge the present foundations and structures of

special education as dominant cultural constructs and reframe the thinking of what a special education is for First Nations' children.

- be open to saying, "I never thought of that."
- be open to different ways of seeing and knowing.

This inquiry began to deepen my understanding of a 'special' education for First Nations' children and it also began to affect a deeper understanding of my values, beliefs and pedagogy. This is the story and the learning within this inquiry. I share Van Maanen's (1988) sense that "knowing a culture, even our own, is a never-ending story" (p. 119). I sense that it is a never-ending story of experiences and with each new experience there is the possibility of new learning and understanding.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Attendance Records for Gloria, Colleen and Evelyn
- Appendix 2: Letter of Consent
- Appendix 3: A Final Note on the Nature of Phenomenological Research
- Appendix 4: Copyright Permission

Appendix 1

Attendance Records for Colleen, Evelyn and Gloria

Colleen

Registered August, 1993 to June 14, 1994

Unknowns = 61
Truants = 2
Excused = 8
Lates = 31

Total absenteeism = 71 days
Total lates = 31

Evelyn

Registered August, 1993 to June 14, 1994

Unknowns = 110
Truants = 1
Excused = 0
Lates = 24

Total absenteeism = 111 days
Total lates = 24

Gloria

Registered Jan, 1994 to May 31, 1994

Unknowns = 73
Truants = 1
Excused = 0
Lates = 15

Total absenteeism = 74 days
Total lates = 15

Appendix 2

Letter of Consent

Letter to Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

Introduction

My name is Ingrid Pearson and I am a graduate student at the University of Lethbridge. I have moved to the Lethbridge area from British Columbia where I was a special education teacher and a Native education coordinator. I am preparing to do research for my thesis. I am interested in researching the experiences of First Nations' students who are receiving special education services or who have a history of receiving special education services. I hope that through this research I will learn more about teaching First Nations' students. The value of this research for your child would come through the sharing of the research with other teachers.

Invitation

This is an invitation for your child to be among a group of First Nations' students who can help me with my research. Your child will become my teacher. It is my intent to meet with the students as a group on four occasions and invite them to share their "school stories." I will be interested in listening to them speak about school and the special education services they receive or have received. Through the audio taping of their stories, I hope to learn what is important to First Nations' students in their learning.

Rights to confidentiality and anonymity will be respected. Your child's name or any identifying characteristics will not appear in any of the research, and meeting places will not be named. I will also be respectful of your child as a learner and be sensitive to your child's cultural heritage. If at any time you or your child no longer wish to take part in this study, you have the right to withdraw.

If you would like to speak with me please phone 329-2279 or my home phone number, or if you wish to speak with my supervisor Cynthia Chambers, please call 329-2271. Robert Runte, chairperson of the Human Subjects Research Committee can also be contacted at 329-2454.

Consent

Please indicate your consent for your child to take part in this research on the consent form and return it to the school.

Thank you

Consent Form for Research With First Nations' Students Learning
Return to school - April 28, 1994

I agree to allow my child _____, to take part in this study.
I do not agree to allow my child _____, to take part in this study.

Name _____ Signature _____
Date _____

Comments

If you would like a copy of the completed research, please check.

Appendix 3

A Final Note on The Nature of Phenomenological Research

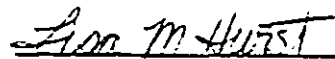
Through a phenomenological research approach there was the possibility of challenging the assumptions and actions of the dominant culture. When the researcher is situated in this culture, the researcher necessarily challenges their own assumptions and actions. At times this was very uncomfortable and I recognized this as the 'tensionality' of this research. It was like sitting on the edge (possibly this is the marginal edge where the dominant culture and the Native culture meet). The edge was the place where 'control' and 'authority' needed to be relinquished. The edge was the place where the comfort of 'knowing' met the uncertainty of not knowing. But moving from this edge allowed me to have "encounters with those who have developed under different conditions and backgrounds" (Vonnegut cited in Baker, 1989, p. 303), and I recognized that I was learning about my own pedagogy, my culture and myself.

Appendix 4

Copyright Permission

Copyright Permission

I hereby give Ingrid Elaine Pearson permission to copy, in whole or in part, *Who I Am*; written by Lisa M. Hurst.



Lisa M. Hurst
Author