

Fiddling with a Culturally Responsive Curriculum

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Abstract

The discourse on education for Aboriginal people has long been limited to a curriculum of cultural assimilation often resulting in an erosion of self-esteem and disengagement. Consequently, this research puts forth narratives of how fiddle programs in northern Manitoba work as a culturally responsive curriculum that in turn address such curricular erosions. As a research methodology, Metissage afforded me pedagogical opportunities to weave the various perspectives of community members, parents, instructors, and former students into an intricate story that attempts to represent some of their social, cultural and historical experiences within the north. Braiding stories of the historical and present impacts of fiddle playing reveals the generative possibilities of school fiddle programs in Canadian Indigenous communities. In addition to building intergenerational bridges, the stories put forth in this thesis demonstrate how the fiddle has become a contemporary instrument of social change for many communities across northern Manitoba.

Keywords: Aboriginal, Native, Metis, education, culture, belonging, identity, fiddle, music, culturally responsive curriculum, Indigenous

Introduction

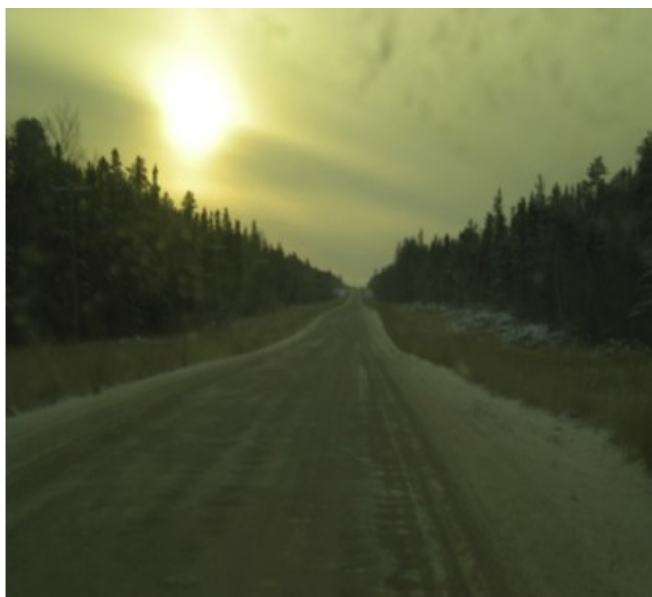


Figure 1: Gravel road to Cormorant

The ground was covered with a very light dusting of snow. And the record breaking temperature outside affirms for me how raw life in the north can be. North of the 54th parallel lies a part of our nation that the majority of Canadians only hear about through picture books and the media. Up around these parts the winter cold is known to be so raw that vehicle tires freeze square, making winter driving a

challenge. Mid-December, that last week of school before Christmas holidays, there were school concerts nearly every night of the week. On this particular Wednesday mid-afternoon, the sun was barely above the horizon, as the shortest and darkest day of the year loomed. My sons and I were headed to the nearby community of Cormorant for their school Christmas concert. Although I had topped up the truck with diesel fuel prior to leaving town, a look down at the instrument panel on the truck told me I better stop at Wally's Place, a convenience store located at Clearwater Lake. Aware that there was nowhere to buy diesel fuel in Cormorant, and with the extreme bitter cold we were experiencing I knew I would have to go outside and run the truck part way through the concert to keep it warm, or risk it not starting. As we drove across the bridge into Cormorant daylight slipped slowly into the inhospitable darkness of

winter. Meanwhile we found our way to the community school. Even though we were early, the already crowded parking lot forced us to find a spot up the road to park the truck. I was reminded in that moment that it was not that many years ago that there was no road access to Cormorant. The primary way to get in and out of the community was by train.

As soon as we walked in the door of the school, I was surprised with a warm hug from a former student I know from Frontier Collegiate. She now works at the community school and has children of her own. We took a few minutes to catch up on news. I was comforted and warmed by the greetings that continued over the course of the evening. Many of the young girls went to the high school in Cranberry Portage when Gunthar was just a baby. They are all shocked to see how much he has grown up. It looked like nearly the entire community is crowded into the small school

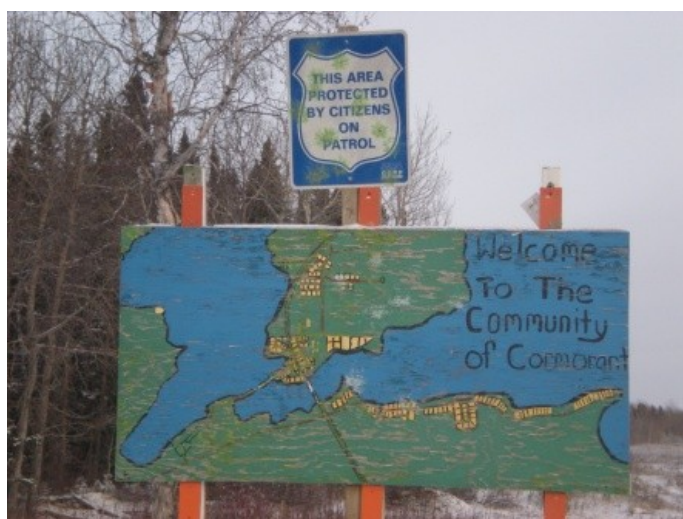


Figure 2: Welcome to Cormorant community sign, Cormorant, MB

gymnasium. There is a bustle of coming and going throughout the concert. It is obvious that this school is a central part of the community. And I was moved not only by the warm greetings, but also by the sense of community that resonated through that small school that cold winter evening.

Background

Education for Aboriginal people has long been limited to a curriculum of cultural assimilation resulting in the historical erosion of their self-esteem and disengagement from the colonial public systems of schooling. “Today Aboriginal children, as a group,” Ball (2008) asserts “have a diminished quality of life due to the negative impacts of colonization on their parents” (p. 8). The historical cost is foretold not in lost dollars, but rather recounted in human *lives*. Consequently, Aboriginal youth as Albert and Fiddler (2008) remind us,

Are over-represented in all risk groups for the *most* devastating conditions of life in Canada including: poverty, unemployment, illness, marginalization and incarceration. The far-reaching intergenerational effects of residential school abuse and forced relocation have all played a role in the tragedy of this situation in Canada for Aboriginal peoples. (p. 32)

In turn, research has established that schools which respect and support a child’s culture with a culturally responsive curriculum demonstrate significantly better outcomes in terms of educating Aboriginal youth (Maina, 1997; Battiste, 2002). The literature review of this thesis (Chapter One) aims to enhance understanding of the historical context of Aboriginal education in Canada. This is followed by an elaboration of the discourse on the key themes identified as fundamental to student well-being (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2005). The literature review concludes by tying the emergent themes both to each other and to this project.

The research put forth in this thesis seeks to understand what the impacts of the fiddle as a culturally responsive curriculum are for Aboriginal students. The fiddle has a rich and vibrant history among Aboriginal people in Canada dating back to the time of contact and the evolution of the fur trade. The historical tones of this are expanded on within the literature review, (Chapter One) to better appreciate the relevance of this project.

My motivation and interest for this research stems from prior experiences of working on the 'front lines' with Aboriginal students as an educational assistant for seventeen years.



Figure 3: Gunthar and Quenten 2006

Working within these spaces, I have witnessed firsthand how public education is not meeting their needs. This knowledge goes beyond statistics and numbers and the complex underlying reasons. Rather, it consists of real names and *storied lives* that make my commitment to the work I am doing that much stronger. Additionally, I continue to experience

the *daily tragic loss of* human lives within the often 'out of sight' and 'out of mind' remote Aboriginal communities located in different parts of Canada, as I maintain contact with friends and family in northern Manitoba. Consequently, I am updated on a regular basis with tragic news of suicidal deaths or accidents.

My family did not fully become aware of the notion of 'Aboriginal education' until we moved to Ottawa in 2006 from a small rural community in northern Manitoba called Cranberry Portage. Here is where I find myself in the midst of the conundrum of being a non-Aboriginal parent of two Aboriginal children—for their father is Metis¹/Cree. Furthermore, my sons easily pass as 'white.' Therefore to me, there is always an underlying question of 'does it really matter'? Do others need to know of their Aboriginal ancestry? Ironically, being Aboriginal is not

¹ Note that Métis is written without an accent over the "e." This is done to signify that the term is being used to encompass all mixed-descent people. The reason for this choice is that "Métis" typically implies specific historical circumstance associated with French and Catholic influences that originated with the eastern trade routes prior to the fall of New France and the Scottish takeover of the St. Lawrence trade. The term "half-breed," also known as the "country born," has historically referred to English and Scottish mixed-bloods who came out of the Hudson's Bay Company trade. I use the term to be inclusive of all mixed ancestry people in the area who were members of the regional extended family system (Macdougall, 2008). My son's paternal Great-Great Grandfather Walter C. Lundie was born in 1865 in England.

something we discussed at home in Manitoba. Rather, it is something we *lived* as a family. In this new urban place, there was and is a separation from our former cultural comfort zones. Additionally, there is a constant renegotiation of understanding how we might find our sense of belonging within this urban place and its respective Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Yes, how we might ‘belong?’ Or will we? As a result, this thesis project has grown into more than questioning the absence of culturally responsive education for ‘other’ Aboriginal students. Now I question its absence on behalf of my two sons. Along with this I question what kinds of challenges they may face or have to negotiate in their lifetime as Metis Canadians. Through a personal reflection Chapter Two reveals some of the deeper issues that compel me. In this sense, I situate myself as the researcher. What follows is a detailed description of the methodology that guided this thesis project.

Through our trials and tribulations of adjusting to this urban environment, the fiddle remains central to our sense of what Chambers (2008) calls *way finding*. “In a curriculum of place,” Chambers (2008) makes clear, “the activities in which we engage children are the very activities they need to dwell in this place, to be nourished by the place and to nourish it”(p. 120). As part of this thesis project, I will reflect back on our involvement with the Frontier Fiddle Program as a family prior to moving to Ottawa. In turn, I will seek to understand what cultural impacts the fiddle has had on the life of my two sons. Although no such fiddle program exists anywhere in Ottawa, within, or outside of school programming, they continue to play the fiddle.

Drawing on Metissage the historical tones of the fiddle in northern Manitoba communities is the starting point for the *findings* section of this thesis. Chapter Three, the

stories, [findings] are a blend of narratives and perspectives from across the north. These in turn introduce the fiddle as a contemporary culturally responsive curriculum. The woven narratives flow into to some of the deeper impacts that are an outcome of the current school programs as shared by the storytellers. It is here that it became very apparent that this is about much more than music lessons. The final portion of the thesis (Chapter Four) is a discussion guided by the stories presented as they connect to my analytical framework; the *Circle of Courage*. This in turn leads to concluding thoughts and future directions of how we might consider the fiddle as a culturally responsive curriculum.

CHAPTER ONE - LITERATURE REVIEW

Situating Historical Context of Aboriginal Education and the Fiddle

We are what we know. We are, however, also what we do not know. If what we know about ourselves-our history, our culture, our national identity-is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness then our identity-both as individuals and as Americans-is fragmented.

(Pinar cited by Dion, 2004, p. 55)

Prior to discussing the fiddle in the contemporary context, it is first imperative to understand the following more clearly: 1) The historical impact education has had on First Nation and Metis people in Canada post-contact; 2) The repercussions of colonization and attempts at assimilation through education; and 3) The historical and cultural significance of the fiddle to Metis and First Nations people. These historical perspectives are pertinent for understanding why documenting a contemporary school fiddle program may be relevant to the Aboriginal education community from a research perspective.

Education and Colonization of First Nation and Metis People in Canada

As a society and a nation, for Canadians, there remains a great deal of unpacking to do with respect to understanding our historical relationship with Indigenous nations who have since time immemorial inhabited this land. In this section I briefly review the literature on how public education and its respective colonial curriculum have had a devastating impact on Aboriginal people and communities.

In order to discuss Canada's Aboriginal people, we must first understand that they were here long before the time of contact and the Europeans (Boyko, 1998). Archaeological evidence along with local stories tell us that for example Manitoba and Quebec have been the ancestral homeland to the Cree for several thousand years (Whidden, 2007, p. 30). Prior to the arrival of Europeans, for Aboriginal peoples, education was not only a lifelong process, but necessary for survival. Furthermore learning and knowledge was shared (Barman, Hebert & McKaskill, 1987; Hare, 2003; Kirkness, 1992). It was at the time of contact with missionaries as early as the 1600's that Indigenous communities were initially exposed to the institutions of colonial education (Hare, 2003). The literature repeatedly documents that the goal of both the missionaries and colonial governments was to eliminate the Native culture (Boyko, 1998; Ing, 1991). Furthermore, the federal government and missionaries collectively believed they were doing the Indians a favour by eradicating their "savage" cultures. For example in 1913 Indian Affairs Minister Duncan Campbell Scott declared:

The happiest future for the Indian race is absorption into the general population and this is the object of the policy of our government...Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic. (Boyko, 1998, p. 176)

By 1951, when the government realized their goals were not being achieved, the residential schools began to close and educational policy shifted in turn toward a curriculum of assimilation through integration and indoctrination (Boyko, 1998; Hare, 2003).

Reviews of Aboriginal education attest to the fact that history continues to repeat itself. Aboriginal children continue to be enrolled in educational systems that are paternalistic, racist

and do little to address their needs (Kirkness, 1992; Battiste, 2002). Moreover, as Whidden (2007) stresses,

Unfortunately, the Native personality has been a poor fit with an institution where performance is assessed largely by ability to meet deadlines. Our systems are unforgiving when it comes to meeting individual needs and personal upsets: while this may be a hurdle to the non-Native, it has often been a complete block to Native students who may opt to quit a situation so alien to their inclination. (p. 13)

There continue to be long-term consequences and costs to society as a result of the colonial education system's reluctance to accommodate the cultural needs of Aboriginal students. These negative repercussions of colonization can no longer be discussed nor perceived as strictly an Aboriginal issue (Helin, 2006; Alfred, 2005; King, 2003; Ralston Saul, 2008). A recent report released by the *Centre for the Study of Living Standards* (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe & Cowan, 2009) underscores the fact that education is *vital* to the holistic well-being and economic viability of not only Aboriginal communities, but also to Canadian society as a whole. Unquestionably, these authors argue that what is at stake for improving education is the need to shift education toward becoming *more* adaptable to the social, cultural, and economic needs of Aboriginal learners (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe & Cowan, 2009). There is strong and continued support that change is essential, but evidence of change remains slow.

Colonial Aftermath...

Theorists contend that we live in a post-colonial world, implying that we have somehow risen above the problematic of colonialism (Wane, 2009). When having this discussion, I reflect on

the questions raised by Beck, Ilieva, Scholefield & Waterston (2007), “*What counts as knowledge? And Who decides*” (p. 15)? Further to this, Linda Tuhwai Smith (Battiste, 2002) reminds researchers to ask,

Who decided that the ‘post’ should be put there? Since when has there been a ‘post’ of colonialism?...a lot of Indigenous communities are uncomfortable with that term and it's partly about this idea that suddenly our history can be named. Suddenly we have gone from colonization to a postcolonial world. (p. 169)

Nonetheless, if one listens closely, and ‘reads’ between the lines, the post-colonial discourse continues to be colonial. “Dismissive critique based in cries of essentialism,” as Haig-Brown (2008) stresses, “has allowed scholars immersed in Western/Euro-Canadian (and American) discourses to continue to relegate Indigenous thought to some marginal space while colonial relations proceed apace and *unexamined*” (p. 16). The reality is that the colonial processes of domination and imposition is just as real for Indigenous peoples of the world today as they were over 100 years ago (Wane, 2009). Education, historically, was a means to eradicate Aboriginal people’s cultures, to oppress, subjugate and marginalize (Weenie, 2008). As a result, the reality of life challenges and barriers to learning faced by Aboriginal youth continue to exceed those faced by non-Aboriginal youth (Cappon, 2008; Pawlick, 2004; Albert & Fiddler, 2008). Additionally, there continues to remain an educational gap in Canada between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Richards & Hove & Kemi, 2008). This narrative continues to reverberate throughout Aboriginal communities living within the borders of Canada.

Brokenleg identifies cultural alienation as the number one reason for Aboriginal students to leave school early (personal communication, November 27, 2007, Ottawa, ON). Currently provincial and local education authorities are paying increasing attention to

Aboriginal culture in an effort to reverse these negative trends (Nikkel, 2006). Recognizing and moving Indigenous knowledge from the margins, as Haig-Brown (2008) expresses, opens the possibility to deepen our work in intellectually productive and practical ways. Furthermore, including Aboriginal perspectives into curricula will be a benefit not only to Aboriginal peoples, but also to all Canadian people. “All students are denied,” Labelle and Peden (2003) stress, “a quality education if they are not exposed to the contributions made by *all* people in the development of the country in which they live” (p. 1). “The fact of the matter is,” as Helin (2006) attests, “neither Aboriginal people nor the Canadian public can afford another lost generation of youth” (p. 30). Moving forward, I introduce the historical connections between the fiddle and the Aboriginal communities who play it.

History of the Fiddle as a Communal Praxis

My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back.

(Louis Riel, July 4, 1885, Manitoba Metis Federation)

All accounts of the history of the fiddle among Aboriginal groups trace its beginnings to the time of contact and the emergence of the fur trade in Canada (Coyes, 2002; Chretien, 1998; Dueck, 2007; Lederman, 1986; Paquin, Prefontaine, & Young, 2003; Whidden, 2007; Dorion-Paquin, 2002). The fur trade routes ran east to west and from the south to the icy waters of the north bringing tunes and other cultural artifacts simultaneously in both directions (Lederman, 1986, p. 15). The music flowed through the waterways in the same way fish spawned along the Canadian river routes (Coyes, 2002, p. 4). The Scots employed with the Hudson's Bay Company

as well as the rival Northwest Company French coureurs de bois employees introduced the fiddle and their respective music to the Indigenous people with whom they traded (Paquin, Prefontaine, & Young, 2003, p.13). Pressures by Europeans for furs led to many increased opportunities between the groups including exchanges of song. Working at trading posts the Cree would have heard the fiddles of the Hudson's Bay Company men and the fur traders and "willingly embraced the European fiddle music and made it into their own"



Figure 4: Fiddle

(Whidden, 2007, p. 48). Historical records as early as 1611 document the cordial and mutually beneficial relationship exchanges between the British and Aboriginals (Whidden, 2007, p. 49). Song, story, and dance were vital to the well-being of the early voyageurs at a time when living conditions were very harsh (Whidden, 2007, p. 48). In the historic development of Canada, the fiddle and the fur trade go together like the paddle and canoe.

Not long after the arrival of Europeans, Aboriginal people were creating their own music, songs and styles of playing the fiddle. The Scottish from the Orkney Islands had a particularly strong influence and the fiddle music transcended the boundaries of the spoken language and culture. Consequently its performed utterances of place and culture were a seamless fit for Aboriginal communities and it was in turn quickly adopted. History books are marked with tales of how storytelling, music and dancing were a way of passing the time and celebrating life when away from friends and family for extended periods of time. On the prairies or in the bush people gathered around campfires where songs and fiddles would be

played late into the night (Dorion-Paquin, 2002). Lussier and Sealey (1978) illustrate a lively description of early accounts of fiddle playing in Canada:

Dancing was a favourite form of recreation. The Metis learned from their mothers the dances of the Plains Indians and the reels and square dances of Scotland from their fathers. They combined the intricate footwork of the Indians with the Scottish forms. The fiddle, a favourite of the Scots, became the beloved instrument of the Metis. Lacking the finances to buy imported European fiddles, they quickly learned to make their own from maple wood and birch bark. Some travelers sarcastically noted that lacking other instruments with which to tune their fiddles, the Metis used the cry of the loon and the bellow of a rutting moose. (p. 18)

Whether on a cart brigade [Red River] or paddling the rivers and waterways of Canada for up to eighteen hours a day, storytelling and song helped men keep their spirits up. For early voyageurs song also helped keep time while paddling or rowing. Between 1826 and 1835 William Sinclair, Metis Chief Factor² at York Factory, developed a new watercraft known as the 'York boat', a much sturdier vessel that carried larger cargo loads than the birch bark canoe (Dorion-Paquin, 2002, p. 8). A York boat crew was generally made up of a steersman, a bowsman [who fended off rocks with a large pole and guided the boat through fast water] and eight rowers. Many of the journeys that these boats traversed were often longer than one thousand miles and included portaging heavy loads numerous times. It was common that there was a fiddle or two and lots of men who could play it. Dorion-Paquin (2002) depicts the animated story of one gentleman who recalled, "In one instance there was a boat's crew, where the fiddle was passed down from the steersman to the bowsman, and every man in the boat could play it" (p. 8). Anecdotes similar to these are found throughout the historical records of the fiddle in Canada.

² The Hudson Bay lie like a big circle in the middle of Canada so during the summer months when the ice melted the company ships could bring supplies to the forts or factories (named for the HBC person or factor, trading items for furs) as they were referred to, and pickup the furs to be taken back to England. Canada history, <http://www.canadahistory.com/sections/eras/clashofempires/hbc.htm>

Although the fiddle was a new voice to Indigenous oral histories, it followed the same music traditions as the hunters' songs (Whidden, 2007). The fiddle tunes changed to fit the Cree sound ideal, with its steady rhythm phrased not by metres and silences but endlessly worded syllable patterns. This differs from the Scots fiddling for example that are characterized by regular metres such as the three-beat waltzes or four-beat reels. In contrast Native fiddling, does not obey these metrical divisions, although it does have a strong one-beat pulse. Moreover:

Scots fiddle tunes are structured into regular divisions of thirty-two bars, which are subdivided into four-bar phrases. Cree tunes are different: they add beats, especially at cadences (the concluding notes), they subtract beats by overlapping phrases; and they like to elaborate the first phrase of the melody. This often results in phrases of three or five beats instead of the Scottish four...Furthermore, Old-time Cree fiddlers use short bow strokes, one note per stroke which gives the music a strong percussive sound. (Whidden, 2007, p. 58)³

Each fiddler had his own version of the tunes, which they changed between and even during performances. The distinct Cree fiddling was so innovative and unique it became known as a new genre of music (Whidden, 2007, p. 57). Fiddling was congruent with the Cree existing ways of cultural learning, and the portable instrument was easily transported across the land.⁴

Stories resound of the life of renowned fiddle player, Frederic Genthon (1857-1941) who was born at the Red River Settlement in 1857 and worked for the Hudson's Bay Company as a fur trader at Moose Lake, Manitoba for many years.⁵ The success of his trading post was attributed to his exceptional fiddle playing ability. His fiddle music and fur trading career were so intertwined that many trappers went out of their way to take him their best catch

³ Anne Lederman (1987) classifies Ojibwe fiddling as syncretic music: the combination of two different musics to make a new one.

⁴ Whidden believes it possible that Canada's northerners had a fiddle-like instrument long before seventeenth-century contact. It may explain the receptivity of the Cree, and other groups such as the Inuit, to the violin (Whidden, 2007, p. 171).

⁵ In 1940, Genthon recorded the oldest known version of the Red River Jig in order to preserve the old Metis style (Dorion-Paquin 2002, p. 7; Lederman, 1987, p. 60).

(Lederman, 1987, p. 3). "Nobody had anything," recounts Manitoba fiddler Lawrence 'Teddy Boy' Houle, life was hard, and people had few belongings. "If you had a fiddle," Houle continues, "my goodness, you were a millionaire" (Lederman, 1987, p. 3). Many old time fiddle players remember using spruce gum for rosin in place of store bought rosin and snare wire to repair damaged strings (Dorion-Paquin, 2002, p. 14). People were resourceful, and fiddles and fiddle players were treasured.

The song and dance promoted a sense of community and identity for a semi-nomadic people who cherished every opportunity to meet with family and friends (Dorion-Paquin, 2002).

At the fur trade posts, fiddle playing was a common feature of the entire social regime. Accounts by missionaries and fur traders and the artists' sketches indicate that the gregarious Metis were passionate about fiddling, dancing and celebrating. In addition to this, it is said that every Metis family had a fiddle player, who, on a mere moment's notice, could play a tune if everybody was in the mood to celebrate. (Paquin, Prefontaine, & Young, 2003, p. 14)

Additionally, Lederman (1986), Whidden (2007) and Dueck (2007), all recorded narratives of Aboriginal elders in numerous prairie communities who conveyed the significant presence of fiddling across the west. These animated narratives recount that fiddle music may have been *the* major social activity among much of the Aboriginal population for more than 200 years (Lederman, 1986). When stories come out, it is evident that the fiddle roots are deep and rich in Aboriginal communities.

These lively and vibrant exchanges are in contrast to the next chapter of Canadian history where prohibition became a more common theme. The Honourable Justice Murray

Sinclair Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada⁶ reverberated a dark side of Canada's past. Sinclair spoke of how from 1880 until 1951 it was *illegal* to practice Indian culture or wear Indian garb in Canada. If an Indian wanted to own land or go to university, they were forced to give up their "First Nation" status (Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, personal communication, October 15, 2010, Ottawa, ON). Furthermore, former Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, and Governor of the Metis Nation, describes how:

There was a time that it was against the law for the Metis to gather in numbers of more than 3 or 4. After the resistance in 1885, they thought that by hanging their leader, they would destroy the spirit of the Metis. By preventing them from getting together and sharing their music, their culture, their dance, that they would destroy their spirit...⁷ (quoted by Dumont in Coyes, 2002)

However, none of that has worked. The Metis spirit is alive and stronger than ever today (Coyes, 2002). This to me further demonstrates the resiliency and adaptability of the people.

Nineteenth century Christian missionary journals recorded that, "they did not want the Cree furs; they wanted Cree *souls*" (Whidden, 2007, p. 52). For example the linguist James Evans (1801-46),⁸ son of a sea captain whose family emigrated to Canada, after he was ordained, wrote that his motivation was to "save souls by preaching and travelling and visiting poor heathen in their wretched wigwams, and teaching young and old the way of life (Fast, quoted by Whidden, 2007, p. 54). Their intention was to convert all the Cree to Christianity. Northern Manitoba elder Matt Sinclair describes the consequences of the arrival of the priests in the following way:

It was just shortly after that the priest first came to Pukatawagan...The priest had the first mass out on the island in Pukatawagan Lake. After it was over, the priest made

⁶ <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=5>

⁷ Coyes (2002). <http://www.reelgirlsmedia.com/printfiles/media/HowtheFiddleFlows>

⁸ In 1840 in Norway House, Manitoba the Reverend James Evans developed the system of writing Cree syllabics. The Cree took to it readily and it changed the way people communicated.

everybody throw their drums into the water. (Brightman, quoted by Whidden, 2007, p. 56)

Dorion-Paquin (2002) illustrates another story by Butch Waupoose's grandfather Dave, from the Great Lakes region. Talking about how his fiddle was smashed by a priest, Waupoose says that, it was, "an act that curtailed his playing for dances at least until he could get another fiddle" (p. 15). Another elder and Metis fiddle player articulates how he remembers that the fiddle was not allowed to be played during lent (Dorion-Paquin, 2007, p. 15). It seems contradictory that the fiddle was introduced by the Europeans and then later banned from being used. Stories such as these reinforce how vibrant a part of life the fiddle was for Aboriginal people.

In the winter, people regularly spent their time socializing and dancing because the inclement weather often prohibited economic activities. Metis dances would last for days until all the food, liquor and energy were gone often to the consternation of the clergy (Dorion-Paquin, 2002, p. 16). During government prohibitions First Nation and Metis people in Canada were banned from gathering and celebrating. Moreover, because the parishioners danced for days and slept in, and missed church it was common practice of the church to *burn* the fiddles of Aboriginal fiddle players (Campbell quoted by Dorion-Paquin, 2002, p. 15). Consequently, traditional music practice ceased. The resulting aftermath is that fiddle music throughout Aboriginal communities in Manitoba was close to moribund (Whidden, 2007, p. 56). Consequently, many fiddles sat idle in their cases (Whidden, 2007). This situation changed dramatically when Frontier School Division, introduced fiddle classes in selected northern schools around 1995. By 2004, the division employed eight instructors, reached twenty communities, and had approximately one thousand enthusiastic young musicians learning to

fiddle (Whidden, 2007; Dueck, 2007). Additionally, the number of instructors and resultantly, the number of students involved in these programs continues to increase every year. It is these historical narrative jigs that led me to northern Manitoba as a research site, where in addition to the Frontier Fiddle Programs, numerous other fiddle programs have started in schools and communities.

This thesis attempts to address the following research questions: **What is** the impact of the fiddle curriculum in these remote and isolated Aboriginal communities? What are some stories that demonstrate the contributions of the fiddle? In response to these questions, via Metissage, I utilize narrative inquiry to braid the lived experiences of community members, instructors and former students in northern Manitoba.

The following sections of this literature review are situated within the field of curriculum studies, but also look at other Indigenous journals, which in turn take up the broader realm of Native education in Canada. I selected 1994 as a start point as this was around the time the fiddle programs began in northern Manitoba. In this section of the literature review, I examine the presence or absence of the following themes: belonging, identity and engagement of students, as well as place, community, and culture. I also scan articles that discuss the arts and more specifically music in education. Additionally I reviewed numerous other sources and books that discuss Aboriginal education. Underlying all of the literature I reviewed how the themes connect to Aboriginal student well-being. I further looked at how they may contribute to improved experiences within education. Consequently, I raised possible linkages between the fiddle (fiddle playing) and the themes through the narratives of those directly involved with the fiddle.

No specific study such as this is identified anywhere in the literature. Although research demonstrates the benefits of the arts and art programs (Gamwell, 2005; Smithrim & Uptis, 2005), nowhere in the literature is there a study that looks at the various curricular dynamics in which a specific instrument contributes and/or connects to cultural revitalization within an Indigenous community within the larger field of Canadian curriculum studies. Moreover, there is little research that addresses the issue of school dropout or school achievement as it specifically relates to Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Brady, 1996; Nikkel 2006). Let us turn to the notion of identity and the implications for Aboriginal youth.

Identity

Identity is a key aspect of self-determination and mental well-being. Antone (2003) substantiates that “in order to be in balance, one must have a positive self-identity” (p. 92). Identity ultimately gives direction, a sense of knowing “where we are going” (Rousselot, 2007, p. 54). This is imperative for student academic success. Many Aboriginal people describe how when one's identity is defined by others, it impacts heavily on whom you feel you are:

When you start listening to these people in society telling us we are a *bunch of losers, drunks, alcoholics or less than anybody else in society...* that's when people start to get confused. And that's when your connection to the spirit becomes damaged. (Berry, 1999, p.19)

Weenie (2008), asserts, “Despite centuries of colonialism and oppression, language and cultural knowledge remain as veritable sources of knowledge that reinforce and validate Aboriginal

identity” (p. 555). This resonates with the resilience of Aboriginal people and their connections to culture.

People have both self-identity and group identity. Antone (2003) maintains there is a strong link between Native identity and a balance between their society and mainstream society. Identity refers to our thoughts and feelings about ourselves, who we are, but also our relationships with others. This includes information about physical, psychological, social attributes, and identification with cultural groups and communities. Moreover, Wilson (1998) relates, “the strength of Aboriginal people is derived from their sense of identity” (p. 281). Based on these areas of personal and cultural development, education has not promoted a positive identity for Aboriginal students (Antone, 2003). Major issues relating to identity for Aboriginal people stem from the sense of *loss* of identity created through forces of colonization.

Belonging

A sense of belonging is about relating to people, places, ideas and beliefs (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). The starting point for school attachment is developing a sense of belonging (Albert & Fiddler, 2008). Moreover, belonging has been demonstrated as an essential element to a student’s experiences of academic achievement (Kehoe & Echols, 1994). Additionally, Albert and Fiddler (2008) inform us “in order to be fully engaged, Aboriginal children need to feel a sense of physical, emotional and cultural safety, where they are able to practice and celebrate the uniqueness of their culture openly without fear of ridicule or disrespect” (p. 25). Cognitive ability and academic achievement are generally strong predictors of whether a youth

will complete secondary school. However, recent research has shown that youth are also prone to dropping out if they have low self-esteem, a poor attitude toward school, or experience feelings of alienation (Willms, 2002, p. 370). Students who have dropped out of school frequently say they never felt they were a part of the school community. Just as important, students, especially adolescents are extremely sensitive to their social context. For many of them negative experiences have devastating and long-term effects on their self-esteem (Gamwell, 2005). Without a sense of belonging, students begin to feel *lost*.

Current statistics speak volumes to how this impacts Aboriginal youth. A high proportion of Aboriginal students, perhaps even as much as *50 percent*, continue to drop out of high school before graduation (Castellano Brant, 2008). A common anecdote echoed throughout the literature is, *"All too often White teachers made the children feel backward...The curriculum made no changes to recognize Native cultures and no changes were made to accommodate the learning styles and the ways of life of Native children"* (Kehoe and Echols, 1994, p. 62). The following Thomas King (2003) question resonates for me here: "What is it about us that you don't like" (p. 145)? It is difficult to feel a sense of belonging when you are made to feel what you know, and where you come from, is *wrong*.

Because education is the primary socializing agent in the community, one of the main goals needs to be the development of programs that promote belonging through cultural association (Antone, 2003; Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1987). This is essential to acknowledge when discussing the education of Aboriginal students. Without belonging, nothing happens (Brokenleg, personal communication, May 20, 2010, Ottawa, ON). The next section of this

project traverses the journey toward accentuating 'place' and its connections to schooling and Aboriginal students within a Canadian context.

Place and Community

"Place itself," Ault (2008) tells us, "becomes the principal object...leading to the enhancement of self and connection to community" (p. 631). In the context of this discussion, 'place' and 'community' are one and the same. Additionally, the notion of 'place' and 'community' go beyond the physical sense of 'place.' Ault (2008) maintains that 'place' refers to the emotional experience of being grounded in character, confident belief, and strength of identity. At the root of belonging and identity, is having understanding and connections to 'place.' This is a journey that historically has gone astray for Aboriginal Canadians. There continues to be, Chambers (2008) laments, "a great deal of grief and sorrow about place in Canada, about land and who it belongs to, about whose stories get told and which stories are to be believed" (p. 124). The negative repercussions of this misunderstanding continue to resonate throughout Aboriginal communities.

Chambers (1999) contends that, as Canadians, "many of us are unsure where we come from, where here is, and whether we belong" (p. 137). For Aboriginal Canadians, as a result of colonization, the implications of this uncertainty are even deeper and more defining, than for non-Aboriginal Canadians. The relationship to place is deeply connected to identity, who Aboriginal people are. Gunew (1994) alleges that discussions about identity take place alongside wider notions of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' within a community. Ellis (2005)

depicts place as “a source of security, meaning, belonging, and identity” (p. 57). In turn, experiencing meaningful relationships is enhanced by our ability to connect to place (Ellis, 2005). Correspondingly, feeling good about and connecting to *where we are*, ‘*place*’ and ‘*community*,’ impacts feeling good about *who* we are.

Now, given, that most children have no choice but to be at school, Ellis (2005) tells us that, “it may be important to consider the classroom as a place” (p. 64). This concept, once again is critically significant when discussing education for Aboriginal students for whom “the school curriculum was a colonial curriculum in that home was either somewhere else or not worth consideration” (Chambers, 1999, p. 137). In turn, Rutter & Hersov (1985) suggests that schools conceptualized as a ‘place’ can be protective when they promote self-esteem and self-efficacy by providing opportunities for students to experience success and enabling them to develop important social and problem solving skills. Moreover, the essence of Zimmerman & Arunkumar’s (1994) research endorses findings that school-based supportive ties *can* serve to buffer against potentially hazardous conditions in the home and other nonschool environments. This is of particular importance, to recognize school as a ‘place’ for Aboriginal students.

A sense of belonging is about validating the importance of cultural lives (Gould, 2005). Beyond the individual connection to place, perhaps the most important form of social identity is one that links an individual to some large collectivity such as a nation, culture or ethnic group (Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 2003). Many Aboriginal people in Canada have been denied their ‘*community*,’ and much of Aboriginal culture has been destroyed as a result of colonization. To a certain extent, “being Aboriginal in Canada means living with that loss” (Dion & Dion, 2004, p.

78). I am personally aware of, and have experienced these feelings of alienation and shame. *I have been in situations where I was reluctant to divulge my children's Aboriginal ancestry for fear of denial or rejection.* Therefore, I look to bridge an understanding between the role of culture and education for Aboriginal students.

Culture

Culture is like a blanket that protects a people. Culture must be taught, experienced and lived by children for the nation to survive and the children to be whole.

(Albert & Fiddler, 2008, p.4)

Literature documenting the link between culture, well-being and Aboriginal student success dates back as far as the 1960's. Culture, at the foundation of human growth, is about values, beliefs, ways of living, identity, and expression (Gould, 2005). Fundamental to well-being, Gould (2005) tells us, "culture is the *bedrock* of quality of life" (p. 6). In turn it is strategically essential to note at this time that 'culture,' from the perspective of Aboriginal people is a dynamic lived experience (Doane & Varcoe, 2005). The common Eurocentric perception is that Aboriginal culture is *static*. Moreover, commonly projected through mainstream education is the notion that in order for Aboriginal people to practice their culture, they must live in the past. Metis scholar Carl Urion, (1999) articulates that there are those that see Indigenous knowledge as *frozen* in time. Thomas King (2003) reinforces this notion, reminding us that,

non-natives romanticize natives; I don't think there's anything else you can do, given the kind of cultural material that's out there that we're fed, you know,

from childhood....The idea of the native as a normal person in his or her own right or the idea of an inclusive, fair sense of history are so blurred as to be almost erased. (p. 22)

How then, might mainstream society come to know and understand that Aboriginal people are alive and *living* their culture today?

The original intent of education of Aboriginal people in Canada was to eradicate culture (Boyko, 1998; Hare, 2003; Ing, 1991). Moreover there is overwhelming agreement on the historical loss of culture through education. "It is time for Canada," as Ralston Saul (2008) maintains, "to acknowledge Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and learning as the valid forms of education that they are. The fact that they have survived attempted assimilation and colonialization, attests to their power" (p. 4). A longstanding consensus among researchers affirms that culture is at the core, or centre of 'being' for Aboriginal people. Repeated throughout the literature is an emphasis on the value of culture needing to be integrated into education in order for Aboriginal students to feel good about being in school (Wotherspoon & Schissell, 1998; Boyko, 1998; Albert & Fiddler, 2008; Labelle & Peden, 2003). "Students feel the safest, most comfortable and most enthused," Wotherspoon and Schissell (1998) tell us, "when they can relate the school curriculum to their own culture" (p. 30). According to Eder (2007), "Western schools are faced with the challenges of finding ways to acknowledge the diverse cultural experiences that students bring to school...and allowing children to make their own connections" (p. 292). Moreover, it is strategically "essential" as Mary Briggs (2006) informs us, "that students are engaged and see themselves and their cultures in the curriculum and the school community" (p. 13). Furthermore, this is necessary in order to correct historical and social biases (Labelle & Peden, 2003).

Ground-breaking research by Chandler & Lalonde (2008) demonstrates the direct link between cultural empowerment and community success. As early as 1990, these researchers unquestionably linked suicide risks among Aboriginal youth with failure of constructing a sense of identity (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008). The most striking result of their research is the powerful link between cultural continuity and individual connectedness. Consequently, First Nation communities that are currently taking steps to preserve their heritage and culture, in turn are dramatically more successful in insulating their youth against the risks of suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008). “The goal of course,” as Ormiston (2002) maintains, “is to allow children to be educated in a culturally-sensitive way. A greater cultural-sensitivity is accomplished through the inclusion of Aboriginal culture in the curriculum” (p. 15). Aboriginal cultures are something which should be presented respectfully and valorized so that children can “acquire a sense of worth and status” (Ormiston, 2002, p.12). Chandler and Lalonde (2008) have identified Aboriginal communities in British Columbia that have a suicide rate of zero. This is profoundly significant, especially when I reflect on suicide not in terms of statistics and numbers, but in terms of the names and faces of students and community members.

My second term in graduate studies, I was writing a term paper that involved connecting the issues of culture and education and what it means for Aboriginal students. Feeling compelled to tell a story, I reflected on whose story it is that I should tell? For three days, every time I sat down to begin writing, I succumbed to tears rather than writing. What came to my mind first were the faces and memories of the people that we have lost in our community to suicide. Sadly, I could not help but think if things were different in our society, perhaps, is it possible their stories might have had a happier ending? The essence of the research done by Chandler and Lalonde gives me hope. Hope for more happier stories, than tragic endings. It was only through depersonalizing that particular paper that I was eventually able to begin writing. (Personal Journal Entry, October 15, 2008).

Suicide rates among Aboriginal youth in Canada are estimated to be between five to twenty times *higher* than among the non-Aboriginal population (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008). The notion of Aboriginal communities with a suicide rate of *zero* is powerful knowledge, particularly when I reflect on the long-term and devastating impacts of suicide on families, friends and communities. Culture *is* a powerful tool that revitalizes and helps people to cope.

Culturally Responsive Curriculum

A school's curriculum closely determines the materials students are exposed to through the course of a school year (Castagano & Brayboy, 2008). It is well established that culture influences and shapes all the dimensions of learning and teaching processes that go on in schools (Gay, 1994). Furthermore, culturally responsive instruction, Kea & Utley (1998) suggest, "uses students' culture as important sources of their education" (p. 45). The centre of a culturally relevant curriculum is the culture of the learner (Stone Hanley, 1999). Moreover, "Students whose culture is respected," Stone Hanley (1999) elaborates, "are empowered to learn because the negative self-image that accompanies the rejection of their experiences is eliminated" (p. 2). Nonetheless, literature on the topic of culturally responsive curriculum as it pertains to Aboriginal communities is notably absent within the curriculum and Native studies journals I reviewed.

Consequently, I turned to journals of multi-cultural education to inform me on this topic. I found common themes within the literature on culturally relevant schooling that speak

to making sense for students who are not part of the dominant social group (Klug & Whitfield, 2003). Another important factor for teachers and administrators to consider is building a bridge between a child's home culture and the school to affect improved learning and school achievement (Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003). Additionally, Klump & McNeir (2005) note, "culturally relevant education recognizes, respects and uses students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments" (p. 3). Gay (2000) confirms the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily. However, this is problematic when "school leaders operate on the faulty assumption that their values, beliefs, and actions are the norm" (Gay, 1994, p. 8). Moreover, the literature confirms that many students do not succeed in school because their cultural or social characteristics are "unrecognized, misunderstood, or devalued" (Kea & Utley, 1998, p. 44). In turn, Skinner, (1999) states that when schools neglect Native cultures and present curricular materials that are biased or not culturally relevant, Indigenous students are 'robbed' of their cultural pride and personal identities.

Castagano and Brayboy (2008) firmly establish that culturally responsive schooling has been widely viewed as a promising strategy for improving the education and increasing the academic achievement of Aboriginal youth. Relevant to this project, a prominent theme in the literature on culturally relevant schooling is the importance of community involvement and support both by the teacher and by the community (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). The fiddle may be only one aspect of a culturally relevant curriculum. As we see later in this thesis, the

connection is both rich and deep, particularly when considering how community connections are incorporated.

Bringing it all together...

Cultural alienation continues generate the sense ambivalence many Aboriginal people have for sending their children to learn within the colonial public education system (Nikkel, 2006). Lacking the positive experiences that contribute to a sense of belonging and identity formation, Aboriginal students continue to lag far behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts in school completion rates (Richards & Hove & Kemi 2008). Previous research has consistently demonstrated the strong and substantial relationship between school engagement, culture, belonging and identity for Aboriginal youth. Culture is at the core of being an Aboriginal person. A strong sense of identification with one's cultural heritage contributes to helping students overcome feelings of cultural alienation (Ball, 2008). I question here the impacts of the school fiddle playing programs.

To have an understanding of self is dependent on the relationship between 'community' and 'place.' Additionally, there is the need to understand where it is we are, and in turn how to connect with this 'place.' Here Chambers (1999) asserts that,

the single most important task for Canadian curriculum theorists may be to search within the physical and imaginary landscape of Canada for the tools that we need to see our home, to help us understand how we have come to be 'out of place' in this home and how we can finally come home here. (p.12)

According to John Ralston Saul (2008), Aboriginal philosophy is key to Aboriginals being confident about who they are. “But it is just as important to other Canadians to have a sense of who we are” (Ralston Saul, 2008, p. 75). Furthermore as Canadians, it is crucial that we acknowledge that we are *here* (Chambers, 1999). Just as important we must know and grasp the full extent of where exactly *here* is. But in order to know who we are, it is important that we all understand the historical narratives of our country.

Meaningful education opportunities are critical to strong people, and thus, strong healthy communities. It is at this point that I turn to the words of a colleague and friend who, when profiled for Aboriginal Awareness Week, (HRSDC, May 2009) made the statement: *“Working for Aboriginal people and communities motivates me. If you have a strong person, they will feed into making a strong community. If you have a strong community the possibilities of success are endless”* (Marcelle Gareau, personal communication, May 2009). While there is clearly much more that could be said about Aboriginal education, such statements provide a starting point for a good discussion on the fiddle as a public school program for Aboriginal students. I question, does the fiddle as a cultural instrument, contribute to student’s sense of belonging and identity? As the fiddle is revitalized, how deep do its cultural narrative strings resonate?

In the following chapter I describe the methodology that guided this research project to answer these questions. It begins with a personal reflection of a blend between the literature and my recent journey through graduate school in order to situate myself, the researcher. This has also been a time as a family, my sons and I were confronted by the *Other*. Or, where *we are the other*. Regardless, I reflect on life experiences along this journey to aid in understanding

what it means to be Aboriginal in Canada today. In turn, I realize these are questions that may have never surfaced if we did not leave the comforts of the pedagogical place of home in northern Manitoba. It is here that I became aware of how it is necessary to realize how deep both the racism and the scars were and are. These memories of racism are not relegated curricular notions of the Canadian past.

CHAPTER TWO - METHODOLOGY

The only thing that keeps us from floating off with the wind is our stories. They give us a name and put us in a place, allow us to keep on touching.

(Tom Spanbauer, as cited in Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 35)

In this way, stories illuminate knowledge in such a way that it connects us to the roots of who we are as individuals and as community.

(Benham, 2007, p. 512)

Situating the Researcher

In 2006 when I moved to Ottawa, Ontario to pursue Bachelor of Education my sons and I were prepared for an adventure. We were going to try city living for 10 months. We had full intentions of taking advantage of whatever opportunities came our way. We were in for a year of exploring in our nation's capital. At that time, I never imagined the opportunity to continue my education at the Masters level would ever be a possibility for me. I had no idea our journey was one that would ultimately change my life and the lives of my children. I think back to where we were just four short years ago...and how so much has changed.

Gravel road jig...out behind the van...

Mother's Day, 2005, the fiddle jamboree weekend came to a close with a finale morning concert at the community arena. Bag lunches were prepared and waiting at the school for the entire group of jamboree participants before they left Norway House. Our van was already loaded with all of our gear. There is only one gravel road leaving town and anticipating the other 500 people heading home we wanted to hit the road. We were the second of two vehicles to arrive at the Nelson River ferry crossing. Distances in the north are vast and gravel roads are known to wreak havoc on vehicles. As it turned out, we were not to be spared on that trip. As we came to the end of the gravel road, something did not feel quite right about how the van was riding. We pulled over and sure enough, we had a flat tire. Within moments trucks, buses and vanloads of students and fiddles coming out of Norway House caught up to us. We were the second broken down vehicle in line behind a bus that blew its transmission.⁹ To deal with the flat tire everybody had to get out of the van. There were sleeping bags, duffle bags and fiddles strewn down the shoulder of the road to get the spare tire from the bottom of the van. The trucks that stopped to help us were from The Pas. One of them was Robert Isfeld. He was one of the instructors during the jamboree. Robert was also the current fiddle teacher in Sherridon. Knowing that their fiddle teacher was moving away from Cranberry Portage in a few weeks, my two sons were out behind the van with Robert while he helped change the flat tire. Unknown to me, they were soliciting Robert to stop in Cranberry and become their new fiddle teacher. That September Frontier School Division approved a fiddle program for the elementary school in Cranberry Portage, with Robert as the instructor. I was thrilled, mostly because it

⁹ The bus was students from many of the 'southern' communities as far as the east side of Winnipeg. By the time they were rescued, the last group to get off the bus did not get home until 5 am.

meant I was not going to have to drive to Flin Flon or The Pas in order for my sons to continue to play fiddle. Quenten was especially excited. That enthusiasm is something I really wanted to hang on to. But I quickly found out though that the local school decided the fiddle program would be for grade 5-8 students only. Poor Quenten, only in grade 3, was devastated. Fortunately for us, Robert, the instructor was aware of Quenten's enthusiasm for fiddle playing. Robert finished teaching the elementary school program at 2:15 pm. This was recess time for the elementary school students. Quenten, who always knew when Robert was coming to town, would drape his miniature half size fiddle over his shoulder to school. On those days while all of his classmates swarmed outside for their afternoon recess break, Quenten would slip up to the music room and join Robert for his own fiddle lesson. "I can't leave town without Quenten getting a lesson knowing how bad he wants to play fiddle," Robert told me. This was a turning point for Quenten. For my sons the fiddle has been their connection not only to home, but to who they are while we transitioned to living within an alien urban environment.

In a way, the flat tire on the van presented itself as an opportunity for my sons to express how strong their interest was in continuing to play fiddle. And sometimes it is the flat tires in life that provide fortuitous educational opportunities. *The Gravel Road Jig* is to this day, one of my favourite songs that my sons play. It not only revives memories from 'out behind the van,' but also the trip to the jamboree weekend. Exhausted with excitement, it was a very full three days, but a lifetime worth of memories and connections. Already, we were looking forward to next year's jamboree...this trip, such a rich experience, was a turning point, not soon to be forgotten.

A Road Less Travelled

Our arrival in Ottawa in 2006 was very much a time of transitions and adjustments. In many ways, for me, moving from Cranberry Portage, Manitoba, [population approximately 600 people] was the most difficult thing I have done in my life. I have traveled extensively both in Canada, including trips to Nunavut, as well as to Europe and even Morocco. We are small town people. Despite that, we live a rich life spending a great deal of our time out on the land. Hunting, fishing and trapping is what my sons know well. They speak the language of the land. This is not an oral language, nor are they conscious per se of this knowledge. It is a language that they have learned through their father while growing up listening to the land under his often silent guidance and direction. This too many would be perceived as the road less travelled. But to those in a small community, to uproot my young children from their home to relocate to a completely different province, that is as the clichéd saying goes, the road less travelled.

After four long stressful days of driving clear across two provinces, to what was to become our new home in Ottawa, I felt utterly traumatized. Moving somewhere to live is much different than going there to visit. We had to learn everything we needed to survive. This in turn meant enormous steps outside of our comfort zone. Returning to a university campus after a seventeen year absence required a learning curve of another kind. That might sound ridiculous, but the city seemed so large, alienating and frightening to me. I could not remember how to live in a city. And to me it was a strange city in an even stranger province. It is ironic I think that I could comfortably find my way home, by boat, in complete darkness, across three lakes. Navigating twenty five miles of water was done by listening to the land. Threatening reefs

and deadheads¹⁰ lurk just beneath the surface of these waters. Despite the impending danger, I have comfortably done this trip more times than I can count, aware of the dangers feeling the safety net of 'home'. Yet, I felt so lost when I arrived in this new cityscape.

Our Home and Native Land-One Moccasin at a time...

I recall June 2007 when Gunthar and Quenten were invited to play fiddle for the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. This garden party, a Strawberry Tea, was hosted at the British High Commissioners Residence. This was their first time ever performing in a public space in front of total strangers. Both boys were nervous, but at the same time, excited. Once we arrived, we were welcomed by the staff of the Wabano Centre and explained when and where they would perform. The party was an outdoor garden party. It had a somewhat formal atmosphere, but was very relaxed and laid back. The Master of Ceremonies for the afternoon was my new friend and fellow Manitoban, from Flin Flon. His wry sense of humour and wit helped the boys relax and feel more at ease. Following their fiddle performance many of the guests personally commended the boys. Even the British High Commissioner himself and his wife came over to shake their hand and tell them how much they enjoyed their fiddle playing. The High Commissioners' residence is situated high on the shores of the Ottawa River looking over to the hills of Gatineau, Quebec and looking west, metaphorically standing 'watch' over Parliament Hill in Ottawa. This was the first opportunity to step out into the public space and share their fiddle playing, their culture with the public and in an alienating space.

¹⁰ Waterlogged dead trees that lurk just below the water's surface. Hitting one can result in paralyzing damage to a boat or motor.

Fast-forward two years to the summer of 2009. I was working part time as a student with the Federal government in our nation's capital. Every day I would ride a shuttle that took me back and forth to my Gatineau office across the Ottawa River. Daily, I would catch my breath as we crossed the majestic Ottawa River and view the grand site of the beautiful Parliament buildings. On the way home, many days, I would also glance over to the British High Commissioners residence, tickled by the memory of that garden party and what a memorable opportunity that was for my two little boys from the northern bush. It was not until late in the summer of 2009, lost in thought one day, I looked over at Parliament Hill and then over to the British High Commissioners residence where it sits high on the banks of the Ottawa River. I realized at this moment that this powerful symbolic building continues to silently state its dominance over the Parliament buildings, the land and the country of Canada, simply by where it stands 'watch'



Figure 5: Victoria Island National Aboriginal Day 2010 Metis Nation of Ottawa community picnic

over the Nation's capital. This to me is symbolic of how Britain dominated and stood watch over the Aboriginal people in Canada as this country was settled. For those who have lived it, colonization is not abstract; it remains an ongoing experience (LaRocque, 2010, p. 100). In order to know who we are, we need to know where we have come from (Chambers, 2008; Sinclair, personal communication, October 15, 2010, Ottawa, ON). We need a connection to place. But just what is this place we call Canada? And how do we story our connections?

As a family we have relocated into a new narrative setting, one in which their Canadian topographies have not yet been plotted. During my undergraduate degree at the University of Manitoba, Professor Emma LaRoque instilled in me a very strong sense of the lifelong impacts of being 'othered'. Her experiences described in her 1975 book *Defeathering the Indian*, her first attempt to educate the public of damaging mainstream discourses toward Indigenous communities resonated once again as I read Tomson Highway's (2010) story about his first experience with *Mameek*, the south, the big city:

When I found myself standing, for the first time in my life, at the entrance to this building that looked like a castle—it was big—Churchill High School, Winnipeg, Manitoba. The fragrance of smoke from my parents' campfire and from forests of pine and spruce and willow still clinging to my clothes, my body, the whisper of wind, the murmur of the lake, and the cries of the loons and wolves and eagles still ringing in my ears, I marched proudly through that front entrance—a new experience awaited me beyond those doors and new experiences had always excited the sons of Lapstun. Only to discover, that first week, that I was the only Indian in that school. The students, all two thousand of them—Brochet's population was a mere 700, the Highway fishing camp's 10 at its most crowded!—the teachers, the principals, the secretaries, the janitor: all were white, white as pillow cases fresh from the wash. I had never to that point in my life, really been *that* conscious of the colour of my skin, but now here I was, so uncomfortable inside its brownness that all I wanted was to disappear, to be invisible. I *was* not proud of who I was. For that first week, I walked the hallways of that school, and the streets around it, with my head hanging, my eyes cast downward. I didn't want anyone to see how embarrassed I was to be who I was. (p. 51)

Simultaneously I read other stories that also spoke of how 'white' schooling changed them from being self-confident and spontaneous children, to feeling shame. Jane Willis in her 1973 biography *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* describes how for twelve years she was taught...to hate herself. She was made to feel untrustworthy, inferior, incapable and immoral. "The barbarian in me I was told had to be destroyed if I was to be saved (Jane Willis, 1973, p. 67-68)." LaRoque elaborates how in *Halfbreed*, Maria Campbell (1973) recounts that it was a combination of poverty and prejudice that led her to feelings of shame...we were terribly hurt and above all

ashamed. Campbell further explains that it was not simply poverty that drove people to shame and despair:

It was a lack of hope, which comes from oppressive dispossession. [Speaking to a White audience,] Campbell states: “You at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow. My parents and I never shared any aspirations for a future, I never saw my father talk to a white man unless he was drunk. I never saw him or any of our men walk with their heads held high before white people.

To add to the shame, was the ongoing fear of persecution if you acknowledged your Indigenous roots (Maria Campbell, personal communication at *Our Metis Homeland* presentation, October 29, 2010, Ottawa, ON). The impact of this knowledge, combined with my life experiences growing up in the north, where at times, life was and is very raw, continues to burn like the sting of a wasp. I think about what challenges my children may have to confront in their lifetime...as a result of *who* they are, their cultural identity. So few non-aboriginal people have knowledge of this, but the reality is this discourse continues to dominate western society.

My family’s journey is one that has required us to change moccasins multiple times. My oldest son, Gunthar in fact has hand sewn his own pair of moose hide moccasins. Under the guidance of Elders at his high school Aboriginal Group, he, along with other students were taught this skill that has been passed on for generations. “I want to wear them moose hunting this year,” he very proudly tells me, animating how he will quietly stalk through the bush in search of the elusive bull moose. But he ran out of time and has only sewn one moccasin. Until Gunthar completes his second moccasin, he will walk with an uneven step, circling perhaps in the wrong direction. This I liken to Canada/Canadians stumbling over coming to terms with the many different historical narrative “truths” yet to be woven into our national collective memories (Chambers, 2006; Haig-Brown, 2008). It is at these narrative crossroads where

representative north and south intersect, I find constant tensions that disrupt what we often call the “*normal*.” These tensions exist both within and between and therefore further complicate orientation. Moreover, I am reminded that these are conversations *our* family never would have had if we had not stepped outside of the comfort zone of our northern home.

December 2009, I returned to northern Manitoba, the place I have known as home for most of my life. Our community welcomed my children and me warmly even though the temperatures outside were a record breaking -52 Celsius with the unforgiving wind chill. Despite this, I reflect on feeling strange returning to what was once so familiar, after a three-year absence to be a student at the University of Ottawa. As I had to reacquaint myself with *home*, it was as if I was looking back in ‘from the outside’. This in turn led me to reflect on my sons and their connections to community and place. It was not until confronted by the ‘other’, when we moved to Ottawa, Ontario in 2006 that we were put in a position where we had to explain who we are, and where we come from. It is here that I realize how disrupting our sense of place also strengthened our understandings of our connection to the land. It is as if we moved into the ‘hyphen’



Figure 6: A cold winter day, Athapapuskow Lake, MB

that Wah, (2000) describes as “a volatile space that is inhabited by a wide range of voices (p. 74).” For my sons leaving home, I see, living within the volatile spaces of the ‘hyphen’, reinforced their connection to place. Resultantly, living in an urban setting meant creating a

space for the boys to perform their Metis identities in an alien environment. It is something we had to learn. And, such learning was not always comfortable. On a student panel speaking to a group of Ottawa teachers at *Niganikaadan, Celebrating the Spirit of Youth Conference*, May 2010 Gunthar was asked to talk about a negative school experience. He shared the following:

In grade 9 geography, we were discussing the fur trade and stuff along those lines and my teacher was aware that I was a trapper and I trapped out home so he referenced me directly. The students didn't like that very much and so I felt like I couldn't be proud of my culture, and I was kind of quiet about it since then. That is different from back home in my community where everybody knows me and my family. And, I don't ever have to explain who I am. My father, my grandfather and my great grandfathers were all trappers and hunters. It is who we are and what we do. It is our way of life to be out on the land. I have been going hunting and out on the trap line with my parents since I was a baby.

He is proud to tell people that he is a trapper and a hunter. But sometimes he hesitates. He realizes, urban people do not always understand how this is a *way of life* for people in the north. It is a relationship with the land that is reciprocal and respectful. Rather than risk hurting someone, he is often cautious of whom he reveals his true northern identity. For me, where they come from, and their connection to the land is what defines *who* they are. In turn, I see their connection to the land and community is reinforced on a deeper level every time my children return to their northern home. The awareness of culture and place is also increased by the coming and going. *When you are at home, you are just one more person at home, especially in a small community where everyone knows everyone.* When you go to live somewhere else, 'home' takes on another dimension. Living in an urban centre, a new place, for my family was a time of transitions, negotiating and adjusting. Throughout this, awareness of the 'other' home and community also was strengthened and brought perhaps to a higher level of consciousness than if we never left. For my children, this has translated into a richer life experience as

everything in their life means more to them [*here and there*]. It has also brought them many opportunities and in turn has made them unique in Ottawa because they are so connected to their roots, where they come from, and the land. Furthermore, it has increased and strengthened their awareness and connections to their culture and the place they know as home. Both of my sons gently share their rich knowledge and understanding of home and this is now further nurtured by people that know them in Ottawa.

When the Other is Me?

As a white mother with Metis children, I am their strongest advocate. But I am not Metis, so, how much can I say? Aboriginal issues can be sensitive terrain to enter. Once again, in our small northern Manitoba community we seldom discussed my family's Ukrainian heritage or their father's Metis roots; rather it was how we lived on a daily basis. Additionally, there was a natural sense of being nurtured within the community. For example, my mom is the 'go-to' person in town for the secrets of making great perogies and other traditional Ukrainian favourites. Bryan [my son's father] is renowned for his knowledge on animals and the land, often called upon to share. Getting lost in an urban space seems to further complicate understanding. I sometimes feel limited in knowing 'who we are', 'who they are'... Yet at the same time, it brings opportunities that we would never otherwise have had; opportunities that work to strengthen knowledge and understanding of home, but also what it means to be Metis in Canada. Growing up Aboriginal in Canada remains complex today. To be an Aboriginal person, to identify with an Indigenous heritage in these late colonial times requires a life of

reflection, critique, persistence and struggle (McMaster and Martin 1992 quoted in LaRocque, 2010 p. 3). *Because of the negative connotations that continue to exist in mainstream society, not all families are willing to identify as being Aboriginal.* This is emphasized in the Ispayin DVD:

Many Metis come from families who felt like they had to hide their Metis identities out of shame. After a family has lost their knowledge, it is hard to recover. But this doesn't mean we don't want to learn. It just means that we may not know where to go to get the right information.¹¹

What may appear simple from the perspective of an outsider is complex and layered. For example, it was not until he was *fifty* years old that Metis author David Bouchard (2010) discovered his family heritage. His book, *The Secret of Your Name: Kimooch ka shinikashooyen*, illustrates his sense of loss in not knowing the stories of his Metis Kokum¹². "Many of our grandparents were humiliated into denying their Native ties," David writes, "in favour of their more acceptable European bloodlines. They did whatever they could to appear white" (p. 2). Having mixed ancestry sometimes adds another layer to the complexity of the story. But perhaps in many ways this is a common thread that runs through the stories of many Canadians (Ralston Saul, 2008), another layer in the answer to the question 'who are we?' (Chambers, 2008). These stories perhaps, are more common than we are aware, buried deep sometimes within generations of Canadian families.

I hesitate to think when the Other is Me, and then on the other hand, when the *Other* is my children? What is my role? Do I stand on the other side of the street; go to the 'other' restaurant; or sit in the 'Indians only' section of the movie theatre; as was once common practice in this country (personal communication, Cranberry Portage, MB, July 2010)? If they

¹¹ *ISPAYIN DVD and discussion guide, 2010, p. 4.* <http://ispayin.blogspot.com/>

¹² Cree word for Grandmother.

wanted to become legal, full-fledged Canadian citizens and obtain voting rights prior to 1960, Aboriginal people had to surrender their special status as an Indian... *"It was the aim of the federal government in the 1870's to eventually assimilate and enfranchise Aboriginals' into European-Canadian society."*¹³ This is a critical moment of Canada's history that remains for the most part silenced. Consequently this means *my children's* paternal grandparents were *not* able to vote, and therefore were *not* considered full-fledged Canadian citizens prior to 1960. I relay these stories to create the context of understanding present day identity issues. As a Metis person in Canada, to identify as 'white' meant that one had access to all of the privileges of the dominant society (Mosionier, 2010, p. 141). In turn, this meant an easier life. To be Metis was to be seen as a second class citizen in many situations and this was hard. For many families, if they could pass for being white, you did.¹⁴ A Metis friend of mine in Ottawa reminds me how this is an issue not relegated to the past. Today there remain establishments in certain Canadian cities that continue to refuse service to Aboriginal people [based on how you look]. It is important that my children feel good about who they are and are grounded in their identity. But how complicated is this when they come from generations of parents and grandparents who were not allowed to feel good about their own identity?

Living Culture

The importance of the revitalization of culture among Aboriginal peoples has already been established in previous sections of this project. During the Library and Archives Canada opening

¹³ Glossary. Canada in the making. (2010). http://www1.canadiana.org/citm/glossaire/glossaire1_e.html#enfranchise

¹⁴ Revision Quest CBC Radio. (2010). <http://www.cbc.ca/revisionquest/episodes/> July 21/24 Andrea Menard

ceremonies for 2010 National Aboriginal Awareness Week I had the opportunity to meet Joe Dragon, the Metis guest speaker. At this presentation, Joe shared personal narratives about growing up in the northern community of Fort Smith, North West Territories. He spoke about how he was not *taught* his culture; but rather, his family *lived* his culture. Living culture involved *wearing* their culture, whether it was the muskrat fur hat, beaver skin coat, or handmade leather gauntlets his mother had sewn for him. Living his culture was never something that was explained to him. He knew who he was through the lifestyle and values of his family and observing his parents as he grew up. I parallel Joe's story to that of my own children who grew up learning the language of the land as a natural part of their childhood. LaRoqcue (2010) reminds us that for Indigenous peoples, "relationship to the land is different from the capitalistic and legal notions of use and occupancy of land" (p. 135). Such relationships encompass connections between language, culture and place. But the forced assimilation of Aboriginals in Canada often removed them from *their* land. In doing so, they lost their connection to place. When you no longer have access to the land, to place, how do you live your culture? There is a kinship that is lost, when you lose your place (Maria Campbell, personal communication at *Our Metis Homeland* presentation, October 29, 2010, Ottawa, ON). Moreover, what happens to the memories of such lived cultures in relation to place when you are forced to relocate? In the words of Jeanette Armstrong (1998):

As I understand it from my Okanagan ancestors, language was given to us by the land we live within...I have heard elders explain that the language changed as we moved and spread over the land through time. My own father told me that it was the land that changed the language because there is special knowledge in each different place. All my elders say it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher...We survived and thrived by listening intently to its teaching-to its language-and then inventing human words to retell its stories to our succeeding generations. It is the land that speaks. (pp. 175-176)

Armstrong's words resonate in my mind as I reflect on many conversations I have had recently within the Aboriginal community in Ottawa. *"It is when I feel most at peace, when I am back at home on the land,"* someone told a small gathering. Following introductions at a Metis community potluck I met a lady who originates from Grand Rapids, Manitoba, a neighbouring northern community. It turns out we know many of the same people. She told me, "It is being on the land that I miss. It is not the same over here." She has been living and working in Ottawa for nearly twenty years. She reminisced about a recent trip to Manitoba in March, recalling how she was there in time to enjoy the spring ice. As winter subsides and the days become long, the sun more intense, the winter's accumulation of snow melts down off the ice surfaces on the northern lakes. This melting leaves large expanses of new negotiable space, as extensions of the land to explore and intimately interact with. It is a very special time of year to experience the land. One can literally walk for miles across the still frozen lake surfaces, just as one walks across a city parking lot. But there is an unexplainable calm within this space. I do not recall her name, but vividly remember the look on her face as she sighed when she told me how fulfilling it was to return to the land. This is not to say that place and connections to the land is not important to all Canadians. Rather it is to relay how deep and fundamental the language of the land is. LaRocque (2010) illustrates how if 'cultural difference' has any meaning, it lies here:

As one who grew up with Cree and with the land, I think I "know" this land. As Metis from northern Alberta, my family does not legally own the land I grew up on, but the land, if it belongs to anyone, belongs to my Plains Cree-Metis ancestors and family. My bones have known this land long before Alberta was born. My younger brother has lovingly tended to this land since the passing of our parents. There is a blueberry patch there that I especially love; when I go there I experience that particular land; I hear it speaking with the luminosity of blueberries in September sun embraced in sunlit green of gently waving poplar leaves. And I remember too why bears and panthers still prowl

through my dreams. The land feeds us, sings to us, gives us light-but it also steals us away from this death. The land does teach us about life and death (p. 136).

LaRocque (2010) emphasizes that “this is all true; this is not poetic waxing” (p. 136). That is to say, LaRocque is not romanticizing the notion of land. “While on a literary level White Canadians can play with themes like place, landscape and identity,” she emphasizes that “however poignant, they cannot compare their privileged, indeed dominant positions with Aboriginal peoples whose places have been stolen, whose landscapes have been bulldozed, and whose identities have been irreparably disturbed (p. 167).” The reality is that these are the words of Aboriginal persons, of what is important to them. It is not the place of non-aboriginal people to question or judge what is said, or how they feel. Otherwise, we revert back to past historical notions of assimilation and oppression—an oppression of what they [*the white other*] value and feel is important.

the other

When the Other is my children, I am proud to talk about my sons and how involved and connected they are to their culture. I am grateful for the exceptional opportunities that have come to them as a result of this in our urban journey. Some of these opportunities I am certain have manifested themselves into turning points in their adolescent development. It is not easy to be a teenager in today’s world. Being Aboriginal adds another layer to this. I continue to feel like I am living in an alien urban environment, in the absence of familiar ‘community’ and kinship of the north. Nevertheless, when the *Other* is my children, I do not hesitate to share *who* they are and where they come from. I advocate, on their behalf, concerned for their well-

being. In so doing, I have come across so many urban people who lack prior knowledge and understanding of who Canada's Aboriginal people are. Stereotypes repeated by the media and mainstream discourses *continue* to dehumanize Aboriginal people and influence mainstream opinions. LaRoque (2010) blatantly articulates that Native history and cultures continue to reinscribe stereotypes (p. 146). Moreover, she tells us:

The task of deconstruction and reconstruction must be shared by all Canadians, by all intellectuals, Native and non-Native alike. Of course we will come at this from a number of different perspectives, but the common goal must be the dislodging of racist material and the continuing development of works that promote Native decolonization. And it must be done in every field and area of study. (p. 147)

Whether the *Other* is Me, or the *Other* is my sons, as a mother, teacher, engaged Canadian citizen I do not hesitate to deconstruct and to inform. I reiterate the thoughts of Dr. Marie Battiste's (2004) CSSE plenary address, "'Postcolonial' is not a time after colonialism, but rather represents more an aspiration, a hope not yet achieved" (p. 1). It is important for us to grow as a country and *all* citizens to be treated with the same dignity and respect. On that note, this project seeks to quietly interrupt the dominant discourse of mainstream colonial education.

Bowing the Strings

In many ways, for my family, the fiddle has come to us as a representative bridge between urban and rural. It has opened doors and connected us to community within this alien urban environment. In this sense it has been a guide to help define the coordinates of this unmapped narrative space. In turn, if the aim of curriculum is survival, Chambers (1999) explains "this survival comes not from grand forms of theorizing and memorizing abstractions, but from

human beings learning and living in a respectful relationship to their lived topos of here (p. 142).” Just as Canadians need a literature about “here” as Chambers (1999) suggests, it is my position that Canadians also need “a form of curriculum theorizing grounded in “here,” which maps out the territory of who we are in relation to the topography of where we live-the physical topos as well as the socio-political, historical, and institutional landscape of our lives (p. 144).” I reflect on this, and question here, if it were not for the fiddle, and their connectedness to *home*, [the north] what direction my sons’ lives may have taken, or what path they may have chosen.

During recent months [spring 2010] it is like a momentum has been building as the invitations to play fiddle are becoming more and more regular. It is as if every performance brings an opportunity for another, including the Odawa Friendship Centre Pow Wow and National Aboriginal Health Organization Role Model Ceremony. The finale moment this spring was when Gunthar entered the *We Got Talent* contest on Victoria Island during the *National Aboriginal Day* Celebrations. To participate in this talent competition he had to send in an audition video. Gunthar compiled a medley of songs especially for this performance:

This medley of songs tells a story beginning with the first song I ever learned, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* and ending with a song my younger, 13 year old brother learned before me and then taught me, *Wizards Walk*, which is the most difficult song I have ever played. (Gunthar Lundie, personal communication, June 20, 2010)

Gunthar was awarded the second place in the youth category at this competition. This was a moment of validating who he is and where he has come from. His journey on the ‘road less traveled’ has meant translating multiple narratives and misunderstandings. Donald (2004) describes how much of the history of Canada is a chronicle of the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (p. 31). Tensions, often leading to conflict are the result of

conflicting interpretations and misunderstandings of crucial aspects of our histories (Donald, 2004, p. 31). The fiddle has been instrumental in guiding and nurturing both of my sons on their alien urban journey. In turn, this nurturing has given us strength as a family, given us a sense of place, kinship (Maria Campbell, personal communication at *Our Metis Homeland* presentation, October 29, 2010, Ottawa, ON). Conceivably, one story at a time...may the songs of the fiddle bring us all one step closer to the dance floor. Someday perhaps we will all dance together...

Constitution Breakdown

May 2010, a phone call to the Manitoba Metis Federation told me Gunthar was not on the membership list at the regional office. This in effect meant he was not eligible for the bursary this regional Metis federation office gives every year to graduating students. In addition to the bursary, is the gift of a Metis sash. "But his name is not on our membership list" I am told from the other end of the phone. These words echo and resonate in my mind for days as I wait to hear a reply. A bureaucracy is going to tell my son he is not who he thinks he is? A quick investigation explains that between staff changes their [my sons] application for Metis 'status' was in the 'incomplete' pile. We submitted the remaining required documents and everything was processed. At his high school graduation in Ottawa, Gunthar was presented a gift of a Metis sash from The Pas Regional Metis federation acknowledging his achievement that day. When his Metis auntie from northern Manitoba made the presentation, she proudly tied the gifted sash around his waist and gave him a loving hug. Three of my son's teachers took the time to comment how they were actually moved to tears by his presentation that afternoon.

That very same week an Ottawa friend, from northern Alberta expressed her frustration. She was told she cannot apply for Metis 'status' with the Metis Nation of Alberta, because she is currently living in Ontario. Yet, the Metis Nation of Ontario will not give her status because of her Alberta homeland. How damaging is someone telling you are not who you thought you are? Furthermore, you require a piece of paper to prove who you think you are. "So is the right of identity," King (2003) asks us, "simply a privilege of power" (p. 149)? According to King (2003), with the current Canadian identity legislation, and at the rate things are going, "in fifty to seventy-five years there will be no more status Indians left in Canada" (p. 144). On the day my son's official Manitoba Metis Federation cards arrive in the mail, I can't help but think back to my Alberta friend, and the words of Thomas King (2003),

The reality of identity legislation has not simply been to erase Indians from the political map of North America, it has also had the unforgivable consequence of setting Native against Native, destroying our ability and desire to associate with each other. This has been the true tragedy, the creation of legal categories that have made us our own enemy. (p. 149)

Once more, I question Canadian Indian identity politics. The discourse of 'we' versus 'they' continues to dominate. There is the constant tension between feeling a sense of pride alongside the possible fear of persecution.

Metissage

Donald (2004) describes Metissage as an approach to research that often begins with autobiographical texts as a starting point for further interpretations (p. 24). This is where my lived experiences as a northern resident and a participant both in northern education processes

and the fiddle as school curriculum is a departure point for writing. In turn, I discern the coming together of this project as a form of Metissage. Zuss (1997) characterizes literary Metissage as a form of representation and rhetorical practice that works through differences (p. 166). He further maintains that in general contexts there are no heuristic rules of the method of Metissage (Zuss 1997, p. 166).

Accordingly, Metissage afforded me pedagogical opportunities as a writer to weave



Figure 7: Metis sash

my perspective and experiences intricately into

the social, cultural and historical experiences of others across the north. In many instances our lived experiences are as braided as the stories. Simultaneously, regardless of differences, many of the varied storytellers embody a sense of a collective experience.

Worley (2006) establishes that Metissage emerges from one specific place and time where people come together, take action, take risks, and claim their lives as their own (p. 521). Mindful of the connections between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal, I turn to Metissage as a means to demonstrate the interrelatedness of the stories and the people across communities. At the same time, I manoeuvre from the perspective of a non-aboriginal person to the sensitivity of what historical tones mean for my Metis children and all Aboriginal children. In *Life Writing and Literary Metissage as an Ethos for Our Times*, Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo (2009) identify the spirit of Metissage as:

A counter narrative to the grand narrative of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts, and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical praxis...We braid strands of place and space, memory

and history, ancestry and (mixed) race, language and literacy, familiar and strange, with strands of tradition, ambiguity, becoming, (re)creation, and renewal into Metissage. (p. 9)

As a site for writing, textual acts of Metissage refuse categories and conditions. Rather it is a strategy that serves the material interests of individuals and social collectives (Zuss, 1997, p. 167). In order to properly address Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum, Canadians need to rediscover the historical and current connections between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal in Canada, even if these connections are not always pleasant to discuss (Donald, 2004, p. 25). To me, an important aspect of this project is to bridge a better understanding, so to speak, of the discrepancies that exist between geo-cultural and political representations of north and south. That is to say, I make an effort to relay how northern communities are different from urban geographies in Canada and in turn enhance our understanding of these differences. This is not an easy task, especially when thoughts of home and the loss of friends and community members resurface a constant flood of emotions during the writing process. Dancing outside the realms of categorization through collective authorship the stories in the following chapters reveal the intertwined connections of people and communities across the vast distances of northern Manitoba (Donald, 2004, 2010). In turn, these stories establish how personal and family histories can be braided within and in relation to the larger narratives of nation and nationality (Donald, 2010, p. 11). This to me is where the historical and present Aboriginal curriculum of the fiddle resonates. In that sense, this project is about developing an understanding through many varied perspectives.

Worley (2006) contributes to contemporary conceptualizations of Metissage as “emerging as a sheltering place that facilitates individuals’ and community’s self-strengthening

and self-emancipation specifically because the diversity of and within the people there helps establish these empowering conditions (p. 520).” Place has a pedagogy, Worley (2006), suggests if we recognize that the notion of place is not neutral. Through personal narratives she examines, “Metissage as a place of education with its own pedagogy.” This is, “where students return to the place of Metissage for comfort, nurturing, support [from teacher and classmates] and strength.” She continues, if students sense school as a place [of belonging] “they return to get help and critically reflect upon what is happening in the school, community, and broader worlds outside the classroom place of Metissage (Worley, 2006, p. 525).” It is at this site of Metissage, I incorporate the fiddle as a metaphorical bridge between school, home and community as a place. Via Metissage, the fiddle weaves the strands of peoples [schools and communities] with place. In turn, students and teachers learn to refortify themselves for the next step towards self and community transformation. This is accomplished without putting others at risk. Rather it plays toward building an internal place of strength (Worley, 2006, p. 527). Through this thesis, I open an institutional narrative space for others to share their stories. This site of storytelling in turn generates a sense of validating the aesthetics of such storytelling.

As a result of the tones of this thesis, the historical stories of the communities in which the fiddle playing is situated contributes to the depth of these programs and their uniqueness. Zuss (1997) describes Metissage as a metaphor of fluidity (p. 166). Using all of the narratives shared, writing this thesis was a process of weaving together the historical stories, alongside the present day stories of the fiddle programs. Consequently the result was the braiding together of the varied perspectives, including intergenerational. As the researcher, I see myself,

as the figurative strand that weaved the stories. Expressions of Metissage can become instances of individual and collective reinscription (Zuss, 1997, p. 180). In that sense, the introduction of fiddle playing in one small community school, as we will see, is an outcome of the stories from the past. These narrative jigs are survival stories that give life to the fiddle as a culturally responsive curriculum and in turn communities that continue to flow across generations without boundaries.

Narrative Inquiry

I turn to the broader realm of narrative inquiry as a form of qualitative research for this project. Simply put, narrative inquiry is a process of gathering information through storytelling (Clandinin 2007). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. This research project, *funded by the Canadian Northern Studies Trust*, originates within my personal experiences, journals and reflections. A form of narrative inquiry, Ellis (2007) explains autoethnography as moving in between experiences of oneself and creating understandings of the context of those experiences. Wall (2006) elaborates that there is a “direct and inextricable link between the personal and the cultural and thus, rich meaning, culturally relevant personal experience, and an intense motivation to know are what typify and strengthen autoethnography” (p.9). It is here that personal experiences, being a parent of Metis sons who play fiddle come into play. Memories, as a participant in their fiddle playing adventures, become a point of departure and a source of inspiration for my writing (Denzin, 2003, p. 137). Brettell (1997) describes

autoethnography as writing about oneself and others through engaging in the world as both participant and observer through one's experiences.

Traditional western methods of historical documentation, Mihesuah (1998) stresses, do not take account of Indigenous voices or Indigenous views of history. As a long-time resident of the north, and a parent of Metis youth, I bring the perspective of the 'other' and bring their voice into future discussions. This project in many ways is a story, about our community and my children. This is described by Elbow (1986) as a "connected knowing" in which the "knower is attached to the known" (p. 14). In other words, as Bishop (2005) depicts "there is a common basis for such an understanding, where the concerns, interests, and agendas of the researcher become the concerns, interests, and agendas of the researched and vice versa (p. 118). Frontier School Division is somewhere I received all of my education prior to leaving for university. Following graduation from university, I returned to the north and worked at Frontier Collegiate for seventeen years. The people interviewed for this project share similar experiences to mine. Therefore in many ways this is our shared story of northern experiences within a particular communal setting. In the sense the north is all about community, I enter this project already from the position of an 'insider', rather than an outsider, a position highly regarded in a qualitative study (Wolcott, 1999). I describe myself as being in the position of a co-participant in the sense that I have the lived experience of being a northern community member, rather than being a passive spectator (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As an active participant, past and present, I utilize Metissage as an aesthetic form of narrative inquiry. This process Bishop (2005) describes as one that facilitates the development in people of a sense of themselves as agentic and of having an authoritative voice. This is not a result of the researcher "allowing" this to happen, or

“empowering” participants; it is the function of the cultural context within which the research participants are positioned, negotiate, and conduct the research (Bishop, 2005, p. 123). That is to say, it is the product of having a sense of community.

Not planned, but an outcome of the nature of this project, many of the participants’ stories are intertwined. That is, although the participants are spread throughout the province, many of the stories shared were from the same setting such as a trip to a Frontier School Division jamboree or other fiddle festivals. My challenge, according to Jones (2005), is the telling and showing of stories that are not only necessary, but also full of possibilities (p. 725). It could be said that this was my internal motivation throughout this project.

The other primary method of narrative inquiry used in this project is oral history, which is built around people...it brings history into and out of the community (Thompson, 1988/2000, p. 23). A life history, Portelli (2001) stresses, “is a living thing” (p. 61). In many ways, this project, thrust life into history itself (Thompson, 1988/2000). Moreover, oral history opens up narrative apertures not just to the stories of heroes and leaders, but also from the extra(ordinary) person in the community. Again, it brings history into and out of the community (Thompson, 1988/2000, p.23). Here Thompson (1988/2000) suggests that oral history makes contact and hence understanding-between social classes, and between generations...lastly, with shared meanings; it can give a sense of belonging to a place or in time (p. 23-24). And the “who,” as Donald (2010) makes clear, “cannot be separated from the where” (p. 33). Therefore oral history enables a student of history and community to introduce alter/native narrative accounts from the underside of public memory. This is where I open a new area of inquiry...and bring recognition to a group of people who have been largely ignored within our collective

memories as Canadians (Ng-A-Fook, 2007; Thompson, 1988/2000). The layers that “live below the text...[of] everyday life” perform doublings of invisibility as memories are reassembled and written into to the hybrid spaces of families and communities (Pinar, 1988, p. 139). Consequently, the stories shared through this project are potentially relevant across northern communities with similar historical narratives.

At this juncture, two key points about this project stand out for me. One is that while research to date regarding Aboriginal education focuses on the fact that much has gone wrong, this project focuses on generative possibilities. Secondly, to a large extent, the literature I have come across regarding Aboriginal education, including agency and government documents and reports, refers specifically to First Nation education. This is somewhat understandable as a collective force to respond to needs of Aboriginal people, but according to Statistics Canada 2006 census data, 54 per cent of Aboriginal people now live in urban centres.¹⁵ Although the notion of ‘First Nation’ control of education is important, it is not applicable to over 50% of Aboriginal students in Canada that do not live within the boundaries of a Federal Reserve. This project brings the perspective of fiddle programs both on-Reserve schools and public school boards.

These records of the fiddle in northern Manitoba lead into a discussion of how the issues explored further connect to current discourses around Aboriginal education and Canadian society. I would like to stress that this is not a program evaluation. Rather it is an opportunity to share a sample of the fiddle stories in northern Manitoba both from a historical perspective and present day impacts and contributions. Moreover, I do not claim to be an

¹⁵ Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/p3-eng.cfm>

expert, or know all perspectives. I do know however, as a mother of Aboriginal children, that they like all children here in Canada, are worthy of the same respect and opportunities to enjoy



Figure 8: Hudson Bay Railway

life, regardless of where they live or where they come from (King, 2009).

I also know “the truth about stories is that's all we are” (King, 2003, p. 122). The purpose of this project is to provide the opportunity to share stories in order to preserve and gain a deeper understanding of the impact of fiddle playing as a school program for First Nation and Metis

students. This project shares

stories and personal narratives of fiddling connections and in turn how they contribute to making a difference for students. Following this perhaps is the possibility of opening doors for other students.

A note on the north/the setting

As a personal reflection, I realize that this project is all about community. Throughout this project I speak of communities both in the sense of the ‘school community’, as well as the community at large. The setting begins with what I call the community of Frontier School

Division,¹⁶ one in which I have lived in since I was five years old.¹⁷ This vast school division covers a territory that spreads across approximately 75% of the province of Manitoba's land mass (see Appendix A). Geographically, Frontier School Division is the largest publicly funded school division in Canada¹⁸. To better understand my sense of displacement upon moving to Ottawa in 2006, I direct your attention to this school division's mission statement that promotes the study of *local* culture and history based on the understanding that it can be beneficial to *all* students; regardless of their ethnicity (see Appendix B). Students throughout this school Division participate in many cultural activities that reinforce the Division's vision to reflect local culture and history and help students to gain a sense of identity and self-esteem. The uniqueness of this was something I became more aware of when our family moved from our Frontier School Division community to Ottawa, Ontario. After arriving with my two sons in the fall of 2006, I realized how 'mainstream' education in our capital city fails to address their sociocultural backgrounds as Aboriginal youth. I underscore the importance that as Canadians we must acknowledge that Aboriginal culture *is* the *local* culture and history of every person in this country, whether they realize it or not. I include here a note on the north to better understand the nature of 'remote and isolated' communities.

July 3, 2010 I was sitting on a patio at the local Bridgehead coffee shop in Ottawa, our nation's capital. I came across Joseph Boyden's article *The Hurting* in macleans.ca, July 1,

¹⁶ An example of community that develops in these small northern towns: during the summer of 2010, my grade 3 teacher and her husband, my high school English teacher (more recently a work colleague and MLA Flin Flon Riding) celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. Having lived in Cranberry Portage since the early 1970's, they have seen a lot of people come and go from the community over the years. For their anniversary celebration, people who had moved away from the community as far back as 1973, returned to Cranberry Portage. Furthermore, people came from as far as British Columbia and Ontario and everywhere in between to attend this celebration. (Some people I have not seen for many years, my grade 4 teacher, home economics teacher, history teacher, librarian, typing teacher...all at one time, the people in my neighbourhood-aka 'teacher street'.)

¹⁷ My family moved up north for one year in 1970. They continue to reside there today.

¹⁸ Wikipedia, October 20, 2008

2010.¹⁹ His story momentarily reminded me of home, my home up north, where life is so completely different than this urban place. At the same time, I became painfully conscious of how mainstream society has so little understanding of the disparity that exists. Firstly, these communities are small, not just small, but very small. I feel the need to clarify that by small, I mean on average a population of 100-500 people. In a community that size, everyone one knows everyone. Boyden's story is about such a place:

A Cree woman I've known for many years up in Moosonee, Ont., has been in such anguish for months that I fear for her life. This anguish, this word, can't begin to describe her tortured suffering. She lives every day walking through what most of us would consider our worst nightmare. A year ago, her 17-year-old son, while at a house party full of friends, walked from the kitchen, where he'd found a short indoor extension cord, through the crowded living room, to the bedroom, and eventually into a closet. There, he wrapped the end of the cord around his neck, and, leaving a foot or two, he tied the other around the clothes rod. This thin young man, pimples on his chin and black hair he wore short and spiky, knelt so that his full weight took up all slack. In this way, he slowly strangled himself to death. (Boyden, 2010, p. 1)

Reading this instantly took me away from my coffee in Ottawa to painfully reliving the memory of my childhood friend, someone I have known since we were in grade one, whose own daughter would have turned twenty this year [2010]. This reminder comes because sadly, at the age of fourteen, she too took her own life. Boyden's story resurfaced for me the memory of my friend and his daughter. The thoughts took me back to her heart-wrenching funeral that dark day six years ago, reliving the pain and the sense of loss. All funerals have a deep element of sadness to them. But that day, no matter how hard I tried, the tears would not stop flowing. Friends and family from all across the north filled our high school gymnasium to support my friend and his family. As the funeral service ended cars slowly took their place behind the hearse to follow the funeral procession to the cemetery. Still grieving, people began to

¹⁹Boyden, (2010). <http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/07/01/the-hurting/>

spontaneously line up to give my friend a hug. I remember, when my turn came, not being able to let go of him. Perhaps because letting go of him concluded not only that moment, but also finalized the life of his brilliant and beautiful young daughter. Something to this day I have still not completely come to terms with. He used to bring her to work with him and they would come and visit me nearly every day when she was eight years old. I can still see her innocent toothless smile. Perhaps this explains why, as these memories flooded back, I could feel the tears uncontrollably welling up in me once again, as fresh as the day of her funeral. Sitting in this roadside coffee shop in Ottawa, so far from my home, surrounded by strangers not a place for private tears...But the tears, they came regardless. I think not only for this young woman, but for all the tragedies I have experienced throughout my life in the north, the senseless loss, all of the young people, their families and friends...I return to Boyden's story to deflect my own sorrow:

My Cree friend didn't know then what she knows now, that this sadness I speak of, this hurting, isn't only isolated in Kash. This hurting has spread across the northern reserves and heavily Indian communities of Canada. It spreads more easily than H1N1, and it's been infecting northern communities for many years. It's deadlier than any epidemic since the smallpox and tuberculosis eras.

...Over a six-month period recently, there were at least 100 suicide attempts among teens in Moosonee, and many others in the neighbouring reserve of Moose Factory. At last count, eight youths in Moosonee have been "successful." They've hanged themselves in closets, sometimes in trees behind the high school...And the reasons why our Aboriginal youth are strangling themselves in closets, are shooting themselves in the head, are drowning themselves in icy rivers? A few more minutes of keyboard tapping on Google and it becomes so obvious: miserable socio-economic conditions, psychological tendencies, the post-traumatic stress of a culture's destruction. (Boyden, 2010, p. 2)

By 'miserable economic conditions' I clarify here, for the most part these communities are considered to be remote and/or isolated. What people in rural and urban areas of Canada take

for granted, *complain* about even, is almost non-existent in many northern locations. One particular Metis community, for example, you cannot spend a nickel except for the local post office to buy a stamp. There is *no* restaurant, *no* gas station, *no* grocery store or hotel. And, there is not always a lot going on in an organized fashion, outside of the local schools. Additionally, a lot of people do not own vehicles and depend on others for transportation. Like Boyden, I do my own Google search to confirm these communities have what is probably some of the lowest per capita incomes in Canada.²⁰ The Indian and Northern Affairs website²¹ has community profile data that shows the average income of individuals in two Northern Manitoba communities' within the scope of my project-it ranges between \$12,000-\$16,000. Meanwhile, the cost of living in the north can be so much greater than it is in urban Canada. It is not uncommon in isolated communities, for example, that a four litre container of milk costs anywhere from \$10-\$15.00. The services in many of these communities are basic to nonexistent. They are not close enough to a larger centre to consider it easy access for services. I share this with you, because I realize, as I sit in our nation's capital, living in these communities can in no way be compared to living in mainstream Canada. I look up from reading Boyden's story to reflect on what a culturally diverse city Ottawa is, but also, how our country is still politically construed through a predominantly white narrative lens. That is, Eurocentricity remains the dominant discourse that informs our mediated narrative em-plot-ments. I have had many conversations in this urban place with people who do not even have a basic understanding of *who* are Canada's First Nation, Metis and Inuit people. Here Metis scholar

²⁰ I am speculating here, but I challenge anyone, anywhere in mainstream Canada to live on that amount of money for a year...

²¹ Income census statistics, Pine Creek. (2010). Indian and Northern Affairs.

http://pse5-sd5.aincinac.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNIncome.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=282&lang=eng

Dwayne Donald (2010) laments, “at the heart of the lovely story of the Canadian nation and nationality is a deep denial of the physical, epistemic, and ontological violence committed against Indigenous peoples and their ways” (p. 29). For people who have *never* lived or experienced life in one of these small communities, it is very difficult to relay exactly how tragic it is. In fact, there is *no way* for one to truly comprehend a sense of the level of social problems without actually experiencing it. Last year the day after Halloween, communities all across the north were reeling. On her way to school, the teenage daughter of my friend discovered a young girl hanged herself in a tree. She was still wearing her Halloween costume from the night before.

Boyden (2010) reflects on a recent trip to Winnipeg where he took part in the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions June 2010 gathering. It is estimated, the first day alone 20,000 people had gathered. Despite the rather festive feel of the first day,” he shares with us, “the pain, the same anguish that my Cree friend feels, was palpable just below the surface. The sunny skies turned to rain the next couple of days as if in mimicry” (Boyden, 2010). I find myself relating to Boyden’s description of a return to the north, where he describes a sadness difficult to define, lingering just below the surface of day-to-day living. “It’s the same sadness I can feel seeping from residential school survivors as I wander through this first annual gathering at the Forks. Groups huddle in large tents, rain popping on the roofs” (Boyden, 2010, p. 2). Like Joseph, I know firsthand many people who suffered similar tragedies. The details may differ, but the loss is the same and the pain lingers.

It is a harsh, but largely unknown reality that so many young people in these small communities have likely experienced more tragedy before the age of 18 than most people in mainstream society will see in a lifetime. The tragedy is ongoing. I return to Boyden's story:

As I've mentioned, this Cree woman in Moosonee, my friend, has lived in anguish since the suicide of her son. Her 15-year-old daughter did, as well. She was close to her brother and went through most all of the stages of grief: disbelief, anger, a stabbing sadness. But she wasn't able to make it to the last stage: acceptance. Five months after her brother was found hanged at the party, my Cree friend found her daughter hanged, this time in her own closet at home, and this time actually kneeling, leaning slightly forward as if in deep prayer...How does a mother go on after that? This Cree woman, my friend, she's from a tiny, isolated James Bay reserve named Kashechewan, 160 km as the bush plane flies north of Moosonee. Kashechewan is like a hundred other northern Canadian reserves. (p. 1)

I too ask, 'How does a parent go on after that?' Thinking once more about my friend and his daughter who would have turned twenty this spring, I return to my cup of coffee in Ottawa, looking at the 'white' strangers I sit amongst. Boyden then reminds me of home again with words of resilience and strength of people. Despite the seeping sadness and tragedy, communities and people are generally happy. This sounds perhaps contradictory, but it has been said that the resiliency of Aboriginal people is sustained by their ability to laugh at themselves (Don Kelly, personal communication, 2009). In fact I attended a two-day *Laughter is Medicine* conference hosted by the Wabano Aboriginal Health Centre in Ottawa that emphasized this fact. Boyden accentuates this point, "Let me be clear that for each story of loss there is a story of accomplishment, of perseverance" (p. 2). He concludes with a vision of a better tomorrow:

Sometimes I catch myself dreaming about my Cree friend's two dead children. In my dream they're still alive, and they're out in the bush, paddling the Moose River together, sun on their shoulders and good power in their stroke. They're paddling north, I think, home to Moosonee. And although I can't see her, I know that their mother stands on the shore by town, waiting patiently for them to come into sight. (p.2)

As most of the participants of this project, I have lived in the north for much of my life. I am fully aware of the disparity, how little there is for youth in these small communities, and also the tragedy. These points were further emphasized throughout the stories shared during this project, such as the words of one instructor: *“What would these kids be doing if it was not for the fiddle? I know it is making a difference, I can see the difference.”* Understanding all of this really reinforces my conviction that the fiddling is not just about musical instruments, but is an instrument of social change. As the fiddling tradition is revitalized, across these small northern communities, this is where the story of the fiddle, this story, comes in, bringing with it a curriculum of healing and hope.²²

St. Anne’s Reel [The Participants]

As I mentioned previously, this project is about community. All of the participants in the project have some type of connection to Frontier School Division. More specifically, a majority of the participants I interviewed attended high school at Frontier Collegiate Institute in Cranberry Portage, one of the Divisions eleven high schools. In a sense, this school Division has created a community across the north. Furthermore, all of the participants have some connection to the fiddle. The participants are community members, parents, grandparents, fiddle program instructors and student fiddle players that have gone through the school fiddle program. As the writing of my proposal evolved, so too did the project. To begin this project I turned to what I

²² I succumb to tears every time I read through this passage; just as I fought to hold back tears listening to Cindy Blackstock’s presentation on First Nation’s children (Children’s Rights conference 2009) as well, listening to Andree Cazabon speak about her latest documentary 3rd World Canada. <http://www.andreecazabon.ca/biography> To me it is just wrong on so many levels that these disparities and conditions continue in Canada today. Mainstream society, influenced by the media, continually blame Aboriginal communities for living the way they do and governments perpetuate the dysfunction through limiting funding and services, among other barriers these communities face.

refer to as 'my community' in northern Manitoba. I began interviews with people who I have known or had connections with during the number of years I have schooled, worked and lived in the north.²³ What followed were suggestions from participants and friends to speak to others involved in fiddle playing. For example, I have known and worked with Blaine Klippenstein for over fifteen years. During interviews with him, he named other key people involved in the northern fiddle community in Manitoba. This led me to other instructors such as Clint Dutiaume and Anne Lederman, as well as the former principal from the Duck Bay School, Dave Maynard.²⁴ It is worth noting at this point that in the north people are often connected through mutual acquaintances. For example, Dave Maynard who was the school Principle in the community of Duck Bay when the fiddle program began there is currently married to someone with whom I went to high school.²⁵

Of the three instructors interviewed, all brought differing perspectives to this project. Blaine Klippenstein is the teacher who started fiddling in the school. Blaine continues to teach and remains highly involved in the communities in which he lives and plays the fiddle. He led me to others in the fiddle community such as Metis fiddle player Clint Dutiaume, who now teaches fiddle at three Reserve schools. Anne Lederman is a professional musician and ethnomusicologist who has performed and taught fiddle for over thirty years throughout the country and internationally. She has recently become involved in the school fiddle programs as an instructor at the annual jamboree.

²³ I have lived in the north since 1970. During the seventeen years I was an employee of Frontier Collegiate, I saw a lot of students pass through the doors of the high school.

²⁴ I knew through Blaine that Dave had moved to Nova Scotia. After a Canada 411 search, the second Dave Maynard that I phoned was the right one. He was more than happy to share his stories with me. We did a telephone interview.

²⁵ We made this discovery after we did the interview.

A community member I interviewed grew up in a small northern fly-in²⁶ community. She has lived in the north most of her life. She worked in education for over thirty years in northern Manitoba. One Grandmother I interviewed has grandchildren, as well as nieces and nephews who play fiddle in the school programs. Her and her husband both went to high school at Frontier Collegiate (where they became high school sweethearts). I have known them for many years. They have both lived all of their life in the north. Another grandmother not only has several grandchildren playing the fiddle, she also attends all the jamborees, festivals and fiddle performances as an active audience participant. In this family I was able to learn from the perspective of three generations. The other parent and student I interviewed both attended Frontier Collegiate during the time that I was worked there.²⁷

Lastly, my two sons, who have been playing the fiddle for approximately six years were a very large part of this project. While we did not conduct formal interviews, they are very aware of the nature of my project. Many informal conversations happened in our daily lives. The perspective they bring to this project is of having been participants of a school program in the north, but also as young fiddle players in our nation's capital city. More details about individual participants are told as their stories unfold through this thesis. All candidates have unique stories and perspectives to share. Additionally, there were many similarities across all the stories told for this project. In general, there was a common sense of enthusiasm to participate in this project, as well as a sense of appreciation that this story is being told. I am grateful to all of the participants for their willingness to share their stories.

²⁶ A northern term to refer to a community for which the primary method of travel to and from is a small bush plane.

²⁷ I had contacted other student participants, but due to time restraints (theirs), unfortunately, I was not able to interview them.

Narrative Jigs

The theoretical framework for this project is one of advocacy/participatory. Creswell (2007) states the anticipated outcome of this framework is to give ‘voice’ for the participants. In turn, the ‘voice’ becomes one of a united front for reform and change. Additionally, this framework results in advocating for raised awareness. This participatory framework speaks to specific issues of the day including empowerment, oppression, suppression and alienation (Creswell, 2007). Like the medicine wheel, this participatory framework begins with the individual in the centre of the circle, and the proximal forces that affect development on the outer rings of the circle (Berry and Arruda, 2008). Aboriginal self-esteem is described as having balanced and positive interconnections between physical, emotional/mental, intellectual and spiritual realms (Toulouse, 2007). Ultimately, balance in all of these areas is imperative to an individual’s sense of self (Toulouse, 2007). To be grounded in a sense of self is understood to be critical to educational attainment.

Prior to conducting my research, a proposal outlining the purpose and methodology of this project was submitted to the University of Ottawa Research and Ethics Board. Approval was granted by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board on October, 28, 2009 to conduct the study (see Appendix D, Research Grants and Ethics Services, University of Ottawa). The principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) (First Nations Centre, 2007), National Aboriginal Health Organization, also guided this project from the initial proposal development through to the thesis writing. Although OCAP originates from a First Nations context, many of the insights and propositions outlined are relevant and applicable to Inuit, Metis and “other Indigenous Peoples internationally” (Schnarch, 2004, p. 4). The Association of

Canadian Universities for Northern Studies *Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North* also provided guidance for this project (ACUNS, 2003). In this document they “maintain their commitment to the advancement of northern scholarship but recognize that such scholarship and research take place among people with a stake in the work being done.” Following Ethics approval, I began contacting possible participants by telephone and email to arrange interview times and locations. Participants needed to be over the age of eighteen and willing to volunteer to speak to me. I travelled to northern Manitoba in December 2009-January 2010 to conduct interviews. Interviews that I was not able to conduct in person were done by telephone upon my return to Ottawa in January.

In keeping within the guidelines of ethical research, I discussed the nature of the project beforehand. I also informed candidates that their participation is an opportunity to share the stories of the fiddle. I ensured that all participants were aware that their participation was entirely voluntary and their contributions would remain confidential if they requested this. No one requested anonymity. All participants were read the consent forms prior to participation, and explained the participatory process. Moreover, participants were offered the opportunity to decline being recorded, and I would then take notes and expand as soon as the interview was finished (McMillan, 2000). No participants, however, expressed discomfort with being recorded. Following these explanations, participants signed the consent form declaring their understanding of the study and their willingness to participate. With the permission of each interviewee, the interviews were digitally recorded (Ng-a-Fook, 2007, p. 83). Interviewees had the opportunity to address any concerns about the interview process before it began. I entered into the initial interviews with a set of ‘guiding’ questions. But when I began the process, I

simply asked participants to tell me stories about the fiddle and their connections to fiddle playing. This is where all the historical stories came forth. The stories of the people who grew up with fiddle playing and fiddle music became a very big part of this project. I note this because it was these very stories that Blaine heard all over the north that led to the first fiddle program.

The interviews were used as a means to elicit the participants' insights, notably, by examining their understandings of the programs various impacts and contributions. There were no known or anticipated risks to participants. Participants were only asked for their experiences and opinions of the fiddle in their community. Records of content of the interviews were kept strictly confidential. As the primary researcher, I was the only person with access to the interview material. No interview candidates requested anonymity. This was a collaborative project, and all information was reviewed with participants (Haig-Brown, 2001). In turn participants were provided the opportunity to review their comments used in this thesis and edit my interpretations and provide feedback on my attempts to represent what they said. Like many of the participants the stories are as intertwined as the people. A common thread in the feedback from participants was how each of them was moved while reading the stories and perspectives of others.

Historically, past research practices were often disrespectful, damaging and stigmatizing to First Nations people (First Nations Centre, 2007, p. 7). Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (First Nations Centre, 2007) recognizes that "good research has the potential to create valuable new knowledge or substantiate what we already know. It can also foster positive change or confirm that things are working well (First Nations Centre, 2007, p. 6).

Research can be a tool for promoting changes that can transform people's lives (Schnarch, 2004, p. 36). This project will not necessarily result in new information but many of the project participants identified or acknowledged that telling this story will potentially benefit others (First Nations Centre, 2007). By regaining control of institutions and processes that impact them, communities build hope for a healthy future (Schnarch, 2004, p. 36). Sharing these stories has the potential to make a difference for other communities and students.

Liberty Two-Step

In addition to personal interviews, I read newsletters and documents and conducted an Internet search of 'the fiddle' for further sources of evidence of impacts of the fiddle within and beyond the local northern Manitoba community. Scott (1990) posits that "documents are the traces which have been left by the thoughts and actions of men of former times, and it is only through these traces, that we can know the past" (p. 10). Moreover, "documents are read as the sedimentations of social practices, and are able to inform us about the aspirations and intentions, about a time and place where we were simply not present" (May, 2001, p. 176). The documents I reviewed were very rich sources of information. This in turn complemented and supported the interviews. Lastly, I revisited personal journals and reflections on my experiences and those of my two children, as they were involved in fiddle playing. These stories are woven into the fabric of this thesis, like the threads on the Metis sash. Additionally, as they continue to play fiddle today, I continually reflect on the implications this has had for my family.

Fiddling with Narratives

This project is essentially a northern Manitoba community oral history. In this sense, I find the word data, to be a very technical term. The transcribed interviews are stories shared, is the 'data' I refer to for this project. The analysis was essentially a gathering and sorting. The term data analysis implies a singular process of studying a certain body of information in order to learn from it (Hanson, 2003, p. 67). In this study, the processing of information began early on and continued throughout the duration of data collection. Creswell (1998) describes this process as basically a sorting procedure, a search for "patterned regularities" (p. 152). Keeping in mind that the intent of the project is to gain understanding (insight) of the impacts of a culturally-responsive curriculum, information was organized by themes and common experiences, and also chronologically to give a sense of where and how this all started. Initially interviews and information were organized by participants and events. Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggest that the analytical process of deriving meaning from data can actually be broken down into various phases, with the first one being simply an organization of the data and the second being the generation of categories, themes and patterns. Creswell (1998) expands on this notion, suggesting that qualitative data analysis takes on a spiral form, with the first stages being ones of organizing the data and then immersing oneself in it to get an overall sense of it before it is broken up into categories.

All of the interview transcripts were imported into NVivo 8, a qualitative software analysis program. NVivo offers many layers and options to organize qualitative information. This is where I created nodes based on different themes as they emerged in the transcripts. As I reread the interview transcripts they were coded further into what NVivo calls 'tree' nodes, or

sub folders according to the themes that arose. This process organized all of the stories across interviews into common folders. After bringing a certain degree of organization to the data the next phase is one of generating “categories, themes and patterns”; a process requiring a “heightened awareness of the data” in order to detect “salient themes” and “recurring ideas or language” (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p. 114). Reflecting on these approaches, stories were organized then reorganized. The sorting began with the two key nodes of ‘impacts’ and ‘historical stories’ of the fiddle playing. The tree nodes (sub folders) of the impacts folder were opportunities, esteem, community connections and events. Reviewing the coded folders, it became very clear that all of the themes are intricately interconnected. All of the impacts are opportunities; and all of the opportunities have impacts on youth on some level. Additionally, the numerous opportunities create the spaces for students to connect with community contribute to esteem and provide space for belonging both individually and at the community level. Moreover, this is where the depth of the fiddle programs started to become apparent to me. The strong connections to and through communities were common across the interviews. This is further elaborated on in the findings and discussion sections of the thesis.

Bishop (2005) suggests the position of “coding” procedure is established and developed by the research participants as a process of storying and restorying, that are the co-joint construction of further meaning within a sequence of interviews as “conversation”. It was during the coding of the interviews that it became evident that the ‘past’ is still very present across the north. Bishop (2005) describes this as a co-construction of a mutual understanding by means of sharing experiences and meanings (p. 126). Consequently, the historical stories of the fiddle, and how much fiddle playing was once a very vibrant part of northern communities,

comprised a very large segment of the stories shared. Many of the participants provided firsthand accounts of how the fiddle was a very vital part of their life growing up in the north. These stories, still very 'alive' today, are what provided Blaine the inspiration to order that first set of fiddles at the Cold Lake School in 1995. When I was about half-finished transcribing the interviews, I had a conversation with a northern community member. Collectively we realized the connection between the history of the fiddle and the rigorous comeback the fiddle is now having in these communities today. Gbrich's (2007) imagery of stones dropping into water creates "ripples that reach out in ever increasing circles" (p. 130) I liken to the reach of the fiddle through these fiddling programs as they reverberate throughout the province while providing unforeseen opportunities.

Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) communicate how narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others (p. 42). In turn, narrative inquirers recognize that the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in relationship with each other. In turn both parties will learn and change during the encounter (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 9). I am reminded here how intertwined my life is both with participants and our stories.

The 'Findings' section conveys the stories shared through this project. Rather than focus on individual narratives, I have attempted to create a collective picture of the integrated history of the fiddle in northern Manitoba (Ng-A-Fook, 2007), weaving a narrative that represents past historical perspectives and braiding it into the fabric of present-day stories with respect to the fiddle and fiddle playing in Manitoba. I make a conscious effort not to overanalyze the life narratives presented (Ng-A-Fook, 2007, p.86). This is where in part, I became the Metissager,

sorting, organizing and braiding the stories. The strength of many of the stories speaks for themselves. I utilize the 'discussion' section of the thesis to elaborate further on the connections of the fiddle to the literature.

Will the Circle be unbroken

You have
 noticed that everything an
 Indian does is in a circle, and that is because
 the Power of the World always works in circles, and
 everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a
 strong and happy people all our power came to us from the sacred
 hoop of the nation and so long as the hoop was unbroken the people flourished.
 The flowering tree was the living centre of the hoop and the circle of the four
 quarters nourished it. The East gave peace and light, the South gave warmth, the
 West gave rain and the North, with its cold and mighty wind, gave strength and
 endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion. Every-
 thing the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round and I have
 heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars. The Wind, in its
 greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same
 religion as ours. The Sun comes forth and goes down again in circle. The
 Moon does the same and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle
 in their changing and always come back again to where they were.
 The life of a man is a circle, from childhood to childhood and so it is
 in everything where power moves. Our tipis were round
 like the nests of birds and these were always set in a circle,
 the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the
 Great Spirit meant for us to hatch
 our Children.

Black Elk Speaks²⁸

²⁸ As told through John G. Neihardt.

Using the *Circle of Courage* (see Appendix C) as a framework for analysis, I reviewed the narratives shared during fieldwork to explore the depths of the fiddle's contributions to students and communities. The *Circle of Courage* is a type of medicine wheel created by Brokenleg and Bockern (2003). The medicine wheel is an ancient symbol that reflects values, worldviews, and practices for various Indigenous people (Labelle & Peden, 2003). Weenie (2008) explains that through time, the medicine wheel has come to be recognized as a way of understanding and making sense of the world for many Aboriginal people. The medicine wheel is divided into four parts, or quadrants, each representing one of the four directions. I note here a caution raised by Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (First Nations Centre, 2007) that research frameworks and scientific jargon are not – or should not be – the only game in town (p. 24). What is more, the *Circle of Courage* is considered a culture-based framework, as recommended by OCAP (First Nations Centre, 2007, p. 22). This particular medicine wheel is based on four basic universal needs described by Mortimer Adler (1985) as “absolute values.” These needs are identified as belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity:

1. The Spirit of Belonging: The universal longing for human bonds is nurtured by relationships of trust so that the child can say, “I am loved.”
2. The Spirit of Mastery: The child's inborn thirst for learning is nurtured; learning to cope with the world, the child can say, “I can succeed.”
3. The Spirit of Independence: the child's free will is nurtured by increased responsibility so that the child can say, “I have power to make decisions.”
4. The Spirit of Generosity: The child's character is nurtured by concern for others so that the child can say, “I have a purpose for my life.” (Brokenleg & Bockern, 2003, p. 23)

Research has demonstrated that children do well when they have these four fundamental needs met (Brokenleg & Bockern, 2003). In turn these researchers describe their *Circle of Courage* as “a holistic approach to reclaiming youth” (2003, p. 22). The key themes that

emerged from the interview transcripts connect to one of the four categories in the *Circle of Courage*. In that sense it speaks to my research. Moreover it afforded me opportunities to demonstrate that in many ways the fiddle as a culturally responsive curriculum is filling very basic human needs for youth across the north. This is elaborated further within the discussion section of the thesis. Underlying all of the stories, I relate how the impacts of the fiddle programs correlate to the *Circle of Courage*, and meeting basic student needs.

The *Circle of Courage* has been referred to as “the common ground where all adults can create strength in all youth, regardless of where the youth live, what religion they practice, what language they speak, or what race they are.”²⁹ It is recognized and successfully used as a framework to guide the discussion on improving educational experiences for Aboriginal children. The Manitoba *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula* (Labelle & Peden, 2003), as well as *I Belong Here* (Albert & Fiddler, 2008) both use the *Circle of Courage*. It is also utilized in the context of a framework for Character Development Curriculum. These are all living, working documents intended to nurture and ultimately lead to an improved quality of life for Aboriginal children (Labelle and Peden, 2003; Albert and Fiddler, 2008).³⁰ The principles of the *Circle of Courage* are the underpinnings upon which the markers of resilience are placed (Brokenleg & Bockern, 2003, p. 24). Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between these markers of resilience and the foundations for self-esteem. It is within these parameters that I parallel the impacts of the fiddle as a culturally responsive curriculum within the four quadrants

²⁹ Brokenleg, (2009). <http://www.aieji2009.dk/da/Programme/Keynote%20speaker%20-%20Dr%20Martin%20Brokenleg.aspx>

³⁰ Character Development curriculum. <http://www.mvirc.com/program.html>
Tom McIntyre <http://www.behavioradvisor.com/CircleOfCourage.html>

of the *Circle of Courage* and therefore corroborate the impacts of the school fiddle playing programs.

Integral to the fiddle program is sustaining culture. As the fiddle is revitalized, in the lives of Manitoba First Nation and Metis communities, these fiddle programs are recognized as contributing significantly to this movement (Whidden, 2007; Dueck, 2007; and Lederman, 2008). In turn these programs revitalize communities as we shall see later in this thesis.

The Chicken Reel [Limitations]

The stories shared are but a brief sample of what is happening. Although just a glimpse, they personify the deep and tremendous impacts of school fiddle programs. In turn the narratives resonate with limitless possibilities. Wolcott (1999) explains that “one cannot embark upon research without preconceived ideas” (p. 43). While I likely brought some predeveloped ideas and perspectives, I do not believe I brought foregone conclusions. I was personally deeply moved (emotionally) during the process of transcribing, sorting and categorizing the interviews for this project. In truth, I had limited understanding of the deep and profound impacts that the fiddling has within the different communities across the northern Manitoba landscape. Even within my own autobiographical narratives, it was both the looking back at where we came from and what could have been, to what has since transpired that revealed to me how much my sons’ involvement in the fiddle playing has positively impacted our story.

In this project I create a space for these stories to be shared. In many aspects, I am a messenger. Consequently, I questioned what personal bias I bring to this study. Having lived on-

the-ground experiencing life in the north, affirms my beliefs that mainstream education needs to better accommodate Aboriginal students. My aspirations to pursue a Masters Degree in education are an outcome of this knowledge and my experience. Over my lifetime, I have had the opportunity to engage with so many wonderful students and community members across the north. They have shown me what disparity is and that it continues to exist in Canada. I feel a time for change is now and my personal history has allowed me to bring a unique understanding to this study. This context I feel created conditions for lessening the distance between the participants, and myself as a researcher. A condition highly valued, and even deemed essential to credible and trustworthy qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I feel aligned with OCAP's statement that community-based researchers have a greater understanding of their communities, and can thus contribute much knowledge, strength and validity to the research (First Nations Centre, 2007, p.13). At this same time, I am also aware of my own positions and reactions and how they contribute to shape the final text (Grbich, 2007, p. 131). Bishop (2005) endorses researchers such as Narayan (1993), Griffiths (1998), and Bridges (2001) who explain that it is no longer useful to think of researchers as insiders or outsiders. Instead, researchers might be positioned in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpreting communities and power relations. Rather than trying to define insider or outsider status, my position is bonded through the ties of reciprocity (Narayan, 1993). I focus my attention on the quality of relations with the people I seek to represent. "They are accepted as subjects with voices, and views (Narayan, 1993 p. 672). Moreover, I perceive "the self of the knower and the larger self of the community of inquiry are, intimately woven into the very fabric of that which we claim as knowledge from the very starting point" (Bishop, 2005, p. 658).

My lived experiences radiate through Jones' (2005) expression when we place our lives and bodies in the texts that we create, engage, and perform, they are "no longer just our own; for better or worse they have become part of a community experience" (p. 784). This is where the merits of my situation outweighs the value of increased objectivity of a researcher arriving with no prior knowledge or experience-essentially an outsider.

Time and money as noted with many projects, are identified as limiting factors in this project. Distances across the north are vast. The extreme cold (-52 with a wind chill) while I was in northern Manitoba to conduct my research impacted my ability to travel. Despite that, I do not feel at any time that I did not do enough interviews, or bring in enough varied perspectives. Although this is a sampling of what is going on, this project generates a very clear picture of the magnitude of the fiddle as a culturally responsive curriculum. Recognizing that not all communities, and people are the same has brought on a movement away from the notion of 'Best Practices', toward that of *Promising Practices*. Case studies on promising practices in Aboriginal education can "offer in-depth insights into those special features and qualities that help to shape rich learning and social experiences, nurture imagination curiosity, support cultural education, inspire student learning and strengthen bridges to parents and communities" (Phillips & Raham, 2007, p. 15). In this way, "research can help us to envision and choose among many possibilities" (Phillips & Raham,, 2007, p. 15). Programs and projects such as this, however, may not always be reproducible in any community with similar outcomes. What are noteworthy are the possibilities.

On another note, this past March [2010] I was invited to participate with the Metis Centre of the National Aboriginal Health Organization in a *Think Tank on Health and Wellness*

for Metis Youth. During a presentation, the issue was addressed that little research exists specific to Metis people. I became aware at that point of the fact that my project could easily have focused on a Metis community. Many participants, including my children happen to be Metis. I remain open within this project that the schools and communities give a ‘flavour’ of what is going on with the fiddle. Central to this project is not ‘Aboriginalness’ but the fiddle and the deep connections in both First Nation and Metis communities across the north. Although I include this note in the limitation section of the project, I put this out as an invitation for future research to look specifically into the Metis community and the numerous contemporary fiddle players and fiddle playing and the resultant outcomes.

Changing Strings

Institutions of schooling house an ensemble of knowledge’s and practices that reproduce and inscribe colonialism’s culture. They also provide spaces to teach alternative histories, to learn about different Indigenous nations who continue to challenge the colonization of their traditional lands (Ng-A-Fook, 2007 p. 206). “What is needed in countries like Canada” Alfred (1999) reminds us:

...is the kind of education that would force the general population to engage the realities other than their own increasing their capacity to empathize with others—to see other points of view and to understand other people’s motivations and desires. (p. 132)

Ng-A-Fook (2007) tells us that oral history projects provide a possible institutional space, a bridging, where communities can construct local histories that challenge a “field [traditionally] dominated by white, male historians who rarely ask or care what the Indians they study have to

say about their work” (p. 205). Here Bishop (2005) also raises the issues in qualitative research of representation and legitimization. However he takes the position that collaborative storying addresses these issues by suggesting that:

rather than there being distinct stages in the research, from gaining access to data gathering to data processing, there is a process of continually revisiting the agenda and the sense-making processes of the research participants within the interview. In this way, meanings are negotiated and co-constructed between the research participants within the cultural frameworks of the discourses within which they are positioned. (p. 125)

Let us attune ourselves now to the next section of this thesis, what I refer to as the findings. Chapter three begins with the tones of historical stories from those that grew up with fiddle playing. Woven throughout this chapter is a twining of stories that describe the beginnings and growth of the present day fiddle programs in northern Manitoba. This chapter further illuminates some of the numerous opportunities that are an outcome of its culturally responsive curriculum. What follows resonates some of the deeper impacts and implications of the fiddle as a culturally responsive curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE

A Waltz, A Jig and A Reel

This chapter begins with a personal journal entry from my first real ‘taste’ of youth fiddle playing. It is here that the story reverts back to the introduction of Blaine, the teacher that introduced a fiddling curriculum and the very beginning of how these fiddle programs began in northern Manitoba. These historical stories express the vibrant role the fiddle played at one time across the north. In order to understand the full impact of the present day fiddle playing, it is important to hear these stories from the past. This section of the thesis is a weaving of a narrative past with the present.

Fiddle Fingers

It was a sunny Thursday morning, in early May 2005. I was heading out on the highway in the high school’s fourteen-passenger van as an employee of Frontier Collegiate, a unique high school located in the community of Cranberry Portage, Manitoba. The van was loaded down with sleeping bags, suitcases, backpacks and *fiddles*. Five of the passengers were students from the high school. I became their pseudo-parent over the course of the next four days. All five were girls. And they all originate from the community of Duck Bay, Manitoba. The other two passengers were my sons, Quenten, age 7, and Gunthar, age 11 who had just recently started fiddle playing. “The jamboree would be a good experience for them” their fiddle teacher told me. Our destination was the Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre, Norway

House, Manitoba. The approximate distance is 378 km. The approximate travel time six hours, as 170 km of the trip is on a gravel road. When you live in a small town, a road trip anywhere is always fun. The van was bubbling with energy and excitement in anticipation of the trip ahead.

Ninety minutes to our first stop, Ponton, a truck stop at the junction of highways #39 and #6 in northern Manitoba, was actually our only real ‘pit’ stop before we got to our destination. There is no other community or service stations on route. Shortly after pulling out of Ponton the pavement subsides to gravel, the next three hours are dusty and bumpy. A black bear exploring the ditch tempted us to stop. The bear was likely foraging for something edible. Although the snow had recently melted, it was early spring and there was no new growth to be seen. We patiently watched as curiosity got the best of this young cub and he came closer to investigate our van. As if to pose for the photograph, everyone squealed as the bear stood on his hind legs to get a better look at us.

Our next stop was the North Whiskey Jack Cross Lake Ferry, the only way to get across to the other side of the mighty Nelson River. Everyone on board was talking about the Sasquatch that was recently reported on the national news to be seen at this very river crossing. We all found



Figure 9: Black bear

ourselves scrutinizing the bushes along the north shore, wondering if we too might catch a glimpse of the ever elusive Sasquatch.³¹ “That is where he saw it,” we hear someone from the bus beside us pointing through their open window.

³¹ Annie. (2005). <http://blogcritics.org/scitech/article/second-bigfoot-sighting-in-norway-house/>

Arriving in the community of Norway House, the gravel road became pavement again. There was a collective sigh of relief throughout the van as the rumble of the gravel road subsided. A long line of yellow school buses, vans and 4X4 trucks were parked bumper to bumper around the circle drive of the Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre's grand front entrance. An atmosphere of excitement and bustle was in the air as we joined the queue at the front door of the school foyer to register our arrival. Somewhat of an organized chaos, the jamboree had just exploded in size from 175 students in 2004 to 425 students in 2005. There was an estimated 550 extra people in Norway House for this event including all of the chaperones, bus drivers and instructors.³² This was a completely unexpected surge in interest and participation. I still recall how I was personally overwhelmed by the activity and the sheer number of students with fiddles everywhere we went. Anywhere



Figure 10: Ariel North view HBO School, Norway House

Source: Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre

you looked, in the hallways, in the classrooms, in the school courtyard there were students playing fiddles. Over the course of the hours and days to come, I was in complete awe. I asked myself several times over the next few days 'What in the world am I doing?' and

³² Norway House is the only high school/community in Frontier School Division that has the capacity to host such a large number of people. Everyone is assigned classrooms for sleeping. Regular classes have been cancelled in the school for Friday to accommodate the jamboree. Many of the high school students are involved in the logistics of running the jamboree. There are four meals a day served in the school. The food is all homemade, available in generous portions and absolutely fantastic!

moreover ‘*What is happening here? Why the fiddle?*’ What I saw back then was unbelievable! As I will discuss later, I am not the only person who was in awe.

Given our classroom designation, we hauled in our luggage, fiddles, sleeping bags, and gym mats. Everyone claimed their ‘space’ on the classroom floor, our ‘home’ for the next few days and nights. Hungry with anticipation we joined the long line for supper. This brand new school was built with an open circular courtyard in the centre known as the Elder’s Courtyard. The centre or core of the school is where all the main offices and resource rooms are located. The ring that surrounds the Elder’s circle is where tables were set up to accommodate feeding the large influx of people in the community for the next four days.

The days are noticeably longer in the north this time of year and all of the outdoor tables in the Elder’s Circle were filled with people embracing the warmth of the intense spring sunshine. Our plates full of homemade moose stew and bannock, we found an empty table near the school’s main entrance to eat our supper. Suddenly I heard a group of girls squeal with delight “Gunthar is here!” To this day I recall how puzzled I was that anyone knew who



Figure 11: Elders courtyard HBO School, Norway House

Source: Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre

Gunthar was, let alone strange girls. I then reminded myself his participation in

school sports took him on trips to other communities. As it turned out, the girls were not strangers, but friends and relatives. When I looked over to see who they were, I recognized

their chaperone as someone I went to high school with. Even though we haven't seen each other for nearly 20 years, we quickly became reacquainted. Shelley, who is a couple of years older than me, did not look any different than the day she graduated from high school. Her three children, Shannon, Cori-Lee and Eldon as well as her mother Eileen were with her. Over the next three days we shared stories of days gone by. We caught up on mutual friends from high school. We laughed at how my youngest son Quenten [eight years old at the time] took a liking to Shannon and hardly left her side for the entire weekend. After the jamboree we continued to stay in touch. Shelley would stop in at my house for visits when she found herself driving through Cranberry Portage.

Following supper, the jamboree began with a play-in. I had no idea what a 'play-in' consisted of, but we headed over to the gymnasium to join in. Cameron Baggins, the Frontier School Division Fiddle Program Coordinator, and Joey Adamowski took turns at a microphone calling out the name of fiddle tunes. Filled with chairs and students, the gymnasium was bustling with activity. Many of the fiddle instructors are master musicians. They were set up on stage with a base fiddle, keyboard and guitars to accompany the fiddle tunes. "Rubber Dolly," Cameron announced, and the gymnasium broke out in a chorus of fiddles. Everyone who knew the song played along. At the same time a handful of students were scattered around the gym, playing their own melody, perhaps the latest song they were trying to master, somehow oblivious to the noise and activity around them. I had never seen anything like this before. Gunthar and Quenten, having had no more than three fiddle lessons, only knew a few tunes. We were overwhelmed with all the activity. "Boil Them Cabbage" Cameron announced. A song they already knew, my sons lifted their fiddles to their shoulders and did their best to play

along. The girls I was chaperoning knew all of the songs and enthusiastically bowed the strings of their fiddles. They were all outstanding fiddle players. Cameron Baggins had been their fiddle teacher when they went to school in Duck Bay. He welcomed them to the jamboree with warm embraces. The girls were equally excited to see their previous fiddle instructor. The jamboree brings students and staff from schools located all over the province. A constant swell of energy resonated



Figure 12: jamboree play-in

Source: Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre

throughout the evening as those travelling long distances continued to arrive. For those from isolated communities, this trip provided an opportunity to reconnect with old friends and acquaintances.

The next two days students participated in fiddle workshops with different instructors to enhance their fiddle playing skills. The students were divided into groups according to skill level identified when they registered. A keyboard instructor had also been invited to introduce the opportunity for students to try their hand at a piano. Friday and Saturday evening, everyone headed over to the nearby Kinasao Sipi First Nation Community Multiplex. A large stage sat at one end of the arena. Chairs were lined up on the arena floor. The concerts both nights were open to the public. A large number of people from the community attended. Friends and relatives from nearby Cross Lake had also driven to town for the concerts. The local community

television station was set up to record the concerts. Friday night's concert was an open stage. Anyone who wanted to perform was welcome to sign up to play a song. There was a steady flow of student groups and solo performances from all the different communities. This was a chance for each of the different instructors to showcase their students' talents.

A Trail of Fiddles – Introducing Blaine

During the Saturday evening concert at the community recreation centre, Cameron Baggins, the Frontier Fiddle Program Coordinator paused the concert to talk about the Frontier Fiddle



Figure 13: Jamboree concert 2005

program. “This all started about ten years ago in the small community of Sherridon with the vision of one teacher,” he said through the microphone. Cameron then introduced Blaine Klippenstein, the teacher who initiated fiddle playing in the classroom to the jamboree audience.

Considering himself to be a nomad, I had a hard time tracking down Blaine to interview for this research project. He never stays in one community for very long. A few years after he initiated the fiddle program in Sherridon, Blaine moved to Cranberry Portage to teach at Frontier Collegiate for a couple of years. Then he moved on to Grand Rapids, and then eventually to Barrows. It took several emails and phone calls to mutual acquaintances for me to

find his current address. When I got Blaine on the phone, he was surprised to hear from me. It had been a few years since we talked. He was in the midst of teaching his first year at a new high school. "I just received new fiddles for this school and our first fiddle lesson is today," he told me during our telephone conversation. I explained my research project to him. "Well, for me, it's not my story," he modestly replied. "But I definitely feel good about being part of it." During our interview he recollected on the processes of how he immersed himself into living within the culture of the northern communities. Blaine moved up north at the age of nineteen. During this time, he lived as a trapper, a commercial fisherman and hunter. These sustainable livelihoods on and with the landscape afforded curricular and pedagogical opportunities to develop relationships with the communities in which he had chosen to live within. "I always felt," Blaine shared, "like I had my finger on the pulse of the culture of the communities." Before becoming a teacher, Blaine had been living and learning about pedagogy of the land in northern communities for a long time. Later as an educator, it was not long before he noticed a lack of connection between the curriculum-as-planned within mainstream education and the educational process students in northern communities engaged with outside the institutional contexts of schooling. "My motive as a teacher," Blaine told me, "has always been that education has got to come from a cultural context. I mean, I was trying everything. I tried to develop local sports, community programs, reading programs, and local whatever." Recognizing the importance for children in the north to have access to literature that was culturally relevant, Blaine utilized his money and time to develop and publish a reading series for children living in the north. Now there are thirty books in a series published by Loon Books that reflect

local, particularly northern curriculum. On the phone that day, Blaine explained his motive to write these books:

It's twice as hard to learn to read when children have to first decode the culture in the pictures and stories. Children need stories and illustrations that reflect their own everyday experiences...For example some of the books might talk about sidewalks. Well, a lot of students didn't know what a sidewalk was. So, not only was I trying to teach them to read, but I had to try and make them understand what the book was even referring to.

Some book titles include *Mom's Bannock* and *The Canoe Race*. Blaine's most recent book, *Andrea's Fiddle* was shortlisted for the 2009 McNally Robinson Book for Young People Award. It is a story about a young girl who receives a fiddle as a special gift from her grandfather. The fiddle comes with a story that has been passed down through many generations.³³

Blaine stressed that no matter what community that he lived in, the people he met always shared stories about the fiddle.

Every Friday and Saturday night, people would clear out their houses, pack up all their belongings, and put them outside. Everyone would then gather inside and there would be square dancing inside the houses. These were not drinking parties, they were gatherings. I was told about these stories in *every* community that I lived in up north. But I never *saw* this anywhere. The fiddle was *dead* in the north.

Blaine could *hear* the presence of this fiddled absence. These stories continue to resonate their narrative tunes throughout the north today.

How Elvis Presley Killed the Accordion

The industrial revolution is typically seen as progress by mainstream society. But has anyone ever stopped to look at the impact it has had on culture and communities? In many ways,

33 Marc Zienkiewicz, (2010). <http://www.thesudburystar.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?archive=true&e=1536932>

perhaps it could be said that these impacts are silent. Although Blaine *heard* the present absence of the fiddling with music through elders' stories, he also *felt* the deep-rooted passion, excitement, and connections that these communities had with the fiddle. I too could *feel* the passion in the stories people shared with me about the fiddle.

The tone of these historical stories resonated through all of the interviews for this thesis. While I was conducting my research up north, I set up an interview with Tina. She is a Cree/Metis who grew up in the small village of Brochet. Tina has lived and worked most of her life in northern Manitoba. A former colleague and friend, Tina and I have shared many experiences together over the years including moose hunting adventures and overnight trips to a rustic old trapper's cabin in -40° temperatures. When I was at home we enjoyed almost daily visits over hot cups of coffee in front of a roaring fire in my wood stove. Cozy from the radiating heat of the wood stove and fresh cups of coffee, one day, she told me:

Fiddling has always been very important in the north, especially in the fur trade areas, like where I come from. It was always a very, very big part of the culture up there. I remember, when I was a kid, as far as I can remember, we always had square dances. And there were always people in the community who knew how to fiddle.

Tina continued to reminisce how even when she was a teenager, going to high school,³⁴ she would go home for the summer [to Brochet] and that is what they did; it was steady dances and square dances to the beat of fiddle music. I have known Tina since I was twelve years old. She worked at the high school in Cranberry Portage during the time I was a student there. When I joined the staff at Frontier Collegiate in 1989, we became colleagues and very good friends. Her home community of Brochet remains today what is known as a remote fly-in community with

³⁴ The community of Brochet, as many remote communities across the north did not and still does not have a high school. In order to continue her education, Tina made the choice to come to Frontier Collegiate in Cranberry Portage that, established in 1965, still today boards students from these remote and isolated northern communities while they attend high school.

no road access other than a temporary winter road that goes in for a few months each winter. Situated on a major river, Brochet has a strong French influence from the days of the fur trade. Although Tina has not lived in Brochet since high school, she maintains a very strong connection to the small community. Her mother, brother and many family members reside there.

I am reminded here of our good friend Carol, who always loved to listen to Tina's adventures about growing up in Brochet. Over the years we have spent countless hours sharing stories and laughter over coffee. Often Carol would excitedly ask Tina, "tell me again about your home." Tina took great care and time to describe the small northern home that her family continues to live within. Her words were so descriptive. We could visualize the tiny cabin through Tina's graphic description of what Chamber's (1999) has called elsewhere the landscape's curricular topography. "The wood stove that my mom cooked all of our food on was over there," pointing to another corner, "that is where we all slept." Cree playwright, novelist and children's author,³⁵ Tomson Highway, also from Brochet, elicits the same graphic images during a television documentary, *Adrienne Clarkson Presents, Tomson Highway: Native Voice*. The program includes a visit to Tomson's home in Brochet, Manitoba. Standing on the space where his family home once stood, he recounts vividly, pointing at the ground, "the wood stove, was over there, and this is where we all slept..." It becomes evident how much their childhood memories of Brochet remain a part of who they are today. Now one of our country's foremost voices in Aboriginal theatre, much of Tomson's writing has connections to his life in the north. He writes the following for example about the place of his birth:

³⁵Highway, Tomson. (2010). <http://www.canadiantheatre.com/dict.pl?term=Highway%2C%20Tomson>

Passed through the most extraordinarily beautiful landscape anywhere on earth; I know, I've seen it myself many times since (and plan, in fact, to die there). Hundreds maybe even thousands of lakes unseen by humans (except by us) with hundreds maybe even thousands of islands, encircled all of them, by gorgeous, golden sand beaches or flat slates of granite that slide like plates into the water and of course, are covered by ice and snow in winter. Imagine, if you will, a lake filled with pristine, perfectly drinkable, deep blue water that is easily two-thirds the size of Lake Ontario, but with five hundred islands, most of them encircled by golden sand beaches. And a mere 1,500 people living in and around it, 600 at one end (the north) and 800 at the other end (the south), and maybe a hundred somewhere in between. My home village of Brochet stands at the northern extremity of just such a lake...is so beautiful that it has been known to bring to the eyes of certain people, even men as muscular as Samson, tears the size of children's marbles. (Highway, 2010, p. 46)

Tina has written the two following children's books that in turn illustrate her fond memories of childhood: *The Spring Celebration* and *Jack Pine Fish Camp*. These are stories of community traditions that she felt compelled to share with future generations.³⁶

Tina remembered her childhood, as a place where there were always fiddle players. The dances would go all night, right into the morning. She emphasized how fiddle playing was a really big thing in the community. Young and old people alike were at these dances. Tina sighed after taking a sip of coffee, (re)membering narratives of dancing with her friend's dad. We both laughed at the thought of this. In today's world, neither of us can



Figure 14: *The Spring Celebration* book cover
Source: Metis Culture & Heritage Resource Centre Inc

³⁶Umperville, Tina, (1995). In Oyate. Retrieved from http://www.oyate.org/index.php?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product_id=160&category_id=7&option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=97

imagine teenagers hanging around with their parents and dancing. “And when you think about it now,” she continued,

...how many other things do you do with your friends’ *dad*? But it was *so* much fun! It was a huge community thing. And it was a really good feeling. It was such a mixture of people. And people would bring their kids, because at that time there was no such thing as babysitting. So people would bring their kids. And there would be kids sleeping all over the place, like underneath chairs, and along the sides against the wall. There would be kids passed out everywhere. And everybody would be dancing until 5 or 6 in the morning. There would be blankets laid out on the floor and kids would be sleeping through the whole thing. It’s actually kind of funny when you think about it. It wasn’t until I had left home as an adult to go to work, that I went back there after I had been working south for a while. I went back and the community was having a dance, so I went, and it was a stereo and people were dancing to a stereo system.

Here comments over coffee that day made me think back to Blaine’s initial interview where he pointed out that The Beatles, Elvis Presley, and recorded music were the beginning of a new era. “When rock & roll came in the late 1950’s and 1960’s,” Blaine told me then, “it killed home grown music.” I don’t think that at the time people realized what was happening. “They say,” he continued “Elvis Presley killed the accordion!”

Back to the warmth of the fire in my wood stove, Tina shared a story about a sense of loss she experienced during her trip home one summer.

People were dancing to a stereo system, and it wasn’t even square dancing. I was so disappointed! And there was nobody there, no adults there, it was all kids, and that is what it had become in such a short period of time. Stereos, and the tape music, that is how we got away from the fiddling. Once the stereo systems came in and the new music came in, the adults were not part of it. And you know, that was it, they never came to the dance, they never danced, and that was it. They could not relate to the new music at all, they couldn’t dance to it. And that was it! *That* is when it died. That transition did not take long to happen. When I went to school here, (FCI)³⁷ every summer when I went home for the summers, we were still having those fiddling dances, and then by the time I was out of high school, it was basically gone. They were done. And it happened quickly and it happened suddenly and it was done. Like it was, it wasn’t, it didn’t *slowly* go out, it was like totally cut off. It was really a quick transition. Then all of a sudden it wasn’t

³⁷ Frontier Collegiate Institute.

cool to be around the old people anymore. You wouldn't be caught dead dancing with your girlfriends' *dad*. That was *it*. The old people were completely left out.

That day I could sense through Tina's words the void that was created in her community.

Much like Tina, Blaine also pointed out similar stories taking place all over the north.

During another interview with Caroline in Wabowden she also highlighted such stories of loss.



Figure 15: My's Place

That day we met in the restaurant Caroline and her husband Nathan own in Wabowden.³⁸ Their business is a gas station, restaurant and a lounge. It is a beautiful massive log building constructed by Caroline's brother Rick, a master craftsman. The restaurant is filled with pictures and memorabilia that

narrate some of their historical lived experiences in Wabowden. Caroline's great-grandparents were the very first settlers in what is now known as the community of Wabowden. This railroad community on the shores of Setting Lake is along the Grass River system that was an established 18th and 19th century fur trade route known as the "Upper Track" extending to the shores of the Hudson's Bay. Having lived most of their life on the



Figure 16: My's Place

family trapline, Caroline's relational roots in the north are very deep. This is what Metis Elder Maria Campbell refers to as kinship, a strong connection not only to the people, but also to the

³⁸ Caroline's husband Nathan grew up in Duck Bay. Caroline and Nathan both went to school at Frontier Collegiate in Cranberry Portage. That is where they met and became high school sweethearts.

place (personal communication, October 29, 2010). They had many different traplines over the years. The one she remembers the most was over on Five Mile Lake. Leafing through old black and white photographs, she told me, Wabowden is going to be 100 years old in two years. She is working on a photograph book that will illustrate the community history from its very beginning. While looking at some pictures, she shared the following story:

My grandmother was born here in Wabowden. She is still alive and still lives here. She is 92 years old. She was such an awesome jigger.³⁹ There is my grandma jigging with her brother. That is my father playing the fiddle. That was in someone's house here.

Her father was also a commercial fisherman, and during certain times of the year, they lived out in the commercial fishing camps. They would fly into town on a bush plane to go to school and then fly back out to camp for the weekend. As they got older they would take schoolwork to the bush camp, returning to town only for Christmas and spring exams. When winter trapping started, much of the travel was by dog team. "We had no other way to travel," Caroline recalled. "And dad took his fiddle with him," she continued,

...everywhere he went. My dad played fiddle a lot. That is how we got into the fiddle. Dad used to play and get us to dance before we went to bed. We didn't know it then, but that is how he played us out and we went to sleep. Something else, he learned by listening, there was nobody to teach him. Sometimes he would get a song from the radio. And that is how my brothers learned as well, by listening.

Caroline went on to tell me how her brother Rick⁴⁰ used to sit and watch her father play fiddle, watch his fingers move. And then her father would ask Rick if he wanted to play. She described how her father would give Rick the fiddle and say,

'Okay, do this.' And Rick would try it. 'No, no, not like that.' And he would say, 'Okay, I'll play it again.' Then dad would play the tune again and then give the fiddle back to Rick

³⁹ The Métis style of dancing to fiddle tunes very similar to Celtic and French-Canadian antecedents, but seamlessly weaved in faster-paced First Nation's footwork and rhythms such as in traditional drumming. Préfontaine, Darren R. (n.d.) http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/metis_culture_and_language.html

⁴⁰ Caroline's brother Rick also went to high school at Frontier Collegiate.

to try. Dad would hum the melody for Rick. We had no record players back then, so sometimes they would listen to the radio for a song to come up, and dad would call Rick over to listen, and then Rick would get the fiddle and he would be listening. That was how he learned to play many songs. He would get it by listening and watching.

Caroline emphasized how that is the way their father taught them everything. “Anything he taught it was; ‘you watch; now you do it.’ And if you mess up, okay, you learn from your mistakes. No big deal, do it again.” While telling these stories, Caroline recognizes how this type of teaching and learning has been lost to formal education (schooling).

Once they reached grade 5, Caroline talked about how they began to spend more time in town during the school year. “The thing I remember then, at Christmas and Thanksgiving, we have a church hall here in town.” She motioned with her hands, to the direction that church hall still stands, remembering with fondness, how they used to gather to have a big feast.

Everyone in the town went. And then the guys would pull out their instruments. The Grandma’s would make beds under the chairs with their jackets. And we’d all sleep on the jackets underneath. Our parents danced. And the Grandma’s would look after the babies underneath the chairs and make sure they didn’t get stepped on. Nobody drank or anything. It was a big get together. And it was all fun. (Caroline, 2009)



Figure 17: Church Wabowden, MB

Caroline’s colourful childhood memories continue to resonate with the homemade good-time feelings of days gone by.

Nathan, Caroline’s husband, sat down and joined in on the story telling during a quiet spell at the service station. Nathan grew up in the community of Duck Bay. “You know what they used to do back home?” He asked me and then continued,

There used to be a bunch of commercial fisherman, they would be out fishing all week. And my dad had a big fish house there. After they finished packing all the fish, they would clean the fish house. Then they would pile all the fish boxes around on the inside on the floor and guys would play guitar and fiddle. And they'd square dance in the middle. That is what they used to do every Saturday night. That was the end of the work week for the fishermen. They would pull all the nets out and dry the nets on the weekend, and then they would go back out fishing on Monday. Saturday was always a night to celebrate.

This went on all the time Nathan was growing up in Duck Bay.

Having attended high school in Cranberry Portage, Caroline knows my family. Her brother Rick in fact travelled many weekends with us working for my dad on the farm. Caroline looked at me saying, "That was the same when you were growing up wasn't it, people getting together and jamming?" And she is right, live music was a very big part of life across the prairies. My father a self-taught musician was playing lead guitar in a band at country dances by the age of sixteen. I spent much of my childhood in community halls all over southern Manitoba. I still recollect the onset of the '*music man*' and his disco ball. The phone calls for my father to play at weddings or community dances suddenly ended. Every time we attended a family wedding, my father would further reiterate his loathing of recordings and the *music man*.

My home on the shores of Lake Athapapuskow was my base camp for the duration of my stay in Cranberry Portage to do my research. Monica, a dear friend from grad school travelled with my sons and I from Ottawa on this northern narrative adventure. The day we arrived the thermometer dropped to -35 C. The mercury stayed somewhere between -35 C and -40 C the entire two weeks that Monica stayed with us. Within a day of arriving at home, Monica and I took to the road to the nearby community of Cormorant to do our first interview. I say 'our' because, having just gone through the interview process for her own thesis, Monica

was really like a mentor to me during these first few interviews. She was comfortable in the homes we were invited into, and always eager to ask questions for clarity if she did not understand something. She was also good company during the long drives to and from communities across the vast distances in the north. During our travels for fun we counted the number of vehicles and wildlife sightings. One particular late night road trip we saw more wild animals than we did vehicles.

I had phoned ahead to let Shelley know that we were coming. She gave me directions to meet at her mom's house. When we arrived, although it was bitterly cold outside, the house was toasty warm from the heat of a big wood stove in the living room. Savouring the aroma of a big pot of chicken soup simmering on the stove, Monica, Shelley and I gathered around Eileen's



Figure 18: Hudson Bay Railway Line

large kitchen table. Eileen, Shelley's mom brought over a pot of coffee and started warming us with stories. Her father had originally moved to Cormorant from Ontario looking for a better life for him and his family. As a little girl her family lived twelve miles up the river from the

community. They had animals, farmed and sold hay. Her mom used to make butter and sell it to the store in town for ten to fifteen cents a pound. She told us about how she had to stay in town at her grandmother's to go to school. In the morning, before going to school, she sold

bottles of milk. She had a little dog that used to pull her sleigh carrying the bottles of milk. All of her deliveries were north of town. The easiest way to get there was to walk down the train tracks, because the snow for the most part was always cleared away. The railroad maintenance crew didn't like her walking down the tracks because it was dangerous. But, she did it anyway. She had to be quick to get out of the way if she heard them coming. Her little dog knew all the stops she had to make. He would run ahead to the next delivery and then stop and wait for her to drop off each bottle of milk. On the days she didn't have to deliver milk, she would sit in front of her grandmother's wood stove and do embroidery on pillowcases and tablecloths. She showed us some of the embroidery work that she had done over the years. During the interview in Cormorant, another community on the 'Bayline',⁴¹ Eileen recollected stories with the same rich tones as Caroline, Nathan and Tina. "I remember going with mom and dad, especially at Christmas, New Years, and special events, they had gatherings in people's houses. And anyone that could play would play." Eileen shared the following story, "Way back, I remember one time, there was someone that came into town, an older man, and he could *really* play fiddle." She gestured with her hands,

So Leslie, that's my husband, hooked up loud speakers on the roof of the house. She continued, and he had it all set up there. And this elderly person was playing fiddle, and he could *really* play. And so he had us, one on mandolin, one was on the guitar, and well, I chorded on the accordion. And there was kind of like a mike [microphone]. So this one, he came from, I don't know, Saskatchewan somewhere, and he came with my brother-in-law. My brother-in-law Orville was building the pool hall at that time. And so he thought he was real live and that it could be broadcasted out. So he'd get on there [the microphone] when he was playing and say '*Hello Jeanette from Wollaston Lake*'. He didn't know that it was just in Cormorant. So we let him think it was a live broadcast. Then we used to have this one lady she was playing guitar. But she was never keeping

⁴¹ The Hudson Bay Railroad to Churchill and the Hudson Bay is often referred to as the Bayline. The railroad is dotted with communities all the way up to Churchill. For many of these communities the train was and is a vital link to the outside world. The 'comings and goings' of the train was always exciting to see who and what got off the train.

time, and she'd be strumming on her guitar and she'd be way ahead, of everyone else that was playing, so then she'd have to stop and wait for the rest to catch up.

Sitting around the kitchen table, the heat of the wood stove warming us, we laughed fondly at Eileen's cherished memories.

Like many small northern communities, for years, the train was one of the only ways to get in and out of Cormorant. There was no road access. Common methods to travel were boat, plane or train. The train's arrival into town was always a big event. People would gather to wait near the train tracks to see who and what was getting on or off the train. Eileen giggled like a school girl as she related the following memory:

Back then, my mother-in-laws house was near the railroad tracks. And sometimes it would get full of people waiting for the train. And the train would always be late and people would get tired of waiting. So they would put the table and stuff outside of the house to make room. Somebody would play fiddle, and they would dance until the train came. I remember that from when I was growing up. And I remember this one that was playing the fiddle, and all at once he said, 'here comes the train,' and everybody took off outside. But it wasn't really coming; he just said that and got everyone all excited.

Everyone around the table laughed again at the recollection of simpler times and joy in Eileen's memories.

Since the very early days of the fur trade, fiddle music has been a very big part of these communities. Cormorant, like Brochet, Wabowden, Duck Bay, and many other small northern communities, there really was not much else for entertainment. So people relied on the dancing and the jigging and the music for entertainment. There was no formal tradition of teaching. Fiddling survived because people picked it up, because everybody did it. It was around all the time and if you wanted to learn, you just watched and copied. Furthermore, it was the only music you heard at that time. Moreover, formal music lessons were and are virtually unheard of in these remote and isolated communities. Music was something you did because it

was in your family or you knew someone who was a musician. But by 1975, the music had virtually stopped. Very few musicians were still playing. As a result for several years many fiddles laid dormant in closets and attics across the north (Whidden, 2007). The next section commences the stories of change.

Fiddling with a Culturally Responsive Curriculum

Reflecting on all his years in the north, as a teacher in the community of Sherridon, Blaine decided one day that it might be worth a try to bring some fiddles into the school. “I think I basically stumbled across the fiddle,” Blaine confessed. “Because I was really trying *everything*,” he continued:

I think Jerry Storie, the Superintendent at the time, likes to tell the story about how one day he found a requisition on his desk for fourteen fiddles. This was such an unusual request, he could not believe it. Fiddle playing in the north was unheard of at that time. He phoned me to find out what it was about. [Blaine had submitted the requisition]. Jerry was amused at this, and I think he signed the requisition because it was so farfetched. I wasn’t a musician, and I had no background in music. I knew *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, to start with. It was just like; let’s see what we can do. And after that, I would basically stay one song ahead of the students.

Located on the railway line that goes to Lynn Lake, Sherridon was once a thriving service centre for Sherritt Gordon nickel mines. When the mine closed in 1940, nearly the entire community was relocated by winter tractor train to Lynn Lake, Manitoba. The present day community of Sherridon has a population of about 113 people.⁴² In 1989 a 78 km gravel road was constructed to service a new mine that opened at Puffy Lake. Sherridon once again became the service centre for the mine. But this time with road access. This washboard gravel road winds its way

⁴² Sherridon, MB. (2003). http://www.gov.mb.ca/ana/community_profiles/pdf/sherridon.pdf

through Precambrian rock cuts, lakes and swamps. It is a treacherous series of tight curves and hills. The trip on average takes about 90 minutes to drive just to reach the nearest paved highway.

During our interview, Blaine continued to recall how up in Sherridon as a school and community they were removed from the outside world. “Sherridon is such a small town. There is not a lot there. The school is Kindergarten to grade 8 and has less than 40 students.”⁴³ As people heard about his fiddle playing students from Sherridon, the group began to get invited to perform outside of the community. “So there I am,” Blaine told me,

Travelling around on a bus with a dozen students...and the vast majority of them have never been more than 100 miles from Sherridon. So here I am, traveling around with these students, getting them out of the community, and getting them into different environments and giving them access to new experiences. And we are at places like Festival du Voyageur in Winnipeg, and these kids are on stage in front of a crowd of about 200 people. The audience claps along in rhythm to the music, and the students take in the appreciation of what they are doing on stage. These are people from outside their culture, acknowledging these children and acknowledging their culture. And you can just imagine what that does for the students on stage to get that acclamation. To me, this becomes more than just about the fiddle and fiddle music. It is about pride, it is about self-esteem, it is about personal development.

It was during one of those trips to Festival du Voyageur in Winnipeg that Blaine connected with Cameron Baggins a master musician. Blaine was so impressed with Cameron’s musicianship and he thought to himself, “Wow, I have to get him up north to work with these students.” Blaine did some negotiating and got the airline to pay for Cameron’s plane ticket.⁴⁴ He then convinced the local superintendent to agree to have Cameron work with the students. Blaine drove the 100 km to Bakers Narrows, the nearest airport, and picked Cameron up. Staying in the

⁴³ The 2008-2009 annual report documents the student population of this school at 13. Frontier School Division. (2009). <http://www.frontiersd.mb.ca/files/active/0/2008-09%20Northerner%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

⁴⁴ Flights up north to Flin Flon from Winnipeg run on average at about \$800 for a return flight. The alternative would be a 10 hour drive by road to Sherridon from Winnipeg.

community for a week, Cameron spent his days in the school working with the students. In the evenings, Cameron helped Blaine master his fiddle techniques. Blaine admits that he was no musician and at that time he had no idea what he was doing. But, “it was during these trips to Sherridon,” he told me, “I think that Cameron recognized the potential and possibilities of the fiddle playing.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, Blaine recognized that it was Cameron’s involvement and musicianship that really took the students fiddle playing to another level.

You see, the connection with the fiddle has been a part of Aboriginal communities for over two hundred years. It is as old as the fur trade and the Hudson Bay Company. So when students started taking the fiddles home to play for family and friends, the positive response was immediate. I think that had the largest impact on the success of this program. Grandparents and parents were disconnected from education. But they took an immediate interest in the fiddle and encouraged students right from the beginning. The affirmation and accolades kept students interested and excited to play and learn more songs.

The response of parents and relatives was clearly a motivational force for students to practice their fiddle playing. Blaine recalled how every Monday his favourite thing to do was ask the students who they played for. Since his time in Sherridon, Blaine has introduced fiddle playing in every school he has taught at. He truly has left ‘a trail of fiddles’ all over Manitoba. In leaving behind the fiddles, he has renewed the fiddle traditions and in turn revived community connections.

A Metis Mecca

As I mentioned earlier, word quickly spread around the vast school division about these fiddle playing students. Blaine acknowledged the key role other people played in the development of

⁴⁵ Blaine was able to bring Cameron up to Sherridon 3 different times while he was teaching there.

the school fiddle programs. He told me several times during our interviews that I should speak to Dave Maynard, the Principal of Duck Bay at that time. It is a small community on the west shore of Lake Winnipegosis, often referred to by Blaine as a 'Metis Mecca.' Through Blaine's recommendation I did a Canada 411 search for Dave, knowing that he had moved back east to Nova Scotia. In turn, I found contact information for three people by the name of Dave Maynard in Nova Scotia. And sure enough, the second number that I phoned was the former Principal of the Duck Bay School. Dave agreed that this was a fantastic story, so of course he was happy to do a telephone interview about his involvement with the fiddle playing programs. Like Blaine, Dave was doing anything he could think of to integrate local culture into the school programming, and engage students within the formalized institutional spaces of a public colonial education system. He had initiated an annual weeklong event that celebrated Metis culture in the local school.⁴⁶ The students from Sherridon were invited to Duck Bay School to perform and carry out fiddle workshops during the school *Metis Days*. Blaine recalled how they were still pretty raw; reminding me again that he was not a musician. "But we looked good, and people responded. It was amazing! How people responded to what we were doing!"

Blaine stressed that Dave played a big part in the fiddle programs moving outside of Sherridon. "I saw what Blaine was doing," Dave told me, "and thought gee, this would be *great* in our community." I could feel the passion in Dave's voice as he stated that, "Duck Bay being a Metis community has a strong fiddling culture in the community. The reality at that time was there were very few fiddle players who were not getting on in years." Dave talked about how

⁴⁶ This Metis Days celebration continues to be an annual event to this day.

back then there were only 3 or 4 people, including his father-in-law at the time, who were playing the fiddle.

Blaine and Dave both reminisced during their interviews how they realized and understood the merit of reintroducing and developing the fiddle program in Aboriginal communities. They understood the significance of the fiddling and were both committed toward further developing programs in other educational jurisdictions. They were both aware that the fiddle music was dying. Consequently, Dave and Blaine brainstormed on what they could do to get a similar fiddle program started in the Duck Bay School. Blaine told me how Dave *really* saw the potential and the possibilities. Dave emphasized during his interview that because Frontier School Division strongly promoted a community's culture. It was very easy to justify, "Okay, we can teach the students how to read music and play fiddle at the same time." So that became their music program. Dave told me with a chuckle how in the beginning, they begged, borrowed and stole fiddles from wherever they could find them to get things going. Then through contacts Blaine had previously established, they hired a fiddle instructor who was *fantastic*! Blaine pointed out, "They were luckier in that they were closer to the larger world. We got Cameron to come up to Sherridon two times a year; they got him every two weeks in Duck Bay."

Dave and Blaine both recall, in fact, how it was incredible in terms of how the fiddle program really took off with great instruction and the enthusiasm of the students. "But, yeah," Blaine pondered, "when we went down to Duck Bay, that was the moment the fiddle program moved outside of Sherridon." That was the beginning of what is now commonly referred to as the Frontier Fiddle Program.

Metis Days – New Beginnings

One of the interview candidates for this project was Lindsay. She was a student at Frontier Collegiate when she was in grade ten during the time I was working there. The community of Duck Bay does not have a high school. All of her sisters and even her mother went to school at Frontier Collegiate. On a side note, Lindsay's Mom, Gloria was a student of my dad's, and my mom taught her how to drive. She remembers my parents from her school days in Cranberry. Anytime a school trip brings her to Cranberry Portage she always makes the time for a visit to my parents' home. While she was going to school in Cranberry Portage she used to babysit my family with another friend called Florence – we knew them as *Glossy* and *Flossy*. Gloria was also a chaperone at the jamborees in Norway House in 2005 and 2006. I always looked forward to an opportunity to see her. Living and working in Winnipeg now, Lindsay and I have reconnected through the wonders of Facebook. We arranged to do a telephone interview via e-mail communication. At that time, I only knew she had a connection to the fiddle playing. After catching up on the latest news about her mom, her sisters and my sons, we turned the telephone conversation to fiddling. She began her story as a grade six student when Blaine travelled to Duck Bay with students. "When the fiddle players from Sherridon came to our school during Metis days, I remember, it was such an exciting thing. We were going to have these fiddle workshops and these students who play fiddle were coming down. It was really a big deal for us." Lindsay then described how the students from Sherridon were billeted out into homes in Duck Bay.

My mom was asked to take a billet. Michelle, Blaine's daughter stayed with us. We became friends right away. At night, I remember, I took her out, and we went and hung out with other friends. We all went and hung out at the pool room, which was the cool

thing to do when you are young in Duck Bay. And I remember, we were like giddy little girls. It was fun! And she became my friend. After that, we kept in touch. We wrote letters, which was the thing to do back then. I remember she sent me this picture of her with her fiddle, it was a school picture. I still have it. She is a lifelong friend...and the next year, her younger sister Katherine came and stayed with us. And I became friends with her as well.

By billeting the students out, Blaine felt it gave them the opportunity to see how other families lived.

In fact, during my interviews with Blaine he conveyed an element of surprise as he reflected back on the early days of the fiddle program. “This is something,” Blaine paused and then continued, “there was nothing planned along the way. But besides the music, the fiddle playing was taking students from small communities and engaging them at a different social level.” Blaine had no idea when he began this fiddle program back in 1995 in the small community of Sherridon what kind of interest and enthusiasm there would be and how it would take off.

Many of the stories shared for this project were from different perspectives about the same time and place. Although often this was a challenge, it was also very exciting to weave together these different narratives strands. While Dave and Blaine were working as instructors and administrators, I had no idea that Lindsay was situated right in the middle of their stories as a grade six student in the Duck Bay School. She brings not only the viewpoint of a student participant to the school fiddle program, but today as a community member she too is also ‘blown away’ by how big the fiddle playing has become. She recollected that before Blaine brought his students to Duck Bay for the Metis Days, they did not hear much fiddle playing in the community. Today Lindsay has cousins, nieces and nephews who are involved in the school fiddle programs. She told me about her teenage cousin Ramsey Rae that has already recorded

two CD's with Sunshine Records.⁴⁷ Her pride resonates through her voice as she talks about how good it feels to see her culture being revitalized on such an immense level through the school fiddle programs.

Much like Blaine, Dave also credits the successes of these programs to the students and the communities. He also began his story by telling me when the fiddle program started in Duck Bay. There was never an expectation that the outside world should or would take an interest. But nearby communities quickly became enthusiastic about student performances.

We started with a small group of students playing and began looking for different venues they could perform at. Besides the local community, we went to Dauphin, the nearest larger community, Swan River, and then Festival du Voyageur in Winnipeg. We also travelled to some of our other schools in Area 2⁴⁸ and people were really interested in what we were doing. This is when the fiddle program really took off in Area 2. It was not long and other areas in the school division having seen or heard about the program wanted to get involved as well. So it *really* mushroomed from there. We had good support from our Superintendent at the time, which helped with the development of the program and adding more communities and instructors. The program began to grow quickly. The development had a real domino effect. It was fantastic, because each community had favourite tunes and had a different twist in terms of how they played, and who played. It certainly brought people into the schools and got them involved in the program. (Dave, 2010)

During our interview, Dave continued to talk about the different kinds of opportunities the fiddle program provided for community members to get involved with students and the school. "Students needing rides was on-going, as was the need to fund-raise. As a school and a community we hosted a number of fiddling events." These activities created all kinds of space for active community involvement. In turn, these events gave the program even more exposure. "At one point," he emphasized "we had over 200 students on stage fiddling. CBC

⁴⁷ Ramsey Rae. In Sunshine Records. <http://worldwidesunshine.com/eMerchantPro/pc/FIDDLIN-BUCKAROO-7p326.htm>
<http://worldwidesunshine.com/eMerchantPro/pc/Ramsey-Rae-br-Fiddlin-Buckaroo-Vol-2-7p895.htm>

⁴⁸ Frontier School Division is very large geographically covering nearly 75% of the province of Manitoba. It is divided into 5 geographic areas, each area having its own Superintendent and local school committees see map Appendix A.

came and did a documentary on the students for their news program. We even cut a CD; well it was a cassette tape at that time.” Here again Dave’s voice resonated with intensity. “It was great! It really promoted the program. And we had to get more instructors again. Like I said, the program really took off quickly.” Outside interest and program growth happened very fast. Suddenly there were so many opportunities for students to travel and perform. Dave then shared a story about the fiddle players’ many trips to Festival du Voyager each year since the program inception. He described how well they went.

I talk about Festival du voyager, when we had the students; we were there each year that I was involved in the program. In the beginning, we started with a fairly unprofessional group, who looked good on stage and sounded okay with the few tunes that they knew to begin with. But after the third or fourth year, they were *very, very* good! We also brought professional fiddlers into the community to share their stories with the students, and to share their fiddles. That was the beginning of the fiddle jamborees. It is really incredible! With great instructors like Calvin Vollrath⁴⁹, the students fiddle skills advanced rapidly. Exposing students to these types of role models had tremendous impacts on them. It was fantastic!

I could feel Dave’s enthusiasm as he told me this story. Once again, it was nothing anyone planned or anticipated along the way. The fiddle playing has taken so many young students on some very exceptional journeys. For me, listening to all of these stories, it quickly became evident that there is much more going on here than an instituted school fiddle program.

⁴⁹ Known as Canada’s Fiddling Sensation, an accomplished musician, Metis fiddle player Calvin Vollrath has composed over 500 songs to date. Calvin Vollrath, (2005). http://www.calvinvollrath.com/index.php?page=home/bio_detail&bio_id=1

Fiddle revival/Cultural renewal?

Thinking back to all the stories I had been told, what began in one very small isolated community could now be called a fiddling revival. When the school and community of Duck Bay got involved people *really* began to stop and take notice. “I remember one of our teachers, Fred Sanderson, he was a very proud Metis. He would give us, ‘pep’ talks. And, something he told us,” Lindsay recalled, “was ‘You know, this is history, this is our music coming back, reviving. You are going to get out of it, what you put into it.’” Lindsay remembered how he motivated students to practice and to feel good about their culture. Even as a young student, she appreciated the cultural connections the fiddle provided and the positive responses they received as Elders and community members took an interest. I realize at this point that I am sharing just a glimpse of what went on in the development of the Frontier Fiddle program and the recent renewal of fiddle playing among youth across many of the remote communities in Manitoba. It is clear the fiddle music resonated with a chord as it flowed through communities. Surrounding communities were captivated and many soon started fiddle programs of their own.

The Devil Went Down to Georgia

During their interviews Blaine and Dave both talked about other fiddle programs that have started up around the province as an outcome of the Frontier Fiddle program. “When I was still in Duck Bay, some of the Reserves were interested and other Metis communities who were sort of toying around with the idea of a fiddle program and started getting involved.” Dave

continued to tell me that when they hosted their fiddle jamborees, they would invite any schools and communities that were interested to participate, and not only the Frontier School Division Schools. People really took notice of the Duck Bay fiddle program. Blaine also told me that there are several other school fiddle programs currently taking place outside of Frontier School Division. For example, he asked me if I knew Clint Dutiaume. Through the fiddle playing, Blaine and Clint have become very good friends.

Among his accomplishments, Clint is nine time instrumentalist of the year at the Manitoba Association of Country Arts Music Awards. He is of Metis heritage and he now teaches fiddle at all kinds of Band⁵⁰ schools that are not connected to Frontier School Division. And there are other people teaching for Band schools as well now. It really has gotten huge. Frontier has over 1500 students playing right now, and there could easily be another 1500 students, but the logistics of fiddle instructors, and money to pay them, especially if they have to travel into some of the remote communities keeps them from expanding at this point.⁵¹

Blaine also stressed to me several times that Clint is a very busy person, but it would be great if I could talk to him. I remember Clint Dutiaume as an instructor at the 2005 Frontier Fiddle Jamboree that I attended in Norway House. At one concert during the jamboree he awed the entire audience with his rendition of *The Devil Went Down to Georgia*. Every student in the arena was motivated to master that tune after watching Clint's performance. My sons to this day still talk about him and it remains a personal challenge of theirs to learn that song.

Involved in music for forty-two years, Clint plays fiddle, guitar, bass, and mandolin. He is a singer, songwriter and entertainer who is considered one of the leaders of his generation in country music. Clint is also one of the most sought after record producers and session musicians in all of Canada.⁵² On Blaine's recommendation I searched the internet for Clint

⁵⁰ First Nation Education Authorities or Reserves are often referred to as Band, as in *Indian Band*.

⁵¹ This number was from a 2008 interview, recent Frontier School Division newsletters report over 2000 students currently playing.

⁵² Clint Dutiaume, (2010). <http://www.mn-s.ca/index.php?id=170>

Dutiaume. I found his contact information on his website and sent him an electronic message. Aware of how busy he is, I was completely surprised when he replied to my note. The Christmas concert season, extreme cold weather and long distances [he is in Winnipeg and I was in Cranberry Portage-500 miles north] posed challenges for us to connect. The waterline that runs from the lake to my house froze solid the day before I was supposed to leave for Winnipeg. There is a point where it becomes unsafe to travel long distances unless absolutely necessary with the extreme cold that blanketed the entire province. We eventually settled to do a telephone interview. I was very honoured that Clint took the time to talk with me. Clint began his story by telling me how he was invited by the Frontier School Division in 2004 to perform at his first jamboree in Norway House. He emphasized how it was his first time teaching fiddle playing to others.

I had never thought of teaching the fiddle. I was just playing music for a living, and I was working as an educational assistant for five years, working with special needs students. I used to bring my instruments to school. I would entertain the students and I had a little bit of a music program in the school here in Winnipeg. And this is how everything led to me teaching when I was invited to teach at the Frontier Fiddle camp in Norway House. That was the *first* time that I had ever even thought about *teaching* the fiddle. When I went and saw what was happening there, because I really hadn't heard of the Frontier program before then. And so, when I went through that experience of the joy and the *enthusiasm* that these young people have for the fiddle, it really...I got hooked! And I was sold on teaching. It was just because of the positive influence that it had on these students coming from these small communities. Another thing that really influenced me was Blaine Klippenstein and his story about starting his program in Sherridon. When he started his small program and that's how this *whole* thing started, to me, that is amazing! That is one of the most amazing stories I have ever heard of! Somebody being so committed to students and the influence that it has, the music has on students in these small communities where there is *not* a lot else going on. That is the reason I started is because of that. It was because of that story of Blaine going to take lessons, just so that he could go and spread that experience with the students in his small community. That was just an amazing, amazing story for me and it inspired me to try to do the same. Because Blaine is not a musician, it is even a more amazing story. Right now I am teaching in three different communities in band schools. I have about 130 students.

Clint reiterated repeatedly how grateful he is to have the opportunity to pass on not only his fiddle playing skills, but also his wisdom and life experiences.

You know, when you pull up to a school and get out of your car and you hear the voices of thirty or forty students saying 'Hi Clint', 'Hi Clint', that is just the best thing! You know you are doing something right when they are happy to see you! That is a nice feeling!

Like many others, the trip to the Norway House jamboree was a turning point for Clint. Now in his seventh year as an instructor, Clint shares his brand of fiddle playing with young and old alike. Over the past few years, Clint has instructed close to 250 students. Some of his students have performed across Canada, the United States, and even for the Prime Minister, showcasing the skills they have learned. This is only one example of many new fiddle programs that have started up in Manitoba schools outside of the Frontier School Division fiddle program.

Beyond the borders of Manitoba

In this project I highlighted stories about fiddle playing in Manitoba. Frontier School Division is central to these stories because Blaine worked for them when he ordered his first set of fiddles. A ripple effect of this school division's fiddle programs is the start-up of fiddle programs in other provinces. During his interview, Blaine explained how the annual jamboree was started as an opportunity to expose students to diverse artistic talents. The jamborees bring a variety of instructors from across Canada. Consequently, the jamboree has become a site for sharing ideas and resources from across the country. Instructors who have come to the jamboree from Saskatoon and Calgary, have both returned to their respective cities to start fiddle programs for

Aboriginal youth. More recently, at the 2009 jamboree, Blaine met Anne Lederman, a fiddle instructor from Toronto. He reflected how Anne was inspired and hopeful that the Frontier School Division fiddle program could be used as a model to help other schools establish similar programs across the country.

Anne's Fiddle Story

Anne Lederman is an accomplished musician originally from Manitoba and now living in Toronto. In 1985-86 Anne situated herself in the Pine Creek/Camperville area of Manitoba to study and record the music of Aboriginal fiddlers for her Masters of Fine Arts thesis, *Old Native and Metis Fiddling in Two Manitoba Communities: Camperville and Ebb and Flow*. Fascinated with her background, Blaine strongly recommended I speak to Anne about her return trip to Pine Creek⁵³ as a fiddle instructor. Once again, following up on Blaine's suggestion, I turned to the World Wide Web to find Anne Lederman.⁵⁴ We communicated by email to set up a time to do a telephone interview. Anne told me how, through mutual interests in fiddle playing and teaching, she had been in communication with Cameron Baggins. She was also aware of Frontier School Division's fiddle program via a project she worked on that involved two students from the Division called *Fiddle Stories: The Elder Youth Legacy Project*. In 2009 Anne was invited by Frontier School Division to be an instructor at the annual jamboree. Anne began

⁵³ Pine Creek School is a new high school built by the Pine Creek First Nation and run in a partnership agreement with Frontier School Division. The 2008 and 2009 School Division jamborees were hosted at the Pine Creek School and nearby communities of Duck Bay and Camperville. It is the only other school/community in the division other than Norway House that has the capacity to host the large number of students and staff that come to the jamboree. For Anne, this was a return to the area where she did the field work for her thesis.

⁵⁴ <http://www.annelederman.com/bio.htm>

her story with amazement, “I’ve never seen anything like the Frontier Fiddling Program, something that exists to that extent and covering that kind of territory and that number of students! “You know,” She continued:

I tell people about the fiddle programs going on in Manitoba all the time. People outside of Manitoba don’t know about it. They’ve got this history of fiddling in northern Ontario communities, but there is nobody there right now [to teach or develop such a program]. We are actually hoping to get a couple of things going, but it is a *huge* undertaking. Because there is no tradition of teaching, it really does take outside people to organize such a program from scratch. When I was doing my research in 1985, at one point Teddy Boy and I went into one of the schools, Ebb and Flow, I think, and we played for the kids. When we finished playing, Teddy Boy⁵⁵ asked the kids how many of them would like to play fiddle and they all...sort of jumped up and down and put up their hands. But there was no one to teach them. I was only there for a couple of months. Teddy Boy wasn’t in a position to teach.

Anne’s perspective brings to light how establishing such a program posed challenges. Live fiddle music had been absent from communities for so long, school boards did not always easily buy into supporting them financially in the beginning. The efforts and involvement of community members supporting the students was important to the program’s development. But in truth, for so long, fiddle playing was not seen as ‘cool’. If the older generation, the ‘master’ musicians were not playing fiddle anymore, why would teenagers want to play?

Just when did the fiddle become cool?

If we recall, I talked about the notion of how ‘Elvis Presley killed the accordion.’ The lure of electronic stereo systems impacted how the live music was no longer being passed on. Over the

⁵⁵Lawrence ‘Teddy Boy’ Houle, Manitoba fiddler. If it wasn’t for people like Teddy Boy Houle, entire traditions could die out and nobody would know. Concerned with the old time Métis fiddling tradition of his native Manitoba, Houle set out to capture the essence of that priceless style by learning from the sources. It was free form - traditional, with marks of originality and it was dying because everyone wanted to play like Messer. Along with folklorist Anne Lederman, they spent two summers recording and learning tunes from old time fiddlers. He has played Carnegie Hall, Canada Day before The Queen, and is now an Elder concerned with helping reform prisoners.

<http://www.worldwidesunshine.com/emerchantpro/pc/Lawrence-Teddy-Boy-Houle-c152.htm>

years many of the older fiddle players were passing away. This, in turn, contributed to what was referred to as the death of the fiddle (Whidden, 2007). The fiddle is a fine instrument, but without guidance, it is a difficult instrument to play. During their interviews, Blaine, Tina, Clint and Caroline all stressed that it is a *terrible* sounding instrument if you don't play it well. Caroline pointed to a black and white photograph hanging on the wall in her restaurant, "there is this old guy, there is a picture of him over there; he played the fiddle. But we called him *Squeaky*." She covered her ears and laughed, "when he did play, it was like, *Oh my god turn off that fiddle!*"

Tina came over to visit me nearly every day while I was in Cranberry Portage this past December [2009] to do my research. During one of these afternoon visits Shelley phoned on her way home from Flin Flon. She wanted to let me know they would be stopping in Cranberry Portage. Early on my trip north, I had visited with her and her mother, Eileen, in Cormorant but now her daughters wanted to visit with Gunthar and Quenten before we returned to Ottawa. Expecting she might stop in for a visit on short notice, I had all of the ingredients on hand to make homemade pizza. When they arrived, Shelley's two daughters and my sons went over to the kitchen to make the pizzas. A strong sense of camaraderie, flour, pizza dough and laughter was flying all over my kitchen as they reconnected with each other. Despite the fact that they hadn't seen each other in three years, they rekindled their familial relationships as if we had never left. While a hot fire roared in my wood stove, Tina, Shelley and I pulled our chairs up to the stove to warm ourselves from the bitter cold outside. Hot cups of tea and great stories to warm our insides, we visited well into the night. Tina had been working at Frontier Collegiate back when Shelley and I went to school there. Recalling our high school days, Shelley and I

laughed at how fiddle playing was not cool when we were growing up. She remembered her childhood when her father used to play the fiddle in her house in Cormorant. "Sometimes he would call up Barney [an uncle] and they'd sit there and play fiddle and guitar, and jam. I remember a lot of that." But there were no young people playing at that time. Tina added that for years, fiddle playing was really not seen as cool, not from the perspective of the younger generation.

Clint Dutiaume confessed to me that although he had started playing the fiddle when he was eleven, he did not tell people he was a fiddle player. Clint's entire family comprised of thirteen brothers and sisters were musical. With that many musicians he told me, "every day was like music camp for me. And I told everyone I played guitar, because guitar is cool right? But," he continued,

I did not even tell anyone I played the fiddle when I was young. I was *embarrassed* at that time. It really was not cool to play the fiddle. And then, for me to go to Norway House and see *all* of these kids playing their fiddles, and loving it, enthusiastic about it, I mean, I felt, being a fiddle player, that's as close to a rock star feeling as you're ever going to get. Being up on stage and seeing all of these kids out there with their fiddles playing along with you, that is just an amazing feeling. I said, right then, that is when I decided, '*Okay, I found what I want to do for the rest of my life.*' I am *extremely* grateful to Frontier School Division for inviting me to that one fiddle camp so that I could *experience* that, because, I don't know if I would be doing this now if I hadn't gone through that experience. I can remember, when I was growing up, I was probably one of the only fiddle players in Manitoba, other than the older gentlemen.

I am close to the same age as Clint and have to agree, when you had The Beatles, Elvis Presley, and rock n' roll, my generation did not think fiddle playing was a cool thing to do. Tina repeatedly came back to the notion of how quickly the music disappeared. "As popular as fiddle music was in the old days...And then it happened so quick that it was gone. And nobody picked up the fiddle."

During her interview, Anne also recalled, the men she was hanging out with in 1985-86 while researching for her master's thesis. "The youngest would have been in his 40's, but most of them were in their 50's, 60's and the older 70's. The oldest fellow with the biggest and most interesting repertoire was 82." She went on to tell me that he passed away the year after she was there. A lot of the fiddle players died within a few years of her being there. The fiddle music was something younger people were just not picking up. As a result, Anne today is one of the only links to certain older Manitoba repertoires.⁵⁶ I got a very strong sense through these stories that I do not think people realized the full impacts of that 'death'. We accepted the change, welcomed recorded music. But reviving the stories from the past affirms there was more than just the music that died.

"And now I say," Clint admits, "it's like I am glad I didn't come along *now*, because I wouldn't have a job." We both laughed at his comment, but the reality is that young people are taking the music and really running with it. The level of musicianship and talents of many of the young people involved in the fiddle programs really is astonishing. Clint followed this thought saying, "I don't know if we ever would have realized these talents if these programs didn't come along, at least not in the volume that there is right now."

Nanny's Dream

Prior to the industrial revolution here in Canada work was done by hand. And music often played a role in making work life easier. Much of Canada owes its development to the rhythm

⁵⁶ Fiddle Stories: The Elder Youth Legacy Project: Fiddle Stories is both a mentorship project and an exciting performance of old and uniquely Aboriginal forms of fiddle music. In danger of being lost forever, the purpose of Fiddle Stories is to pass on the oldest surviving traditions to a new generation of players who will in turn, pass them on.

of song. Music kept the voyageurs digging deep with their paddles for hours and days at a time. Moreover, it was an attribute for a voyageur to have musical abilities. Music made life easier and took the drudgery out of life, or so the story we tell ourselves goes. The onset of industrialization changed relationships among music and people. I return here to Blaine's reflections on what an amazing story this has become. I sense that his awareness of the magnitude of what is going on has further sunk in through this moment of storytelling.

During one of many visits, warming our cups of tea, Tina and I talked about how unbelievable the success of the school fiddle programs has become. We considered how the fiddle was silent for what appears to be almost twenty years [or more] following the introduction of stereo systems. With that gap in mind, "I think something that happened," Tina told me thinking out loud,

I think the timing was right. I think once all the older people, from the generations who grew up with the fiddle were gone, the response would not have been the same. Some of the people who grew up with the fiddling traditions are still there in the communities today. They are old, but they are still there. And that encouragement, when people get excited about something, when community people get excited, that makes a huge difference. Because you usually don't get that for a lot of things.

Something else we realize is that Blaine probably picked the right age group of students to play fiddle as a group. Peer pressure is tremendous among young people. Tina reflected how when the students realized as a group that they could actually play. The encouragement and recognition that followed was a big part of why the program was successful. She reminded me how you don't get that kind of encouragement for a lot of things you do in life. Blaine and Tina both recognize that the students picked up on the fact that the community people were excited about the fiddle playing. Here we might return to Blaine's first interview where he shared:

Students are so disconnected from education. And I see a big part of that being parents and grandparents are disconnected from education. The fiddle is something families got involved in. They took an interest and encouraged children *right* from the beginning. And they don't get that when they take home books like math and science for homework. But parents, relatives and community members responded with tremendous enthusiasm to the fiddle playing right from the beginning.

This energy further motivated students to play their fiddles and learn more songs. Collectively, interview participants realized that this fiddle playing is kind of special.

Back at home, it is so cold we can see the north winds blowing across the lake. Tina watched the flames through the glass door of my wood stove dance wildly as I threw a couple of more logs on the fire to keep us warm. "The other thing I have to wonder is," she asked "are there other things like that? You know what I mean? That people would get *that* excited over? Because, think about it," she continued, "it took someone from the outside to hear this. Really, it's amazing that somebody thought of it, and it's somebody that's not even from here, from this area that got it going." She paused again and took another sip of her tea.

Why and how did that become important to this person? We are so much a part of it, like the saying goes, you don't see the trees from the forest. And when you are part of it, you don't think of it as anything that, to do anything about. I don't know what it is, you just become part of that and you don't look at it as being something special, or something different. You know, and that somebody coming in from somewhere else all of a sudden hears these stories, and says, 'oh yah, this can be done.' Like he wouldn't have noticed that the fiddle wasn't there, because it wasn't there. But he (Blaine) must have felt the excitement and the passion in the stories and picked up on that. And these people were getting older and older, and nobody asked them to play at dances anymore. And then all of a sudden when I was working here, (FCI) all of a sudden there was this revival of this fiddling. And the elders who grew up with this and the elders in the communities were very, very touched that this was being done. When I was at the school committee conference in Winnipeg one time, I almost found it overwhelmed me, you know, with a large group [over 200 hundred] of students playing fiddle. My dad had just passed away, and all I could think about was how proud he would have been to see that and to hear that! I was, I was in tears. And it was just so amazing to see so many young people playing. It was always such a huge part of the culture that had basically disappeared. It was sad. Because that was passed on right from the fur trade days, it just kept getting passed on over the years. And then all of a sudden it was gone. It

overwhelmed me to see it and to hear it again. The old people are just like amazed that it is back. Now all of a sudden this fiddling came back in and now the old people are back into the lives of the young people. There is definitely a connection and it connects the old to the young people. *And if my dad would have heard that and seen that, he would have cried, you know, and I knew that, he would have been really touched by that.*

She then sighed, and reflected on how people who grew up with fiddle music are really touched to hear the music again. She paused to consider what we were talking about, and then told me, “all of a sudden, I think the students realized, ‘Oh, this is pretty special.’ And when you have groups of students, that is a lot different than one or two students playing.” We agreed that the timing of when Blaine started this was a big factor on the enthusiastic reaction from parents and communities. “When a whole class in the school, when everybody is doing it, then the students are like ‘oh yeah, look at this’ and then all of a sudden it’s like ‘whoa, it feels good!’” Suddenly, the fiddle *is cool*.

Lindsay, who was a young student at the beginning, shared the following about fiddle playing:

And I guess the response that we would get is that this was kind of making history; it felt like you were put up on a pedestal; not a pedestal, but people seeing you playing the fiddle, especially the Metis community, people really respected you, and these were a bunch of young kids right; but the fiddle coming back; people were so happy and smiling. It was just a joyful atmosphere whenever we played. And I know we played at prestigious events, so to us it was like, this is a big deal. We have to play really well. We were not pressured, but that pressure was put on you; you have to perform well; you are performing for big dignitaries...important people...so it was a very big deal and people were just kind of awestruck sometimes I think, that we could all play together as a big group. (Lindsay, 2010)

Listening to Lindsay, reminded me of Eileen, who in turn brought the narrative perspective of a grandmother, someone who grew up with the vibrant fiddle playing as a young girl. “I think it was almost extinct you know, as the older people passed away, well, so did the fiddling.” Eileen told us, her voice now cracking with emotion, “my husband Leslie, he had a stroke, so he

couldn't play anymore. But when Shannon⁵⁷ started to play fiddle, Leslie used to sit there, and he'd be almost crying when he'd see the young people playing."⁵⁸ Eileen recalled how much the fiddle meant to their family and there is gentleness in her voice that further emphasizes the loss. "Shannon was the only one of the kids playing at that time."⁵⁹ But you'd look at him [Leslie] when she would be playing and he was almost crying." Eileen sighed, not sure what to say next. Shelley tried to help her mom explain how it made them feel, "He used to be so..." she hesitated before she spoke again, "Well, that is the way *you* feel right now." She tapped her hand on the table, at a loss for words, "It is weird. But that is the way it is." *I am so overcome with emotion when I am transcribing this conversation, I find myself in tears, and have to take a break. This happens to me more than once while transcribing the interviews for this project.* But this time I make a note and was compelled to ask the question, "*What was lost when the fiddle music died? When it stopped?*" I do not think Blaine had any idea how profound the outcomes or connections of fiddle playing would become when he started this. In turn, I realize at this time that I truly had no idea how meaningful the fiddle was in these small communities.

Regaining her composure, Shelley continued, "but when our school got involved with the fiddle program, the second year, they had it here, they said, their goal was to bring the fiddle music back." Shelley raised her hand and pointed out the window, "they wanted to make a comeback on this fiddling. And now, you know, you could sit outside my place anytime and you can hear fiddles across the road now." She gestured to her mom and told us, "and then I

⁵⁷ Eileen's granddaughter, Shelley's oldest daughter.

⁵⁸ I get goosebumps listening to this when I am transcribing. *There really is a deep emotional connection to the fiddle that is evident by the enthusiasm of young people playing today combined with the responses of older generations.*

⁵⁹ She was the only one that was old enough at that time.

phone here, and I can hear Isaiah⁶⁰, playing, or over the road I can hear Ronald and them playing.” It is amazing how it brings back not only the fiddle, but also brings people together while jamming. Another parent told me how her dad had a sound system set up in his garage and they regularly gather there to jam. “Where my dad lives the houses are close and everybody’s listening to the music. In the summer you can see people sitting outside on their doorsteps listening, and it sounds so nice.” She smiled and then said, “that is something we look forward to every summer, jamming in my dad’s garage.”

The deep connection of the fiddle program is further emphasized to me by Shelley’s oldest daughter. When they stopped in Cranberry Portage to visit Shannon was so excited to see Gunthar and Quenten, she didn’t have time to talk with me. But she did sit by the fire with Tina, her mom and I for a few minutes while we were waiting for the pizza to finish cooking. She shared the following:

Well I started playing fiddle when I was...seven I think and this is my eleventh year playing. My Papa Leslie bought me my first fiddle and I continue playing in memory of him. It was so difficult at first for me trying to learn how to play an instrument, but soon enough my fingers just went with the beat. My first time to a fiddle workshop was scary because I didn’t know anyone. But it was just about having fun. Throughout the years of playing I met so many great friends that shared the love for the fiddle like me. Now when we gear up to go to a workshop it just feels like a family reunion/get together. Whenever I play I feel this bolt of life going through me and it makes me so happy to pick up my fiddle and play. I get really nervous though because the performances just keep getting bigger and better. The reason why I play is because I love music, I love the fiddle and I love the amazing people I meet. Although every concert I play at or even when I just pick it up to play around it is always in memory of my Papa, [Grandfather] and whenever I play I feel as though he is right next to me guiding my fingers to the next note.

Shannon’s story to me clearly demonstrates the intergenerational connection of the fiddle. The energy, the excitement, the entertainment, the enthusiasm along with the mastering of a new

⁶⁰ Eileen’s foster son.

skill is all within Shannon's story. This is only one of many students' stories who have picked up a fiddle in the last fifteen years and through this made deep connections and personal growth.

We will see in the ensuing sections of this thesis, the impacts and opportunities created by a fiddling curriculum are both deep and profound. Fiddle playing in the north today goes beyond the music. The next section of this thesis tunes into samples of some of the numerous opportunities forthcoming through a culturally responsive curriculum. Let us attune ourselves to the opportunity and the narratives of northern Manitoba and the doors that are opening there for youth through their fiddling connections.

Fiddling Toward Community Opportunities

Fiddle playing is part of the school curriculum, which is a relatively recent initiative within many Manitoba schools and communities. Consequently, one of the aims of this thesis is to create an institutional narrative space to share stories about this current curricular development in northern Manitoba.

During many traditional dances, a change in the tempo of a given fiddle song signals Metis jig dancers to change their dance step. Switching from basic to more fancy steps with the fiddle music is referred to by the dancers as a *change*. Many favoured jigging songs, for example the Red River Jig, have a beat which accelerates to which the dancing in turn becomes more vigorous. Periodically, as the music changes, a group of dancers will form a circle, each alternating in and out of the centre dancing their own fancy step. Here, while belonging to the group, each dancer takes an opportunity to show his/her mastery of the music and dance –

while independent of the others. Then in generosity and giving, each dancer then invites another dancer the same chance to participate. Our view is of a harmonious whole.

This next chapter of my thesis weaves stories from multiple narrative perspectives that provide further testament to the ways in which the fiddle provides curricular and pedagogical opportunities for teachers, students and the community to engage a culturally responsive curriculum. These stories, I refer to as the “*narrative jigs*” provide rich fodder for thought and consideration. The result is a Metis/sage-ing of narratives (Ng-A-Fook, 2011). They are woven together from all aspects of the fiddle programs - from fiddle instructors, to participants, parents, grandparents and community members.

As with the fiddle music and dancers, these unique recollections and stories gathered as an outcome of my research appear to mirror the music and dance itself. Some speak from one voice or of one experience that demonstrates an outcome. Others come out of events such as *Under the Porcupine Festival*; and the Frontier School Division Jamboree. Both are sites rich in music and cultural heritage – which echo the narrative em-plot-ments of many voices. Each narrative jig supports the benefit and joy of the entire northern fiddle program.

On that note, this chapter is divided into numerous subsections. Many of the subsection “*titles*” are taken from popular fiddle tunes that resonate through the small northern communities who have a fiddle curriculum. Each narrative jig describes experienced outcome(s) of having the program in their schools.

Akin to the changing beat of a dance song, the narrative jigs begin with only possibilities. However, it is not long before the rhythm presents opportunities and the community impact can be felt and seen. Perhaps even more vigorous and worthy of the spectators attention is the

unheard sound of the deep human impacts that can be witnessed as the shared experience of the “dancers” in the following narrative jigs.

Jigging to Dedications

Student fiddle performances at school assemblies, concerts and community events are becoming very common. In addition to these formally organized events, parents also shared stories about some spontaneous moments when their children picked up their fiddles. One parent told me how her best friend recently got married. Her daughter, her niece and her friend’s daughter all play fiddle. The three of them joined together on the stage and played at the wedding. During this particular interview she shared the following:

To have these little girls that are playing fiddle, it just kind of brings everything to life. So in situations like that, it is rewarding for the girls, and they are motivated to do it. But it is also appreciated by everybody, especially the elders, they appreciate that these little girls are playing fiddle and its nice cause, I know that there are some of those elders there that probably did play at one time and are just kind of...I mean I don’t know the history of why we lost the fiddle in the first place, but for it to even come about later in my lifetime, it’s just amazing. And I appreciate it that much more. (Parent 1, 2010)

This story resonates with the familial and intergenerational connections of the fiddle.

On a different note, another parent shared a different kind of community story. This is one of a tragic funeral that was the outcome of a house fire that took the life of a grandmother, her five-month-old grandson and the infant baby’s father. Left to grieve the loss of her family was the baby’s mother. Also left was the infant baby’s great-grandmother for whom this loss was almost unbearable; it was the third adult child she buried in as many months that spring. A group of young girls in the community who were close to the family decided to play their fiddles

at the community memorial. Although not a happy occasion, these young girls are recognized and respected for their contribution to the family and community during such a difficult time. Furthermore, it is a part of contributing to healthy community involvement.

Instructor Clint Dutiaume emphasized the appreciation parents have. “And the reaction from parents, is amazing!” he told me during our conversation over the phone, “they come to school just to thank me for getting these students playing instruments. That is pretty gratifying to have parents come down and tell me I am doing a really good job and they are very thankful.” As someone who has grown up in a very small community Clint knows how it is just *such* a positive thing for these young people to have the opportunity to participate in their communities on an optimistic note and then receive affirmation for it.

Jigging to OH Canada

One of the fiddle instructors has a small portable recording studio that he takes with him when he teaches. “Just for fun,” he tells me,

The students make recordings. They love to hear themselves play. For instance, I brought my little studio to one school and we recorded *Oh Canada*. Every morning they play their own version in school, instead of the commercial recordings. The students were also invited to play *Oh Canada* at the community celebration when the Olympic torch was going through town. I try to do everything I can to bring different experiences to these students that otherwise maybe they wouldn’t get.

This is exemplary of opportunities that never would have happened if the fiddle programs did not exist. In turn, such opportunities continue to present themselves because the students are enthusiastic about fiddle playing. Not only are students proud to be part of the program, but so too are the parents and communities taking pride in their children’s participation.

Jigging to Spirits in the Morning

Manitoba Hydro is to the province of Manitoba what the oil industry is for Alberta. Blaine told me a story about a big grand opening Manitoba Hydro held recently for a new building in Winnipeg. A showcase for green energy and efficiency the grand opening ceremony included a group of fiddle players from the Hollow Water School. Blaine heard that the students put on a really great show. Furthermore, he found it very interesting, that Manitoba Hydro would include not only students in such a big event like that but the fiddle music as well. This performance also emphasizes the value this big corporation places both on Aboriginal youth and fiddle playing. Additionally it raises both the student and community profile among the general population. This is exemplary of a corporate sponsored public performance that validates student identity. It takes a great deal of courage to stand up in front of a group of complete strangers and perform. For young people from small communities this is an even greater challenge.

Jigging to Duck Dance

I highlight for readers at this time that the communities this project is situated in can in no way be compared to mainstream communities. For example, during his interview Blaine talked about how, "It's just not the same. Taking kids from remote communities, and giving them access to the larger world, you can just imagine the impact that has. Now you take these kids and you're traveling around." Blaine then stressed to me, "you get them out of the small community, get them into different environments, you could say it is like taking a child from

Ottawa and taking them Europe.” We agree that these are pedagogical opportunities these students might never have had if it were not for the fiddle.

I have lived and worked in the north for nearly forty years. I am reminded at this time that students who are not involved in sports, participating in the fiddle program may be the only chance they have to take trips outside of their small communities. These are educational opportunities that did not exist prior to these fiddle programs. During his interview Clint Dutiaume related how some students take the fiddle playing and really run with it.

The opportunities these fiddle programs are allowing these students are just amazing! In Sagkeeng, they have a whole music and arts program at their school, including square dancing, guitar and fiddle. Some of my fiddle students, along with the square dancing team have been invited to Disneyland to perform during March break. I have a group of fiddle players who now travel with the Asham Stompers, a well-known square dance group. And it is in all the communities I teach in, the students are invited to perform at different festivals and stuff. And when they make five, ten, twenty, thirty or forty bucks, that is the best thing in the world, not only did they get to play their fiddle, they got paid for it too! That is unheard of for them! It really is fun!

In the south, trips to Disneyland are commonplace. All the years I have lived in northern Manitoba, this is the first time I have heard of a group of students going on such a trip. During my interview with Blaine he reminisced on “those times with the students, the happiness and the joy...and then you are doing these performances, and you’re playing, and I guess, at the time, you don’t realize the impact that it’s having.” More importantly, these are memories that will stay with these young people for a lifetime.

Jigging to a Poor Girl's Waltz

In order for any and all of these activities to happen, it cannot go unmentioned the important role fundraising plays. A common theme throughout the interviews was the prominence of fundraising to the fiddle programs. This requires a tremendous coordination effort. On that note, I caution a reminder that many of these communities really have little economy. Consequently, this is not in any way comparable to fundraising in a mainstream community. These are times where communities pull together to fundraise and contribute in any way that they can.

In one community, the school principal told parents, about the *Under the Porcupine* music festival. She did not want to see any students miss out on something that could be so good for them just because they didn't have the money. That particular year there were initially 30 students in that community who indicated an interest in going to the music festival. Registration is \$275 per student which is a significant amount of money to fundraise in a small town. Two parents shared the following challenges of fundraising in a small community:

Thanks to our school, our students get these opportunities. I just know that I am grateful for what the school has done for the fiddlers. We have an awesome principal and she is one of the biggest fans I believe. She really sees it as important and does not want to leave anyone one out. She gets us motivated and will do pretty much anything for our students to go on these trips. As a parent, I don't have the resources or the money to get the kids involved in all of these opportunities. I am so grateful for what the school is doing for the kids. And to have all that come from the school, it's...you learn to appreciate it all. Of course we do try to do fund-raising and stuff like that, so our kids can go, but where it comes from, the heart of it all is our principal. (Parent 1)

We have bingos; sell hot plates, pizza sales, hot hamburgers plates...a lot of times you end up digging in your own freezer to make it happen. And besides the cost of registering for the camp, we also need money for gas to get there. (Parent 2)

Fundraising adds a dimension of cohesiveness to the communities. Strong healthy communities equal more opportunities for young people and further open the doors to more possibilities. On that note, nearly all of the interview candidates spoke about their involvement in two key community fiddling events, the *Under the Porcupine Music Festival* and the *Frontier School Division Jamboree*.

Jigging Under the Porcupine

An evening fiddle program for adults in one of the communities is what one might call a ripple effect of the fiddle curriculum. An outcome of this evening fiddle program has had a profound impact on not only this one tiny Metis community, but also on the larger fiddle community in Manitoba. With a school fiddle program established in the Barrows school the adults in the community soon took an interest. Blaine, the principal of the school, applied for funding from continuing education. Through the adult evening program, this group really got involved in fiddle playing. Some of the participants had a sense they wanted more. One summer, nine members of the group, including the instructor Blaine, went to *Emma Lake*, a well-established fiddle camp in northern Saskatchewan. They bring in some of the best fiddle players in North America as instructors. The group went to this fiddle camp and Blaine told me how it '*blew everybody away*.' "We all had so much fun! You are surrounded by good music, good food and good people." He continued to elaborate how many of the participants still say it was probably one of the most profound experiences they had in their life. "And when we returned home with this excitement, and said, 'We need to bring that type of energy to our community, let's think

about hosting our own fiddle camp.” So they did. They started planning immediately. Wanting a camp for adults, Blaine told me “What we really wanted was to drink, party and play music.” They started fundraising, and hoped they could talk people into coming. The camp follows the format of *Emma Lake* with workshops during the day and concerts in the evening. I note here that this is one of the communities mentioned that you cannot spend a nickel except for at the local post office.

As a result of the school fiddle programs, fiddle playing is very high interest among students and that is who the majority of the participants are for the *Under the Porcupine Music Festival*. Just ending its fifth year, this festival brings out families and community groups from all over the province. I could hear the deep emotion in Blaine’s voice as he continued to share with me how this small music festival has had a very big impact on this tiny community:

So we have this incredible array of musicians, some of the best in western Canada. It is ridiculous; we are paying them minimal, *minimal* amounts of money. But we’ve developed a kind of a sense of a family within the musicians. It has turned into an amazing event with amazing musicians. During the evening concerts, the focus is on the musicians getting up and playing. We wanted to do that because we know this in all aspects of learning that seeing it, hearing is really important to the process of learning. It is about seeing what can be done and being inspired. So that’s one of the things that we feel is really important with the concerts because we are showcasing a fantastic array of musicianship. So that has an impact on the students and the audience, and they are saying ‘Hey I want play like that. I want to be that.’ So that’s what’s happening there. And so I would say, the week that it is happening you drive through Barrows and there are tents and campers everywhere and it looks like a little tent town. There’s that festive feeling. I mean there is the whole aspect of developing the music. Music has just kind of exploded in our area and there has been a real revival of people getting together and jamming and playing. And it is real home roots, grassroots music that was there until the stereo and rock and roll and Elvis Presley came around. We are getting back to that now.

The impacts are felt not only in this tiny community, but throughout the participating communities.

The hills are alive with music

For many, myself included, fiddle playing quickly became a family event. During her interview, Shelley talked about how her family quickly became hooked on getting involved in whatever opportunities were offered. The first year they went to the *Under the Porcupine Music Festival*, Shelley took only her two daughters. Once again with disbelief in her voice she told me, “the experience, the way they come out of there, it’s just amazing!” The following summer, with the support of the local school principal, some funding from the regional Metis Federation, and their fiddle instructor’s encouragement, they found themselves taking five vehicles and twenty students from the small community of four hundred people. Reminded of how much work it was to organize the trip, Shelley was very animated when she described that summer’s adventure to the music festival.

We took Michelle’s vehicle, mum’s vehicle, two of my vehicles, Edie took a vehicle, we had five vehicles, and we filled them right up. There was *no* room for anything. I took my truck and I had to build an extra bigger box on the back of my truck. Mervin took that one. (She points to another truck parked outside). And then the vans were totally packed. You could barely move. The kids just sat squished (*she shows me ‘like this’ gesturing with her arms*). And every seat was full. The truck was loaded extra high cause we had to take all the tents and tarps. Yah so, that’s been a real cool experience. But you know, it’s really *amazing*. And it’s not just a little part of a tune, it’s a full tune, and it’s not just one tune either, they play several songs when they walk out of there. Three full days, and it’s amazing what they walk out of there with! Yup, it would take me three years to learn what they do in the three days. Because it is so small, they get a lot more out of it. And they have guitar, and drum and they have jigging and square dancing and vocal and bass guitar as well. So the girls got into classical music there. Donna Turk teaches classical and she had a group of only 6 students. So they were really focused on what they were doing. They do a huge performance after that one. That is where they are starting to teach them how to read music. They have to learn how to read the notes, a musical score. And they love it! They love it! When you listen to it now it’s just amazing.

Excited by the memories, Shelley sighed and continued, “Wow! And they put on, it’s just huge; the meals are just awesome; everything is homemade. We have no troubles, nothing, no incidents at all. The students that were there, they all chose to go.” While she was telling this story, she went over to a cupboard in the corner of her moms’ kitchen. Digging through a drawer, looking for the CD from last summer’s festival, she told me how they record all of the concerts and everyone gets copies of the CD’s afterwards.⁶¹ She wanted us to listen to the song the girls recorded at last year’s concert. She flipped through CD’s and songs until she found the song she was looking for.⁶²

Shelley’s story took me back to Blaine’s interview where he described one of the things that the festival does is bring the whole level of musicianship up.

So, you are getting real quality instruction, and you go home and you work on the stuff that you’ve been taught that brings your playing up. And the modeling at the concerts is *absolutely* inspirational and you go home and *practice, practice, practice*, you are so motivated. You’ve been excited. You see the possibilities. It is amazing!

The *Under the Porcupine* music festival is a completely community based volunteer festival/camp/celebration of music and dance. It has become an amazing event and Blaine has found that the people in Barrows are saying that before they have never had any recognition as a community that they feel good about.

The community, I am hearing from so many people has developed such a sense of pride that they can host an event, that they can put on an event. We get SO many compliments by people coming that the food is good, the hospitality is good, how warm the community is and *that* is impacting the community. I am hearing this from people all the time traveling around Manitoba. And that is just; I don’t know people just feel really good about it. A real sense of pride! Yah, it’s just great! And then when the festival is over the impact I would say is the self-esteem just throughout the year.

⁶¹ Everyone bought the CD at the end of each evening-the money went towards next year’s fiddle camp.

⁶² This is also the songs that her daughter’s and a friend played at the funeral that spring in the community.

This past year they had 100 participants in the program, which is actually the population of Barrows. So their little community doubles in size. In the evenings, people travel from surrounding communities to see the concerts and their little community hall is packed. The result is not only a tremendous impact on a tiny community; the impacts reverberate through communities all over the province. In addition to that, this fiddle festival is something that everyone looks forward to every year. Every time I talk to Blaine, he tells me, “You should come.”



Figure 19: Under the Porcupine CD

Jigging at Frontier School Division Jamboree

The *Under the Porcupine Music Festival* is an example of a community driven fiddle event. Another profound indicator of the success of the fiddle as a culturally responsive curriculum is the annual music jamboree held by Frontier School Division. This jamboree began at first as a gathering of students from the few communities that had fiddle programs. The schools brought in master musicians together with groups of students to do intense workshops. When the students received instruction from advanced musicians, their skills advanced very rapidly.

During our Cormorant visit over bowls of homemade chicken soup and Eileen’s homemade buns, Shelley recalled how her family first became involved in the school fiddle jamboree.

Shannon was just in grade four when the first letter came home from the school about the fiddle camp. At first I refused to let her go. But then the fiddle teacher convinced me to send her. So I phoned my mom to see if she wanted to go with us. It would be camping in a ball field, and everything happening in the ball field. The food will be served there and everything. We decided we were taking Dad with us and he was in a wheelchair, so that meant we had to have everything accessible for him. He played fiddle himself, so he wanted to go. He always wanted the kids to play fiddle. But his right arm was paralyzed after his stroke, so he couldn't play anymore. So he gave Shannon his fiddle.

Anyway, we decided okay, we're going to go. I sat down with Shannon, and I told her, if I take you all the way to Duck Bay, you're going to go on your own. I'm not gonna have anything to do with it. They were going to bus the students back and forth from the campground to the school for the fiddling. She said 'yes I'm going.' And so we packed up, and let me tell you, the truck was heaped up right over top of the cab, (she gestured with her arms) and away we went...And it turned out to be the MOST amazing time! We never had one bit of trouble. She never had one bit of doubt in herself. She was gone on that bus. I think there were only 125 students that year. And then they had the big stage show [performance] right there in the ball field in the campground. The fiddle instructors stayed right there with us at the camp. They weren't in any fancy motels anywhere. They stayed in a tent and froze with the rest of us. We had awesome instructors. That's when Calvin Vollrath was there. He was one of our first instructors. We'd go to bed, and they had the campfire right outside our tent, because we had the tarps and everything, and they fiddled ALL night, The adults and the students were playing, well until Cameron came and said 'alright now, go to bed you guys.' Everyone was there, gathered around the campfire. And we didn't need to go anywhere; we just stayed in the tent because they were no more than 10 feet away from us.

Shelley laughed, "Yup, all night they fiddled. That jamboree was in Duck Bay." Held the long weekend in May, in Manitoba, the weather can still be very cool and unpredictable. Shelley stopped to take a drink of water and then continued her story about that first trip.

One of the things that sticks out to me about Calvin [Vollrath] is he was playing, and it was so cold, and we were thinking, what should we do, it's so cold, how are we gonna get through this night in our tent? It was the very last day of course. And while he was playing his song, he started singing jingle bells, and just after that the snow started coming down. And boy after that we packed up and we left.

Shelley's story conjured up images of the snow falling in the middle of the outdoor concert in May. Sitting around Eileen's kitchen table, we all laughed. Eileen then took a turn to add to the story after listening to the fiddling for three days:

And when we were heading to Dauphin, Cori-lee would have been about three years old at the time. She was sitting on my knee. Shelley was really low on gas, and we were wondering if we were gonna make it there. Cori-lee was sleeping and she woke up and she said '*Oh Gran, I'm so fiddle sick!*' Because that's all you heard were fiddles, [for 3 days] from first thing in the morning to last thing at night. So Cori-lee was quite *fiddle sick*.

We laughed and this brought Shelley to remember her reluctance to become involved in the beginning. The fiddling had just come into the school that September,

Like myself, I am sure people were saying *I'm not sending my kid*. It was just the way I felt, I'm not going to go out there, and that's *too* much. But when you heard them play, that's all it took was for us to listen once, and then we *never* quit going. Following that, we're going to all the fiddle camps. We go to more now, like *Under the Porcupine*, and never miss out on anything now. We still have a lot of the same instructors and that's the best part of it is that it's the same people who come in now. For all the camps that we've been to, it's all the same people.

In 2003 one hundred and seventy five students attended. Since that time, the Frontier School Division Music Jamboree has become an annual event. What began as a small gathering has gotten bigger and bigger every year. Because the communities that host the jamboree are very small, the maximum number of students that they can accommodate is limited to four hundred and fifty students. The jamboree has a true 'festival' atmosphere, with students involved in intense workshops for three days with master musicians from all over Canada. The evening concerts open to the public resonate through the community.

My very first experience at this music camp was in Norway House in 2005, a memory Caroline and I share together. I continue to recall how I was *completely* blown away by not only all the students with fiddles, but also how much they *want* to play their fiddle. Students participate in workshops from early morning until late afternoon. Between workshops fiddle tunes resonate through the halls and courtyard of the school. The 2005 jamboree brought Caroline

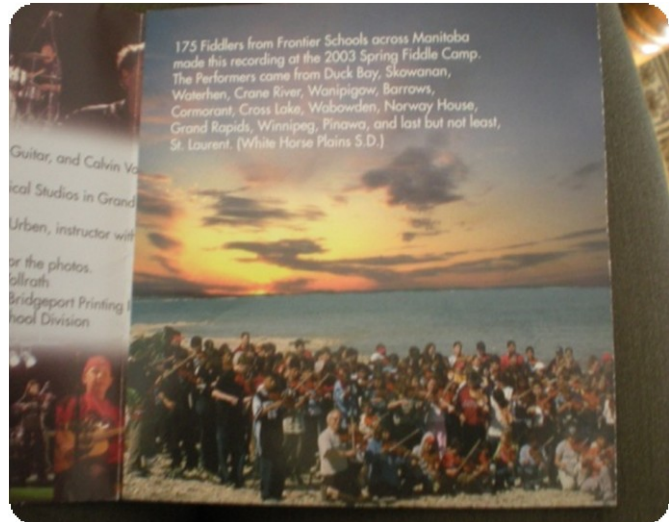


Figure 20: Frontier Fiddlers CD Jacket

to the jamboree as a chaperone with her grandson and his schoolmates. We were ‘camped’ in neighbouring classrooms for the weekend. Following a personal reflection on my own thoughts, Caroline shared her amazement with the jamborees.

I have never seen anything like it! When you go to those festivals, it’s awesome! Those kids are walking around with their fiddles wherever you see them, they’re in the bathroom, in the cafeteria, sitting in the hallways, and they are all playing fiddles. It’s just awesome to hear them! And it’s just steady. When I went, I thought ‘these kids are gonna drive me nuts’. But it was awesome! I couldn’t believe it! And it was like you couldn’t believe it, these kids, I just thought to myself, ‘*what is going on here*’? And some of the songs they were playing were my dad’s and it was awesome to hear these kids, some of the little ones playing this music.

In agreement with Caroline, I found my first trip to the jamboree ‘mind blowing’. The most amazing part of being there was the energy and the enthusiasm of the students toward the fiddle playing. This fervour seemed to increase with intensity the second year I went to the jamboree. I remember shaking my head when students were playing their fiddles on the school bus for nearly the entire five hour road trip.

Jigging to Grand Rapids Breakdown

In 2008, the music jamboree was based out of the Pine Creek School for the first time. Students and workshops were spread around the three small neighbouring communities of Pine Creek, Camperville and Duck Bay. The deep cultural connection of the fiddle in that area of Manitoba was reflected by the packed house in the community arena during the evening concerts. Lindsay was visiting her mother in Duck Bay during the 2008 jamboree. During our interview Lindsay recalled her involvement in the school fiddle program in the 1990's when it was first being developed. With excitement and disbelief she talked about the recent concert at the community arena:

I actually went to a concert at the arena and I listened, and there was SOOOO many fiddle players! *I was blown away!* I am just so proud to see that there are so many students involved, so many students from all the different schools! It was so amazing!

Lindsay, like many, cannot get over how many students are participating in the fiddle playing today. Blaine, who has been involved from the very beginning, also expresses the same awe about what he sees. "And when you go to those jamborees," Blaine told me on this occasion,

Oh my God!! What is happening now with the student level of involvement is absolutely incredible. Some of the best fiddle players from across Canada, such as Gordon Stobbe return to the jamboree every year to instruct the students. These instructors are amazing musicians and they know their stuff; they never see these students except when they return every year to the jamboree. *They are completely 'blown away' by how much better the students are than they were the year before.* They just keep on bringing music to these students and bringing them to a higher level. Collectively, everyone stands back in awe and asks, *'Where is this going to end?'* The advanced students are so motivated that some of them are practicing two or more hours per day on their own. This is evident by the noticeable advancement of their skills every year. Encouragement from home for students to play is so forthcoming, like no other activity in communities before, or present. It is amazing that it is exposure to so much, on so many levels. Participating in the jamborees is also part of the motivation for some the students. They are about the music, they are almost like festivals. When these students get together and see each other play, the good ones want to get better and they all motivate each

other; it's totally motivating, and they love it—they are excited to come back every year. It is having a profound impact on them.

So what's happened now is that the Aboriginal fiddle music as we are teaching it is pretty basic. So some of these students have gone through it all and they have mastered it. The next step is they go on to learn Celtic music; then, at the last two jamborees, these students are playing classical music—yes, they are playing classical music; not only that, they are also picking up the cello and viola as well. For two years now, during the jamboree, this group of advanced students played a 10-minute classical piece; they are up on stage playing like an orchestra. And this; and it makes me *cry—it literally brings tears to my eyes, every time this happens*, the students in the crowd, the other 450 students on the floor watching this, they give them a standing ovation after the performance. And we [instructors and administrators] are asking ourselves, '*What is happening here? What's happening?*' It has become so huge, and it has moved so far beyond the cultural component now.

Once again, for students in small, isolated northern communities, these types of opportunities are unheard of. I am reminded of historical tones of how the fiddle was originally adopted from Europeans during the days of the fur trade. On that note, I reiterate that Aboriginal culture is not static. The learning of classical music by Aboriginal students may be considered as 'acquiring white man's ways' or acculturation, the process and imposition of white culture by outsiders. But Aboriginal children are not *less Aboriginal* for playing classical music on their fiddles. It is important to know and understand the ongoing evolution of Metis culture.

Being Metis is not just about our history. Like all culture, Metis culture changes over time, so it is also important for us as youth to express what it means to be Metis in today's world. Even though many of us choose to express ourselves through activities like fiddling and jigging, a lot of us prefer more contemporary ways like hip hop, basketball or even ballet.⁶³

I stress here the importance of the notion of *choice*. Music is a universal language. The growth and the opportunities that the love and the learning of music are bringing to students in these

⁶³ ISPAYIN. (2010). <http://ispayin.blogspot.com/>

small communities are incredible, regardless of what type of music they are learning and playing.

Here I return here to Blaine's stories of his early days in the north. Everywhere he went, people shared stories about the fiddle playing. He knew the old styles of Aboriginal fiddle music were profoundly unique, but he had never heard them played. That is, not until the 2008 jamboree when Anne Lederman, an ethnomusicologist was invited as an instructor. Anne spent time in 1985 and 1986 in the Camperville, Pine Creek area learning and documenting traditional Metis tunes for her Masters' thesis. Today Anne is one of the few connections to many of these old repertoires. It was Anne's performance during a concert at the jamboree that stimulated Blaine to tell me how "the response from the audience [a packed house] was absolutely fantastic! It was just." He continued,

I thought it was amazing! Because that was the first time that *I've ever seen that connection with that old traditional Metis style*. Well, first of all, the song changes every time you play it and it so unique and so different. You have to be a person of outstanding musical ability to be able to learn that style of playing. And what is really neat is she is a fantastic musician. She did a show where she played some of those old tunes that she had learned from the masters, okay, songs that don't even have names right?

This performance that Blaine spoke of reverberated a deep affective chord throughout that community sitting in the arena that night. The response of the local communities took Anne by surprise. During her interview she shared the experience:

I played tunes that I had learned from elders *there* in that community. When I got up on stage, I said that I didn't have any names for these tunes because the players I had learned them from didn't have names. And that was really neat because people came up to me afterwards and they were really excited about hearing those tunes. People came rushing up to me and they all had different names for the songs. They all had names...and it was just the energy and the excitement, they'd say 'Yah, that tune you played, that was what my dad always called...or my uncle called...it was *the energy*! And the fact that they could tell it was connected to what their parents and grandparents

had played *[Once again I feel really emotional-succumb to tears while I am transcribing this interview...it really is much, much deeper and so much more than 'music lessons' for these students and communities.]* So that made me feel really good too. It was great!

Anne reflected on her participation in this music jamboree. She repeated how fantastic the fiddle programs in Manitoba are. As a music instructor she also appreciates the complexity of establishing such programs.

So, you know, everybody has their piece of the puzzle, right? My piece hopefully, if I can stay involved in some way is to make connections with the older repertoire so we can bring back some of that old stuff. Something that is unique, so that they realize that Aboriginal communities had a unique musical heritage that is theirs, something that they can be really proud of as being theirs...

Although she is only in Manitoba for a few days during the jamboree, Anne acquired a strong sense of the passion for the fiddle in these communities. "The whole community comes out to see and support this. I mean it's a huge thing to have 450 students in your arena playing fiddle." The motivation and enthusiasm of the students really stands out at this event. "That is amazing that they *want* to play that much" Anne told me!

I *wish* I could get kids in the city to be that interested in playing. There is a real cultural connection, but there is also an emotional connection. And that is a connection you don't see with kids in music programs in the city, where it is just something else that they do.

As a participant of previous jamborees with my children, along with instructors Anne and Blaine, I realize that the jamborees and Frontier program are about much more than fiddle playing. There is a sense that you can feel the emotional connection of the fiddle during this event. On that note, I return to finishing thoughts about this rich celebration with reflections from Blaine. I am mindful here that Blaine is careful not to take credit for the present day outcomes of the fiddling. He recognizes the contributions of communities and the schools, and remains involved regardless of what community he lives in. He speaks also of Frontier School

Division, “Every year, they do such a good job! They bring in a variety of musicians to expose students to an array of instruments.” It is not just about the fiddle, but he continues to be amazed at what the fiddle playing has done in these communities, moving youth and communities beyond the musical component.

Jigging to Maple Sugar

As Blaine mentioned several times during his interviews, there is such a festive atmosphere at the jamboree. Consequently, he recognizes that the potential to build capacity in these northern communities through the fiddle playing is far reaching.

And then there is the whole thing of gathering the students on a large scale. When we gather the 500 students every year at the jamboree, you know what that’s doing. And you’ve got kids from Churchill to Falcon Lake, the whole expanse. You know the students are connecting with other students from other communities...And we’ve never had a single competition. And it’s so neat when you go to that jamboree, because it’s not about who’s the best, it’s *all* about sharing. And so you’re around there and you’re seeing these students and there you’ve got the guitar players and you’ve got the fiddle players and they are teaching each other and they are jamming together and its community. *The jamborees are like a big ‘love in’ really. They are something else!!*

Blaine and I talked about how we both know firsthand the challenges and realities of life in these northern communities. During our last interview, having recently returned from another annual jamboree, he reverberated, “The jamboree was as usual just awe inspiring!” This event is so unique in this northern context.

I’ve heard so many people, talk about it. When you see the students that are there on stage, and I’ve been living in the north for *30 years* and have been actively involved, and there are other things...but there are challenges...I know there are other good things that are happening. But I’ve never seen *anything* having the impact at this level as what the music is doing. *What you see there, it blows you away! Somehow it touches you in*

the heart! And so, I don't know, I mean it's just a really positive thing. It's a good thing for these communities.

Anyone I talked to about being at a jamboree has similar reactions. It is such an amazing experience to see the enthusiasm of the students and their fiddles. Furthermore the positive effects of the jamboree continue to resonate throughout the province of Manitoba for the remainder of the year.

Jigging a Traveller's Jig

Alongside the storytellers, the internet provided me with additional indicators of student fiddling achievements. The number of recorded CDs that have been produced by students involved in the fiddle program is astonishing, considering the short amount of time that they have been playing. Furthermore, communities continue to generate eagerness to hear the fiddle music, especially when it showcases their youth. Since the program started numerous students have received nominations for Best Fiddle Album, multiple Aboriginal Achievement awards, Aboriginal Music awards, and Galaxie Rising Star nominations for students as young as 13 years old.⁶⁴

The 2002/2003 annual report of Frontier School Division refers to the Frontier Fiddle program as:

Providing great opportunities for personal growth and development of our students...The Frontier Fiddling program continues to thrive due to the talent and initiative of our instructors and the active support of schools, school committees, and

⁶⁴ Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards. Aboriginalpeopleschoice.com;
http://www.canab.com/mainpages/events/archive_files/press/2005/CAMAnom_bio.pdf
http://www.canab.com/mainpages/events/archive_files/music_awards/2006finalists.html#fiddlealbum
http://www.canab.com/mainpages/events/archive_files/music_awards/2007finalists.html#fiddlealbum

parents. The public performances have brought recognition and great honour to our school division...including a performance for Queen Elizabeth II on her visit to The Forks in Winnipeg in 2002. (p. 5)

The March 2010 Frontier School Division home page reads: *Frontier Fiddlers Perform at 2010*

Festival du Voyageur:

This group of Frontier Fiddlers, coming together to practice and perform at these various venues, in front of large crowds provided each student a sense of pride and accomplishment that will follow them throughout their lives. Congratulations students and well done! Frontier School Division is proud of you!⁶⁵

An additional March 2010 *Special Announcement* on the Frontier School Division website announces that the Frontier Fiddling Program is the winner of the *Premier Award for School Board Innovation*. This award recognizes educational innovations and improvements, advanced or directed by boards of education to support and/or enhance student achievement. The announcement continues:

Over ten years ago, the Frontier School Board of Trustees was impressed with a group of students from a small two-room school in Sherridon (Cold Lake), who were performing at various schools in the Division. The Fiddling Program, introduced in this school, helped revive the musical tradition in many Division communities. As a result, the Board of Trustees adapted and expanded this program across the Division. Today, the Fiddling Program is in 32 schools, with approximately 2000 students participating and proudly performing at local, provincial and national venues.⁶⁶

This recognition further emphasizes to me the value of a culturally responsive curriculum.

Jigging to a Devil's Dream

As the young fiddlers become more renowned, they are regularly invited to perform. Additionally, many of the impromptu opportunities to perform continue to present themselves

⁶⁵ special announcement <http://www.frontiersd.mb.ca/node/746>

⁶⁶ Frontier School Division. (2010). <http://www.frontiersd.mb.ca/node/746>

through the enthusiasm of both students and communities. In addition to their local communities, fiddle players are invited to special events, and organizations such as Local Treaty Councils, The Aboriginal Women's Council, and The Manitoba Metis Federation. One student participant remembers the performing:

We used to travel to put on shows to other places when they were having festivals and stuff like that. One time we went to Winnipeg and played for the Manitoba Metis Federation President David Chartrand. The performing was always fun. The trips were always fun! People would come and talk to us after, even the media was involved, and some students would get interviewed by the media. It was a big thing for people to see, such a big group of students playing, all different ages and all playing in synch. It was a really big thing for people to see. For me, the playing was an opportunity to learn something new, to travel and to do fun things. It was also an opportunity to make your community proud and to be involved in something important. (Lindsay, 2010)

As a result of these opportunities to travel and perform comes the potential to build capacity among youth from small northern Manitoba communities. It is also evident through stories shared for this project that a shift has taken place in terms of behaviours and student engagement among many of the young people involved in fiddle playing programs.

While I was working on this project, I was continually informed of new opportunities and performances students are invited to. For example one friend updated her Facebook status: *"Under the Porcupine!!!! OMG, I had the time of my life in Barrows, the music, the dancing, the food, the people, the kids, wow, I can't wait till next year. The teachers were Awesome."* Other Facebook messages hinted of mom's longingly lonely for their children who had left home on yet another fiddling trip. The most recent message told me a group of youth had traveled to Batoche, Saskatchewan for the *Back to Batoche 2010 Metis Days* celebration. My oldest son Gunthar was also there as a Metis youth representative with the Metis Centre of the National Aboriginal Health Organization. I pause for a moment to share some photographs.

It is not so much the photographs here though that I refer to but the captions underneath them that strike a chord with me. One photo is Gunthar with Joel, an eight year old boy who took a



Figure 22: Gunthar and Joel 2010 Back to Batoche

Source: Facebook, Gunthar Lundie

liking to him while at Batoche. Joel's mom wrote a note beneath the picture: *"I asked Joel what are the three best things about Batoche, and he said Gunthar, Gunthar, Gunthar...we are so happy to meet a great guy, talented too."* Gunthar wrote the lyrics to a rap song for Joel while they were there. Gunthar and Joel performed the song at a stage show at Batoche.

Another photograph is from someone we met in Ottawa in 2007 at the first fiddle performance at the Wabano Strawberry Tea, Jaime Koebel. Part of the dance group Jig-on-the-Fly we meet up with Jaime and her three children at many events the boys play fiddle at. Over the past three years we have become good friends. At Batoche, Jaime posted a photo she took of Gunthar along with the caption: *"He's like my little brother...my nephew. He's totally family. Gunthar ran 5km with me the first day of the memorial run for veterans at Batoche...only, he ran the whole way!"* (Jaime Koebel, personal communication, July 22, 2010)." This narrative space resounded deep within me the fact that if my sons were not fiddle playing here in Ottawa, we likely never would have crossed paths with many of these very special people, nor had these opportunities. I reflect again on how moments such as this are developmentally defining for youth. These relationships nurture their sense of belonging. Furthermore they foster identity and encourage their mastery of playing the fiddle. For example Jaime, Pauline

and Daryl [Jig-on-the-Fly] always personally acknowledged my sons fiddle playing. Additionally, they publicly reiterated the importance of youth involvement in their culture and community.

Connections such as this contribute to strengthening communities across generations.

It has already been suggested that this is about more than just fiddle music. The deeper impacts these programs are having

throughout communities are not



Figure 21: youth with youth Batoche 2010

necessarily as obvious as the ongoing public performances. The following stories further illustrate how deep the fiddle music resonates. Via Metissage from moments past into realities present the narratives of musical interludes weave strength within and between communities.

Jigging to a Short Bow Jig

I want to stress here again, the thing about small communities, if you have never lived in one, they are very small. If the school you attend only has a handful of students, social opportunities are very limited. The chance to go on a road trip is always exciting, even if it just to another small town. As a result of the fiddle programs, there are numerous occasions where students are brought together from various communities. For example, one year I was at Rural Forum in Brandon, Manitoba chaperoning students for a conference. One of the main stage

performances Saturday morning was a group of one hundred and fifty Frontier Fiddlers. Between songs, Cameron Baggins, the Division's Fiddle Program Coordinator described how many of these students had never played together before. They had traveled from all parts of the province, arriving in Brandon on Wednesday in order to have time to practice and rehearse together prior to that stage show. This performance attracted one of the largest audiences during this four day event. It is what goes on behind the scenes that I raise here. One of these is the chance for students to meet others from different communities and parts of the province.

Besides fiddle playing, this is a trip to the city, and a very social occasion for students. The students are staying in hotels and are together for the duration of the four days. This provides the space for new friendships and relations to develop. One student interviewed suggested at times like this, 'little boyfriends and girlfriends' are found. Some of these develop into long term relationships, even couples that become inseparable. Many lifelong friendships were started and established through the fiddle playing events and activities such as this. Another example is one student told me she remembers being nervous to go to the different events because she did not know anyone. Now, she tells me, it is like a big family reunion every time, because they have become so close.

Another student spoke about how fifteen years later she has remained a lifelong friend with someone she met at a fiddle playing event. Additionally are the opportunities for adults to connect and build new friendships. I know for myself, besides the fiddle playing, the best part about going to the jamboree each year was catching up with the people we were going to see again when we got there. Going on trips such as this, and spending time together day and night always takes personal relationships to another level.

Jigging to Rubber Dolly

Anyone who is at all familiar with the fiddle knows how fragile the instrument is. Highly prized in the days of the voyageurs, fiddles were often found wrapped in moose hides or blankets and sat in a prime location near the front of the boat for protection. Particularly in the north, there is a common conception of young people being disrespectful. If one conjures up the image of four hundred and fifty teenagers in one setting, the natural association would be disorderly or unmanageable. Add fragile fiddles to the scenario, one would think that there would be a lot of damaged fiddles for example at the annual fiddle jamboree. But, on the contrary, youth are very respectful when they are with their fiddles. Instructors, parents, grandparents and community members all mention this behavioural transformation. One grandmother told me,

When I first heard about the fiddle program in the school, I thought to myself, 'oh yeah, that is going to go somewhere', cause kids are *so bad*, they don't listen anymore. I really didn't think it was going to go anywhere. I thought, Yah, right! I can just see you trying to teach all these kids how to play fiddle, like hold your fiddle, don't drop your fiddle, and kids throwing their fiddle...Like what kids have respect nowadays? Very few kids have respect for anybody nowadays. But when you see them with those fiddles...In order to play like that, they *had* to respect those fiddles. When I first went to the fiddle camp in Norway House, I thought, '*Holy Moly! This is good! I was blown away!*' Fiddles are so fragile, and I never saw one broken fiddle that whole camp! And it was like you couldn't believe it, these kids, I just thought to myself, '*what is going on here?*' Like how are these kids...and they *listen* so well, they are so well behaved. You know there wasn't anybody trying to break somebody else's fiddle. You go to a school now, and you see kids and they're kicking the lockers, or ripping somebody's book up or you know swearing at each other or whatever. But at these festivals, No way! *They are 'what song do you know? How many songs do you know now?'* It's just...It's awesome!

This is the perspective of someone who has lived her entire life in the north. The behaviour truly is a transformation for some students. Moreover, when the students are asked to go out and perform, they are always happy to participate [play]. They even phone and ask, "Should we wear our white shirts?" Typically kids these days are usually, the sloppier they are dressed, the

better they think they look, one grandmother told me. She shared how nice it is so nice to see kids dressed up when they go out to perform. In turn, this creates another space for positive acknowledgements for youth at the community level.

A 2001 Winnipeg Free Press article includes interviews with Frontier Fiddle instructors, administrators and students. Fiddle instructor Cameron Dick states, “It’s returned a sense of pride to the whole community, even those who don’t fiddle.” Henry continued,

Many students who caught the fiddling fever, have also changed their lives at school and with their families...A transformation comes over Trevor Seymour when he picks up the fiddle. His attitude is toned down, replaced by a certain earnestness, his eyes trained on the music, his fingers instinctively finding the notes, his foot tapping out the beat...Before the fiddling program, handfuls of students like Seymour were kicked out for behavioural problems or because they didn’t show up for class. ‘It keeps them out of trouble,’ said Dick...The music has roots for Aboriginal people. ‘Once they get into fiddling, you’d never know they were the same kids,’ said Dave Yeo. (Henry, 2001)



Figure 23: Quenten HRSDC Aboriginal Awareness Week

Echoed throughout the north, such stories clearly resonate the positive and significant impact the fiddling has had on students and communities on a deeper level.

Jigging to a Logger’s Breakdown

In many small, remote communities, as a result of a lack of opportunities for youth participation, vandalism and other undesirable behaviours are often rampant. I know this from

the experience of having lived in the north for many years. When I was growing up, the ‘talk of the town’ Monday morning was always about the vandalism that went on over the weekend. One fiddle instructor shared with me a story about the positive influence he sees that the fiddle is having: “Oh, here we go, the Barrows story,” and he started to tell me about the first year he was at the *Under the Porcupine Festival* in the small community of Barrows. Everyone was camped in the field beside the school in this small community. He was in his motor home around midnight and he was just getting ready to go to bed. When all of a sudden he heard the noise of kids out in the field, he chuckled as he told me:

My first reaction was, *Oh great!* Now these kids are going to keep me up all night making noise and getting into trouble or something. Then all of a sudden I heard *fiddles playing from across the field*. There was a group of students sitting out in the field playing their fiddles. That was the coolest thing I have ever gone through just because, you know, my first reaction was ‘Oh great’... and all of a sudden, they serenaded me to sleep.

We both laughed at his story, knowing the reality that there is so many other things these young people could have been doing that night, like getting into trouble or vandalizing in the community. When I was growing up, in anticipation of ‘trouble’, it was not uncommon for the RCMP to take ‘known’ troublemakers [teenagers] on a Friday or Saturday night and drive them ten miles out of town. There, they would get dropped off. By the time they got back to town, the ‘novelty’ of vandalizing would be gone.

Jigging to Flop-eared Mule

This brings me to stories of role modeling the fiddle program presents. On the one hand, the instructors model for students what is possible. Many of the instructors who come to the jamborees are classical musicians that have turned to fiddle playing, including Cameron Baggins, the fiddle program coordinator. On that note, the advanced students' performances inspire and in turn motivate beginners to want to improve. A moment that really struck me profoundly at my first jamboree in Norway House in 2005,

During one of the concerts, all of the different community groups took turns going up to perform. All of the groups of students were all accompanied by their adult instructor. Cameron Baggins introduced the group of students from South Indian Lake by telling the audience that the music teacher left the community in the middle of the school year. This left the students at the school with no fiddle teacher. What ended up happening is one of the 15 year olds, an advanced student, took over as the teacher for the younger students in the school. The students from South Indian Lake performed, led by this 15 year old student. I still recall at that moment I was so moved by what a powerful role modeling and mentoring opportunity that was. (Personal Journal entry, May 2005)

This moment struck me as a very influential opportunity for the fifteen-year-old student to demonstrate leadership to his school and community. Additionally, it sends very strong messages to the young students he is teaching and the young people in the audience as well.

Another space for role modeling is within families with siblings. One young student remembered she was too young to be allowed to play in the school program. She recalled when her sister would play a song. And, she would listen to her play and then play along. She just figured out the notes and played. The school let her start playing when she was in grade 3. In fact, she started with the advanced group of students because of her ability. She received her own fiddle for Christmas that year. Her mom, who was sitting beside her added, "I think watching her big sister play was the thing, something that motivated her and she wanted to get

better.” She finished with the last word, telling me how she knows way more songs than her sister. Satisfied that she could ‘one up’ her older sibling.

Another mom told me how her younger daughter watched and listened as an older sibling played. Even though she was too young to be in the school program, Mom could sense her younger daughter’s enthusiasm and determination to play. “She was sitting in the room by herself playing Rubber Dolly, at a slow pace, but it sounded so cute. And I thought to myself, you know what, how did she pick this up so fast?” So she phoned the principal and asked if her daughter could start the fiddle program.



Figure 24: John Arcand and Quenten

The principal completely supported starting her in the program early. In fact she said if they waited until she was old enough, she might be discouraged. So they put her in the fiddling program and her enthusiasm to play continues today.

More recently, Anne Lederman (2008) worked on an *Elder Youth Legacy Project* that involved Aboriginal Elders passing on their traditional fiddle music and playing style to Aboriginal youth. Two of the six youth involved in the project are ‘Frontier Fiddlers’ from the communities of Norway House and Grand Rapids, Manitoba. I know and recognize both Ryan and Matthew from the fiddle jamborees. During a jamboree concert, this fiddling duo was introduced as the following: Ryan D’Aoust had started playing at the age of 10 in the Frontier Fiddle program with Cameron Baggins as his instructor. A left-handed fiddler player, Ryan took the strings off of his grandfather’s fiddle and restrung it so he could play left-handed. By the

time he was 15, Ryan had already produced his first CD, *South Side of the Strings*⁶⁷. Matthew had recently composed *In the Bush with Grandpa* that he performed for us. Between songs, a very proud Cameron announced that these young men are kept busy playing at community dances, where on a given Saturday night they were paid between \$500 and \$600 for their fiddle playing. They are phenomenal musicians. Moreover, the outstanding demand for their performances resonated with an awe through the younger fiddle players in the audience that evening.

On top of their involvement with Anne in the *Elder Youth Legacy Project*, Matthew attended the North Atlantic Fiddlers Convention in Newfoundland in 2008. To me, they are both a story unto themselves, exemplary of the possibilities and potentials that might otherwise never have happened if not for the school fiddle playing programs. Through their involvement in Anne Lederman's projects, Ryan and Matthew have had many tremendous opportunities, including working with elders to preserve Aboriginal fiddle music. It is hoped that someday they will pass this knowledge on to younger generations. In this case, these talented young men are not only role models; they are mentored and have the opportunity to be future mentors. Knowing how limited opportunities are in the north, I continue to be profoundly impressed by how powerful these moments are for youth in these small communities.

⁶⁷ Ryan D'Aoust. (2008). <http://aboriginalpeopleschoice.com/artists/ryan-d-aoust/>

Jigging to Whiskey for Breakfast

Another story that stood out for me came from Lindsay, one of the first students involved in the Duck Bay Fiddle program. Closing our interview, I asked her if she had any special memories or stories she wanted to share about the fiddle or fiddle playing. Following a brief moment of reflection, she told me,

Well I guess it's not my own story. It is something I think of when I see fiddling shows. I go to the Metis club here a lot. And I go to the Metis folklorama. I am always around jigging and fiddle music. But I really like it when I see an older fiddle player and they ask a younger player to join them. I've seen it a couple of times. To see that, a youth and an elder playing together, I don't know, I just think it is so amazing to see that!!

Lindsay's story becomes even more special to me when May 27, 2010 during Aboriginal Awareness week with the Federal government in Ottawa, a friend of mine told me John Arcand was going to be performing at Library and Archives Canada. My friend has known John and his wife Vicki for years and he offered to make arrangements for my sons to meet them and play a song with John at his performance. At first Gunthar was very intimidated at the thought



Figure 25: Gunthar, John & Vicki Arcand, Aboriginal Awareness Week, Library & Archives Canada

Source: Brenda Chapman, Justice Canada

of playing fiddle with someone as renowned as *John Arcand*, a 'Master of the Metis Fiddle.' As he had time to think about it, he became excited at the notion. We arrived at Library and Archives Canada about fifteen minutes before the opening ceremonies was scheduled to begin.

Gunthar met Vicki and John Arcand.⁶⁸ They slipped into the auditorium to do a quick rehearsal of a couple of songs they both knew. Part way through his performance, Vicki, John's wife and guitar accompanist announced that one of John's passions is to work with young fiddle players. She then invited Gunthar on stage to join them. They delighted the audience to *Paul's Jig* and *Whiskey Before Breakfast*, [or *Spirits in the Morning* as Vicki says they introduce in the schools when they perform so the students don't go home telling their families the Metis have *whiskey for breakfast*]. The experience was a shared treat for Gunthar, John and the audience.⁶⁹ Metis guest speaker, Joe Dragon, was next on the agenda for Aboriginal Awareness Week. He spoke of the importance of mentoring and role modeling for Aboriginal youth. Joe shared personal stories of mentors influence on his own life. He also spoke about how fitting it was to see a Master such as John Arcand invite young Gunthar to perform with him. I know Gunthar felt respected and honoured for having the opportunity to play with such a master musician. He also felt the respect of the audience. When Gunthar returned to school that afternoon, he shared the video of his performance with several of his teachers. They were all very excited for him and further validated what a special moment that was. Occasions such as this are very powerful in building capacity within youth.

⁶⁸ Quenten also wanted to join in on this performance, the whole day was a challenge for me to organize and coordinate all of us meeting at the Library and Archives Building. At the same time Quenten was also nervous about the whole thing, so we left it with Gunthar only playing. But Quenten and I stayed after to talk to John and Vicki, and buy John's newest CD Dedications. John signed the CD for Quenten

⁶⁹ 'See you in Batoche,' were the parting words between Gunthar and John Arcand that morning.

2010 is the 125th celebration of the Battle of Batoche. While at the Métis celebration with the Métis Centre of the National Aboriginal Health Organization, Gunthar's inspiration and motivation to play fiddle was taken to another level. Fiddle playing and fiddle music was front and centre for the entire week long celebration. What is more is the space for intergenerational exchanges becomes a natural occurrence at times like this.

Jigging to Big John McNeil

The fiddle playing seems to have become almost ‘contagious.’ The desire for students to play is held back only by the challenge of finding instructors to teach them. If there were more instructors, there would be more students playing. As a young adult who has an appreciation of experiencing the fiddle program herself in its early days, Lindsay now reflected back:

I guess one of the things that is a hope with all of the young people in the communities that are learning to play that along the way, some of these people will stay in the communities as adults to continue the programs. I heard up north that was happening, one of the students who is a graduate of the program is traveling around up north teaching. And that is the things you want to hear, you want to hear the people who learned and who want to give back to the community and teach as well. It is good that they are able to teach and instruct that they have enough skills to do that.

That is another great outcome of having the programs right in the communities. The potential future instructors are learning hands on what it means to play fiddle across the north.

Jigging to Maytwayashing Waltz

Writing this thesis I reflect on my years of living and working in the north. One of the most profound stories for me through this whole project came from a parent who shared with me stories of how challenging it is to raise children in these small communities. She repeated and stressed to me how there is just not a lot for young kids to do and so many of these kids are just getting into trouble. I am fully aware of these challenges and sympathized with her. She told me:

So when there is music, and they’re home with you, that is the best time to try and get the music going and keep them around. It is so easy, and I have seen so many kids slide off into the wrong direction. [In a small town, everyone knows every body’s

business...there are no secrets.] It is such a struggle to keep teenagers on the path of trying to do right. Last winter my daughter was not coming home after school, and staying away, and me, not knowing what she was doing. She was getting further and further from me.

She hesitated and nervously told me how her daughter was beginning to stray. Feeling the tension of raising teenagers, and the peer pressures they often succumb to, “you don’t have to write this.” Then she quietly whispered,

I won’t even say what she did, but it was *bad*, and she was grounded for over a *month*. So, I told her while she was home, ‘your gonna have some time to pull out your fiddle, and I’ll get the guitar.’ And we kind of did, and we practiced. And that is where I am starting to understand the ‘keeping the connection’. While she was home, we shared time together with our music, and it kind of grounded us. The fiddle was like a bridge for us and helped keep her feet on the ground. It brought her back to me. It is amazing...I couldn’t see us ever living without the fiddle now that it’s here. It is an honour to have my children be a part of the fiddle program and to have the music in our life. It is so grounding for the children. And it kind of helps as a parent, I’m not saying it will take the job, but I’m saying it makes it this much easier for my job to know that that fiddle is there and to know that they love their fiddles. I know my daughter loves her fiddle and that she’s gonna keep on going with her fiddle.

If nothing else happens, this story to me makes it all worthwhile. When we were closing the interview, I was thanking her, she started to tell me how when she plays guitar, often she does not hear anything else that is going on around her. She finds that she just tunes into the guitar playing, and it is almost like a form of meditation for her. In turn, she relates that playing the fiddle is a similar experience for her daughters...and she is so grateful that they have that outlet brought to them through the school. The fiddle playing is naturally connecting students to home and community and allowing for positive interactions.

Jigging to a Snowflake Breakdown

Another aspect of the fiddle program that is fascinating is the whole community supports them. The fact that it is all generations are behind it has a profound impact. One of the jamboree instructors related to me how there really is a deeper sense that it is part of ‘your heritage’. He told me how he got a real sense that people feel that the fiddle is a part of what the community *was, or could be*. Although he was only at the jamboree for a few days, it was very obvious how the fiddle really means a huge amount to the adults in the community. It is about so much more than just music lessons. Another instructor told me, if these music programs didn’t come along, you have to think, what would these kids be doing today? A community member and lifelong resident of the north made the following observation:



Figure 26: Scott; Batoche 2010

Source: *Back to Batoche*, Kymber Palidwar

You don’t get support like that for anything, even sports you don’t get that kind of support from the community. Sometimes with sports you’ll get the support of the people who have kids in that sport. But overall, you don’t get that kind of support, and the overwhelming response. And it’s *everybody*. You don’t have to have children in it. And it was just amazing. When I first saw it, the students playing as a big group of students together playing from all the different schools, *oh man, I was just blown away!* I couldn’t believe how amazing that was! But when you think about it, how many other things would people get this excited about? It’s just amazing! And especially in the north. And I think that kind of stuff really does a lot of confidence building for students. You know, just to be able to play in front of people and to have that confidence to be successful at something. And to go in front of a group of strangers in a strange place, takes it to another level. For sure, it would do something for a person. (Tina, 2010)

Woven through all of the interviews from this project is this theme of how the fiddle is far-reaching in these communities. Every person interviewed used the words '*amazing*' and '*blown away*' frequently throughout to describe what they see and how they feel about all the young people fiddle playing. These are the same words I used when I was at my first fiddle jamboree in Norway House. I was completely '*blown away*' by not only all the students with fiddles, their ability and enthusiasm. It is amazing to participate in such an event. Intertwined in this is the indication that what is happening here goes beyond the music.

Jigging to a Red River Jig

As expressed by many interview candidates, Clint Dutiaume considered how the fiddle really does give so many students something to feel good about. It has such a positive influence on them and is so good for their self-esteem. He told me, "*I can see it!* It is just an amazing thing to be a part of!" Blaine also described this in the following way:

I don't know, just to me, it doesn't matter what you do, I mean, I'm an educator and for me, if it would have been something else, art or ceramics or something, you go with what you have. But the fiddle is, to me, it was much more than just about fiddle music, it's about pride, it's about self-esteem, it's about personal development...and it's connecting to communities.

While there is much healing to recover from 150 years of forced assimilation and the loss of local cultures, the fiddle today soothes the ears and hearts of many. Furthermore, it gives students a sense of belonging on so many levels. It creates a sense of belonging among classmates, between friends they meet at special events, and to community that they are exposed to on so many different occasions. It gives them a sense of mastery of a skill, a feeling

of accomplishment. It also creates the space for independence to develop. Lastly it provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their generosity. The spaces to give back to their local communities and the broader public communities are continually increasing along with building capacity in individuals and communities. The stories shared during this project all provide us with the insight into some of the deeper impacts of a culturally responsive curriculum.

I conclude here with a brief personal reflection. I return not only the stories shared, but also my personal connection to the fiddle through my sons. While I write this, my oldest son Gunthar had just recently returned from the weeklong *2010 Back to Batoche* celebration, attending as a youth with the Metis Centre from the National Aboriginal Health Organization. He was also one of the 'Youth Ambassadors for Manitoba' while he was there. Upon his return, I made the one hour drive to The Pas to pick him up. The entire trip home, and well into the evening, he was full of stories about his adventures in Batoche. He was especially excited about Scott, a 12 year old fiddle player he met while he was there. Scott only started playing fiddle two years ago. One year after this young prodigy began playing; he exceeded his instructor in ability. During a stage show Gunthar and Scott watched a fiddle performance that included a song Scott had never heard before. Immediately after, they returned to his camp and Gunthar watched and listened as young Scott taught himself the new melody by trial and error on his fiddle. At this time I have to wonder, as more and more students are participating and mastering the fiddle where will we be a generation from now? There is an energy and level of enthusiasm that almost feels contagious with the young people fiddle playing. Radiating with enthusiasm, Gunthar returned to Saskatoon three weeks after the Batoche celebration, for the

John Arcand Fiddle Festival.⁷⁰ Here he and his brother were able to participate in intense fiddle workshops with the Master, John Arcand.⁷¹ But for Gunthar, this trip was also an opportunity to reconnect with many of the new friends he had made while at Batoche just a few weeks earlier.

As a participant observer of these scenarios, the capacity building, the modeling, the mentoring, that is going in these spaces; I raise the question again, “*what was lost when the fiddle music died?*” *What else died?* Blaine reflected on his years as a teacher in many different northern communities:

All of these things are synergistic in that they move people in the audience, and then the audience appreciation of it moves the performers, the kids. There is nothing else like it that creates that kind of synergy. Other stuff that I see happening at a profound level especially on the reserves is the pow-wow groups, they are developing pow-wow groups, and the traditions and I really see the positive effects of some of that programming that is going on. But I don’t think it’s happening at the same level as this is. The fiddling has been a great thing. I don’t think it’s the only thing that is out there, but at such a large scale as this, I think it’s having an incredible impact.

This synergy can be felt across communities, connecting youth with the older generations, as is reflected by many interview candidates. I consider the saying ‘what goes around, comes around’ when a friend recently told me the fiddle music *soothes* and *heals* her soul when she listens to it. Has this vibrancy and enthusiasm of the fiddle come back as part of our healing journey as a nation? As I shift from the storied section of this thesis to the discussion, I reiterate Blaine’s words: ‘this was...there was nothing planned along the way...and where is this going to end?’

⁷⁰ John Arcand. (2010). <http://www.johnarcandfiddlefest.com/>

⁷¹ They had a choice of instructors from across Canada, but chose John’s workshops.

CHAPTER FOUR – DISCUSSION

We will raise a generation of First Nations, Metis and Inuit children and youth who do not have to recover from their childhoods. It starts now, with all our strength, courage, wisdom and commitment.

(Ball, 2008, p. 4)

I want you to remember only this one thing,' said the Badger. 'The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them anywhere they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memories. This is how people care for themselves.

(Lopez cited by Donald, 2004, p. 21)



Figure 27: A cold winter day on Athapapuskow Lake

Back up and Push

December 2009, my fourth night at home in Cranberry Portage, I can hear the ominous creaking of the house as the vicious northwest wind blows across the lake. Looking out into the darkness I can see the barren tree branches dancing in the wind as it gusts. Without even going outside, I know this day is going to be the coldest yet. As the darkness of the night lingers far

into the morning, I stir the coals in my wood stove, and put another load of wood on the fire to warm up my home. As if to mock me, a wild gust of wind rattles the entire house right to the foundation. I am reminded again of the extremes of the north.

Fast-forward six months; I am once again at my home on the shores of Lake Athapapuskow in northern Manitoba. The difference is extreme in temperatures +35 rather



Figure 28: Athapapuskow Lake

than -35. The trees and grass are a lush green. For days on end there is a calmness in the air. The surface of the lake is a mirror image of the trees, rocks and blue sky that embrace the shore. The quiet and peace is regenerative. The haunting calls of the loons echo through the day and night, often the only sound that interrupts

the silence. I find myself jumping into my kayak every chance I can, reacquainting myself with the shores of home. The calmness as I glide across the surface of the water radiates through my being. I am warmed not only by extra-long hours of sunshine, but also by the memories of how precious this northern landscape is.

At the outset of the literature review I situated the historical background of education for Aboriginal students along with the resultant detrimental outcomes. This is followed by a review of the literature on culture, belonging, identity, place and community, and with it, a culturally-responsive curriculum. We are reminded how cultural alienation continues to generate the

sense of ambivalence felt by many Aboriginal people towards sending their children to learn within the colonial public education system (Nikkel, 2006). Ultimately, it is about understanding and allowing Aboriginal children to feel good about who they are and where they come from. Once again, I speak these words from the perspective of a parent, and the impending fear of my children becoming a statistic. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the results of the project within the framework of the guiding research questions as they relate to the broader questions arising from the literature review:

- ***What is the impact of the fiddle curriculum?***
- *How does the fiddle curriculum impact these remote and isolated Aboriginal communities?*

This project specifically visited the fiddle as a culturally-responsive curriculum, with a series of stories that situate the history of this curriculum along with present-day impacts. The conclusion of this discussion ends with recommendations for future research and program possibilities.

100 Pipers

The original intention of the creator of the school fiddle program was an attempt to engage students in education. Having the insight of being a long-time northern community member, he was trying, in his words, ‘anything and everything’ he could to reengage students. According to the philosophy of the *Circle of Courage*, a person without self-worth from any background or culture would be susceptible to social, psychological, and learning problems (Brendtro et al.,

2002). Therefore, to avoid such problems, certain criteria must be met within each individual (Brendtro et al., 2002). Using the *Circle of Courage* as a framework, I demonstrate through the stories shared during this project how a school fiddle program fills these basic human needs, *belonging, mastery, identity* and *generosity*, as identified by Brokenleg and Bockern (2003). In turn, using examples from this project, we see that the fiddle, in these communities, truly is a culturally-responsive curriculum. Moreover, it addresses gaps and connects youth not only with education, but also intergenerationally within communities. I turn to Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (2005) who relay that in many tribal languages a separate word for art, education, and spirit cannot be found and that these words are intertwined because they are an integral part of the rich fabric of one's life. As if a natural departure, tremendous opportunities are an outcome of present day fiddle playing programs. As such, the fiddle has become an integral part of many of the families and communities involved.

Chase Me Charlie [Belonging]

Tajfel (1981) heeds that if membership in a group does not contribute to positive self-image, the individual, in the interests of maintaining a positive self-image, will leave the group, either physically or psychologically. According to Kohn (2006) most children fail school not because they lack the necessary cognitive skills, but because they feel isolated, detached or alienated from others or from the educational process. There are many factors that place students at risk, but the seed is planted in school the first time they feel *unwelcome*.

Stories shared through this project illustrate that these school fiddle programs contribute to student's sense of belonging and 'place' on various levels. For example, within the group setting, the small class in which they partake in fiddle instruction is the first layer. This is the space where students are a collective part of something. The numerous opportunities that come to students to perform further endorse the sense of belonging for students. There is the opportunity to connect with an audience, whether it is within their own school, in their local community, or traveling to an outside community. Performances big or small are always followed with positive reactions and positive feedback from community.

In 2007, my sons were invited to play fiddle at a Gala fundraiser for the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. They received compliments throughout the evening, but I remember one particular gentleman, who introduced himself to us, and told us that he grew up in a small rural community in Manitoba. Very animated he shared how listening to my sons play *Rubber Dolly* took him back to sleeping on top of a pile of coats in the hayloft of a barn when he was a child. With a warm hand shake and a genuine smile on his face he recalled how his parents would be down below in the barn dancing to fiddle music. He along with other children would peer through cracks in the boards of the hayloft and listen to the music as they drifted off to sleep.

Dueck (2007) discusses the shared intimacies of these public performances, or collective experiences that engender belonging.

Public culture also intersects with intimate interaction in the course of public assembly. Public assembly is a moment of possibility, when gathered strangers might come to know or interact with one another...public assembly is often an occasion for [or the beginning of] more intimate interactions, including friendship, courtship, allegiance, enmity, and economic association. It is frequently a moment of collective experience, action, or interaction, when audience members not only witness or participate in an event, but witness one another doing so. There is a kind of intimacy in this collective witnessing, and witnessing of witnessing. (p. 50)

For some students this collective intimacy begins when they take their fiddles home. For others it is when they are asked by family to play for a visiting auntie or uncle. For all students, traveling to music festivals and jamborees fosters their sense of being part of something special. As one student said, 'It is like we are one great big family now'. There is a sense of reuniting and celebrating at these gatherings.

Furthermore, these gatherings have connected people across and through communities. In turn, what develops are very deep connections from spaces where many typically would have lived in isolation. Additionally, traveling to outside communities builds and reconnects students' sense of pride and belonging back to their own home community.



Figure 29: Duane, Quenten & Gunthar, May 2010

Source: Fred Cattroll - HRSDC Aboriginal Awareness Week

Belonging is connected to place in this project as the notion of 'knowing where you are, and where you are from' (Chambers, 2008). *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada 2009*, conveys the notion that "Place is the locus of all knowledge, its origin and function. We come from place and we grow in place" (p. 24). The sense of being part of a community, and knowing that it is home is strengthened by the fiddle both through connecting to community and by the opportunity to travel and be proud of where you come from. Furthermore, a great deal of community pride is generated through these students' fiddle performances.

Belonging is also the necessary thread that strengthens the daily fabric of our lives. According to Perry (n.d.) our relationships create the glue of a family, community and society. He states that “this capacity to form and maintain relationships is the most important trait of humankind — without it, none of us would survive, learn, work, or procreate”. This strong sense of belonging common to most Aboriginal people has been compromised over the decades by a difficult history [that has impacted their individual and community well-being] (CCL, 2009, p. 22). Healthy connections within community are key factors contributing to the overall wellbeing of Aboriginal people (CCL, 2009). The stories shared in this project solidify this sense of belonging that resonates through the fiddling.

Flaming Arrow [Mastery]

Along with the need to belong, children also find it vital to have mastery over their environments (Brendtro et al., 2002). Children continuously seek to find competence in schools by demonstrating success in what they do, both socially and academically. If they are deprived of opportunities to succeed or are experiencing constant failure, they will release their frustrations through troubled behaviours (Brendtro et al., 2005).⁷² A troubling statistic that leads me to question the ability of the education system to support Aboriginal students’ mastery

⁷² Ironically I witnessed this myself when my son entered a large Ottawa high school with a student population of 1200. This is double the number of people that live in our entire Manitoba community. This resulted in feelings of alienation, troubled behaviours and a 30% drop in academic marks over a 3 month period.

of a non-culturally responsive curriculum is the nearly 40%⁷³ of Aboriginal students who drop out of school.

Mastery is defined as the achievement of learning goals which include developing skills, expanding knowledge, and gaining understanding (Callopy and Green, 1995). Numerous examples are shared about how the fiddle gives students a sense of accomplishing something, “even if it is as simple as playing *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*,”⁷⁴ it gives them something to feel good about (Clint Dutiaume, 2010). There is also a motivation generated among and between students to learn more new songs. It is like an internal drive between students. I am reminded again of the time I was on a school bus traveling to a jamboree one spring (2006) and students played their fiddles for nearly the entire five hour drive. There is this sense of a personal challenge among students to want to constantly improve. They play and play and play.... (Blaine Klippenstein, 2010). Children want to see themselves as competent and successful human beings (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). The success of mastering ‘another’ new song is followed by the reward of acknowledgement from family, friends, and instructors for the accomplishment. This validates the feelings of achievement and mastery.

Within the scope of these fiddle programs and the context of the communities in which they are situated, it is important to note here how schools can positively impact students from difficult family backgrounds:

Although these students enter school with many problems that interfere with school performance, once they are engaged in learning, the results are remarkable. Even if their family problems cannot be solved, schools give every youth a daily opportunity for success, responsibility, and positive attention. (Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001, p. 124)

⁷³ In 2006, 40% of Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 did not have a high-school diploma, compared to 13% among non-Aboriginal Canadians. The rate was even higher for First Nations living on reserve (61%) and for Inuit living in remote communities (68%). CCL http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/StateAboriginalLearning/SAL-FINALReport_EN.PDF

⁷⁴ This is the first song my sons learned how to play on the fiddle, and is often the starting point for fiddle playing.

When they increase mastery this in turn leads to positive outcomes in students' lives. The fiddle is providing the opportunity for this to develop. This is further nurtured by home and communities. Another outcome of this is the potential discussed with respect to students' mastering other musical instruments such as the guitar and keyboard. Additionally, many learn to read musical scores and even compose songs. These are numerous opportunities to develop a sense of mastery that were essentially unheard of previously.

Snow Deer Two Step [Independence]

Payne (2005) illustrates how pivotal it is to find balance between allowing children to move toward independence while still providing them with the necessary amount of nurturing (Brendtro et al., 2002). She insists that "educators have tremendous opportunities to influence...students' lives..." and furthermore, "...it costs nothing to be an appropriate role model" (p. 25). John Taylor Gatto (2002), a former New York State Teacher of the Year, proposes that (p.225) students: "...need to have lots of first hand experiences in order to develop independence. It doesn't do much good," he elaborates, "to get these experiences second hand from books" (p. 32). An example of independence developed and nurtured is the opportunity to travel to perform in public places. Coming from very small communities, for young students, to leave home on their own is meaningful. Also significant is performing in front of groups of complete strangers. Recording CD's individually or as a collective group also promotes a sense of independence. Numerous examples of these were found such as *Frontier Fiddlers Volume I and Volume II*; *South Side of the Strings*; *Fiddlin' Buckaroo*; *Nanny's Dream*;

and *Gillam Frontier Fiddlers*. Another example of independence is when students make their own decision to perform for the community, such as at a funeral, wedding, or other community event. Acts such as this are followed by the rewards of positive acknowledgements they receive, even at times from complete strangers.

For other young people who lack a sense of power over their own behaviour and their environment, however, feelings of alienation and school failure may dominate. These are the students who in turn often seek alternate sources of power through chemicals or membership in a youth counterculture (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002, p. 52). Kohn (2005) challenges educators to think beyond traditional discipline and commit to building community by empowering students by giving them autonomy. He asserts, “A community not only preserves and nourishes the individuals who compose it but also underscores the relationships among these individuals” (p. 108). It takes a great deal of courage to perform in front of a group whether it is strangers or familiar faces. As the students speak of feelings of nervousness prior to performances, they also express feelings of joy and even the sense of ‘being on a pedestal’ and feeling respected following these performances. Subsequently these performances contribute to student’s sense of independence.

Orange Blossom Special [Generosity]

John Gatto (2002) contends that students of all ages need to be involved in community service to realize they have much to give and to learn. Moreover, students themselves must seek out opportunities that are spiritually fulfilling (Gatto 2002). Schools can play a crucial role in

encouraging young people to actively contribute to the well-being of others, if they structure ongoing community service. Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, (2002) reiterate the importance of reconnecting students with their communities as a way to develop altruism. Many times students are involved in fiddle performances, they are volunteering their time and they are giving back to their communities. Also, performances can be preceded by long hours of group rehearsals to prepare for events such as for the *Festival du Voyageur*. I share here a story from the government of Manitoba website with a headline: *Youth Making a Difference*:

For the past four years, seniors and shut-ins of St. Laurent, (MB) have been visited regularly by a group of young fiddlers between the ages of 10 and 16. A fiddling program was begun at the school in 1999, and before long a performing group was formed consisting of ten of these talented young people. The group soon became known as The St. Laurent Fiddlers...This group soon became well known in the area, and requests started coming in from neighbouring communities to have them perform for various events and in other seniors' homes. The joy it brings to their [seniors] lives is matched only by the sense of pride it brings to the young performers. As time went on, it was duly noted by their instructor and the public that the more they played for their community and others, the more they practiced and the better performers they became. Teachers noticed also that the members of this group grew in self-esteem and their school work and behaviour improved...⁷⁵

Additionally important to remember is that the time it takes to travel to perform is usually not measured in minutes or hours, but days. Overall, the time committed by students is substantial.

The *Festival du Voyageur* performance gathers students from a number of different communities. In addition to travelling long distances, students may be performing with students from other communities that they may have never met before. Dueck (2007) described one such trip:

The Frontier Fiddlers were thus comprised of several small groups of students from mutually distant communities who learned and rehearsed under the guidance of a

⁷⁵Manitoba government

http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/youth/leadership/stories/Sharing_Metis_Fiddling_with_Seniors_and_the_Community.html

number of instructors (who typically came in to teach from outside the community). Their Festival du Voyageur performance was a special event insofar as it brought members of several different groups together to perform. The instructors and group members had synchronized the performance in advance so to speak, by using set versions of tunes to be played, codified in violin tablature, staff notation, recordings, and discussions between instructors. In their preparation for these performances, groups of students who were initially unknown to one another engaged in a kind of long-distance sociability: with the help of written notation and knowledgeable instructors they coordinated musical interactions with strangers...it was a public celebration of good-timing music from intimate rural community life: music that carried with it resonances of house parties and homemade good times with family members and friends. (p. 37)

This trip is an example of students' generosity to the larger community. As was noted in previous sections of the thesis, these 'good-timing' stories continue to resonate through small northern communities.

Boil Them Cabbage

An additional layer of generosity is the time and effort to fundraise in order to participate in some of these events. The coming together as a collective force to raise funds in a small community contributes to both a sense of belonging and to generosity. For example, to make 'hot plates'⁷⁶ or a pizza sale takes a great deal of communication, organization and team effort. One community when doing a hot plate fundraiser was asked to deliver [30 or so] hot plates to a group of Manitoba Hydro employees who were staying at a bush camp nearby the community. A large order such as this is very much appreciated by the fundraisers. As a gesture of thanks, the students went out to the hydro camp to perform for the hydro workers. This is another example of the synergy generated by the fiddle 'within and between'. Healthy

⁷⁶ Selling hot suppers by the plate and delivering them to homes/families.

connections within the community are key factors contributing to the overall well-being of Aboriginal people (CCL, 2009, p. 22). Underlying all of this is the notion of giving young people not only something positive to do; it is keeping them out of trouble.

Cree Hymn [There is Coming a Day] [Culture as the Unifying Thread]

Fundamental to all of the above-mentioned themes is culture. There is this sense of knowing that the fiddle and fiddle playing was a vibrant part of your community; this sense of knowing, it is a part of 'who' you are and resounding memories of days gone by. The deep emotional connection does not need to be explained, but can be 'felt' throughout communities. These emotions resonate through the voices of many of the interview participants. Further, the literature confirms that many students do not succeed in school because their cultural or social characteristics are "unrecognized, misunderstood, or devalued" (Kea & Utley, 1998, p. 44). When the fiddle program began in 1995, no one ever anticipated how enthusiastically students and communities would respond. I return to the original thesis questions, ("***What is the impact of the fiddle curriculum? How does the fiddle curriculum impact these remote and isolated Aboriginal communities?***"). Upon reviewing all of the stories shared through this project, the simple answer is: *The impacts are at a much more profound level than I ever imagined.* On a deeper level, I was deeply moved listening to the emotion and expression in people's voices as they shared their stories. To hear the historical stories firsthand from people with the lived experience of growing up with the fiddle being a very central part of their families, their lives

and their communities, reinforced the connections the fiddle is generating today between generations and within communities.

Canadians who are marginalized by race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, dis/ability, gender, sexual orientation and language proficiency, experience systemic barriers to social and economic opportunity that directly influence their participation in health-enhancing activities (Canadian Index for Well-being [CIW], 2010, p. 34). Although schools work as systems of internal oppression within Indigenous communities, there are multiple ways in which Aboriginal students can negotiate their agency (Ng-A-Fook, 2007, p. 198). The fiddle program in northern Manitoba communities is representative of one such example, bringing so many positive elements to so many students, families and communities. It is the students themselves that are embracing the fiddle playing, perhaps through all of the positive/feel good responses they receive [from family and community]. Regardless, they are truly really 'taking off' with it. Motivation to practice accelerates the opportunities that are coming their way. Students are adopting but also advancing. One mother shared with me a story about how they were driving to 'town', about an hour and a half long trip. Her daughter, motivated to learn *Big John McNeil* a popular, but challenging fiddle tune, put it on the truck CD player. By listening to the song repeatedly, and playing along, she taught herself how to play during that truck ride. Sitting in the back seat, by the time they got to town, she had mastered the song. There are also numerous stories within families and friends where a sibling or friend will listen to someone else play a song and then teach it to themselves without any music or instruction. As Lindsay & Shannon mention, performances continue to get bigger and bigger.

Aboriginal students must continue to mediate their cultural experiences between their community's needs and the "Eurocentered" systems of public education (Ng-A-Fook, 2007, p. 198). This is not just about school and education. There is a deep layer of community wellness within these stories. Here Dueck (2007) states that:

Traditional music and dance and the discourse that accompany them celebrate rural homes and rural life, and in doing so affirm the rural bases of Indigenous political autonomy and economic right. Indigenous fiddle music is thus anything but nostalgic or backward looking: on the contrary, it is an entirely current expression of hope for vibrant rural presents and futures; it is a celebration of the good life in the rural areas where Indigenous people's political and economic claims are strongest; and it is a pleasurable and emotionally charged practice at the heart of an image of vital Indigenous modernity...Indigenous fiddle music acknowledges and constitutes a public that has strong ties to the sound, movements, thoughts, and emotions of rural music life...for which the Frontier Fiddlers represent a new northern rural generation. (pp. 55-56)

Moreover, the fiddle programs resonate generative and regenerative possibilities past and present.

Surrounding youth with a social support of a loving and caring environment helps to build resilience and self-esteem among young people (Ashworth, 2009). This was not taken into consideration in establishing these fiddle programs, but is a natural outcome of a positive or culturally-responsive curriculum. Research demonstrates that the connection between an Aboriginal community's social relationships and the educational outcomes of its members is strong (CCL, 2009, p. 22). Moreover, research shows that the most important protector against risk-taking for young people is to feel valued by significant adults in their community.

With the Truth & Reconciliation Commission traveling around Canada it brings the historical treatment of Aboriginal people into the public eye. Parallel to this, Aboriginal youth continue to exist between worlds; they struggle with and fail in mainstream systems of

education. Ng-A-Fook (2007) illustrates that individual communities and schools need to establish and define the direction of how culture will play a role in the education of its youth (p. 98). These fiddle programs may not be the answer to everything and to all, considering the intergenerational impacts of dysfunction and despair that the residential-school era brought to so many communities, and which continue to prevail (Boyden, 2010). In many ways the expansion of the fiddle programs throughout schools and communities is an example of grassroots community efforts that seems to have become a natural link between culture and education. As students traveled around and performed in neighbouring communities, parents and communities said “we need that in our school”. The outcome is the present day fiddle programs.

Recently I find myself engaged in numerous conversations that make me realize that the mainstream population is not aware of the relevance of the fiddle to the Aboriginal community. This reinforces that there is *a lot* that mainstream society does not know about both northern Canada *and* Aboriginal Canadians. This is where our institutions, beginning with academia, continue to fail and fall short. Ng-A-Fook (2007) reminds us that the dissemination of thought [culture] through journals, media, and other avenues have “gatekeepers” who understand the effects of colonialism and are committed to fighting any perceived act of hegemony on our communities (p. 196). Having just completed my Bachelor Education at the University of Ottawa, I realize the concept and curriculum of Aboriginal Education and Native Studies was noticeably absent at this capital institution. Furthermore, in our nation’s capital city, I have been told so many times by many people “*I didn’t know....*” with respect to issues that prevail among Aboriginal people in Canada. Current education systems are an education of ignorance

with respect to Canada's Native population. Education is key to healthy people, in turn, healthy people equals healthy communities. Healthy communities in turn foster societal well-being.

Swamplake Breakdown

Essentially, this thesis is about agency and empowering people. Alongside this is the notion of capacity building, that in turn empowers people who are most vulnerable and gives them resilience. I would like to share anecdotal evidence of this. At a recent fiddle playing concert I attended in Ottawa, one of the performers was an instructor I recognized from the Frontier School Division music jamboree. During an intermission he shared with me a story of one particular student. When this instructor first started going out to these jamborees, this student was homeless. Now an accomplished musician, this student has completed his third year of university. Additionally, this young man travels to numerous camps and workshops to teach fiddling to other young students.

To conclude, these fiddle programs not only open the door to celebrate culture, they celebrate youth and celebrate communities. The possibilities, the opportunities continue to grow and multiply. All of these opportunities contribute to student well-being through meeting four basic fundamental human needs, which in turn creates healthier people and healthier communities. Many of the project participants expressed not only their gratitude in the opportunity to share their story, but also the hope that through sharing, this "fiddling around" may open new opportunities in other communities for other youth. It was clear across generations and perspectives the deep connections of the fiddle for people young and old alike.

The Canadian Index for Well-being June 2010 report identifies the following:

Time spent in organized, extra-curricular activities such as sports, music, art and dance, is beneficial for both children and adolescents. They have higher verbal scores, better academic success, improved social skills and mental health outcomes, and are generally less likely to use substances such as drugs, alcohol or tobacco than non-participants.

Participating in leisure and culture pursuits, either individually or overall, contributes to individual, community, and societal wellbeing.

Participation in leisure and culture throughout one's lifetime promotes higher levels of life satisfaction and wellbeing into later life. There is also emerging evidence that leisure and culture can play an even greater role in improving the quality of life for marginalized groups.

Participating in leisure and culture activities not only contributes to immediate feelings of wellbeing, but the benefits can be sustained over time if the activity is continued. People who enjoy an active leisure lifestyle throughout their lives are more likely to have higher levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction. Most importantly, early exposure to all forms of leisure and culture activities leads to early adoption by children and adolescents, and these patterns of participation continue throughout adulthood.

The places and facilities for leisure and culture are very important to individuals and communities. They help foster local identity, bring a community together, and reduce social exclusion. They also contribute to a community's quality of life and environmental and economic health.

Leisure and culture make significant contributions to the wellbeing of Canadians and their communities. They also help shape our national identity and sense of who we are as a people. (pp. 30-33)

This project establishes the tremendous positive outcomes of a culturally responsive curriculum. Aboriginal groups are looking to schooling as a means to promote cultural revitalization and enhancement (Labelle & Peden, 2003; Hanson, 2003). There is potential here to influence the creation of new opportunities and support development of similar programming, or culturally responsive curriculum in other schools for Aboriginal students. By doing this, student, community, Aboriginal and societal wellbeing may very well grow in a reciprocal motion.

Merrily We Roll Along

During the course of this project many issues surfaced. Aboriginal education has moved to the forefront of Ministries of Education across Canada. Some closing thought on future recommendations:

1) Research:

Potential future research projects could include: A case study of a specific community or school that has a fiddle program in place. For example, brought to light is the major gap in research specific to Metis people in Canada. With the knowledge of how vibrant the fiddle playing is among the Metis communities in Manitoba – a research project specific to a Metis community or school program could be noteworthy.

Or an educational element of a program which is having an impact beyond the scope of this particular project is research that examines the benefits of the fiddle playing from the perspective that music has far-reaching benefits for all humans. There is the natural potential to study the academic connections, the impacts on brain development or benefits that may be an outcome of these fiddle programs. It has been said that music is a more potent instrument than any other for education (Children's Music Workshop, 2006). Recent research has found that music uses both sides of the brain, a fact that makes it valuable in all areas of development. Furthermore, music affects the growth of a child's brain academically, emotionally, physically and spiritually (Children's Music Workshop, 2006). In light of the fact that there are some students that practice two or three hours a day, what are the impacts of this? What kind of brain power is developed under these circumstances?

According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), young people in Canada who participate more frequently in cultural activities tend to complete college or university programs more often than those who participate less often or who never participate (CCL, 2009, p. 42). Considering the impacts of the fiddling curriculum, what are the long term outcomes?

It is noted through this project by Anne Lederman, that there has been a shift in learning and teaching fiddle music. At one time there was no formal instruction as described by Caroline; rather you listened, watched and played. In the older traditions no one slowed things down or taught techniques. You didn't start out playing tunes at half speed. What is being done now is radically different than how people learned this music in the past. These school programs have instilled a standardization and formalization in the teaching of fiddle music which is really a relatively new phenomenon of the last 30 years. Whidden (2007) notes the dramatic near death of the fiddle in Manitoba communities. Although the school fiddling emphasizes notation and ear skills equally, the tunes do not have the rhythmic

flexibility of the earlier Cree style, but they are providing a much-needed musical outlet and a sense of cultural continuity for the youths in the isolated communities (p. 59). Despite the current success of the school fiddle programs, it is important to look at what happens when you start setting up formal teaching programs and how that connects to the older music and the traditions. This is something that has been completely under the academic radar in terms of being a research subject.

2) Programs

In light of recent statistics that 54% of Aboriginal people live in urban Canada, implementing a fiddle program in an urban school or community centre could be a means to connect and engage urban Aboriginal youth and communities. Consequently, I ponder the contributions a program such as this could make in an urban context, one in which the youth's sense of place may be more or less defined. As an increasing number of Aboriginal families are living in urban areas, what are the curriculum possibilities for fostering a sense of identity, belonging and mastery? The possibilities may transcend fiddling and music and incorporate other Aboriginal traditions. [Renfrew Country School Board has Celtic Fiddle program]. I personally would like to not only see the start-up of such a program. I would be very interested in monitoring the effects.

I have personally been witness to the transformation that comes over students as they shift from feelings of alienation to feelings of mastery, belonging and accomplishment. I have seen the personalities go from quiet and withdrawn to outgoing and radiant. Students, who previously walked around with hoodies up, looking down at the ground, not making eye contact or looking up, transition to walking with their hood down, their head up, and smiles on their faces engaged in conversations as they begin to feel a sense of mastery and belonging. Fiddle playing may not be for everyone, but as these stories indicate, it is having a tremendous impact on many who might otherwise fall through the cracks. The curriculum of the fiddle as an instrument of 'cultural continuity', makes the case that Aboriginal youth seek "a place in society that affirms their value as citizens and as Aboriginal persons, and they are finding that embracing a personal vision of who they are and who they will become reconnects them with the wisdom of their Elders" (Castellano, 2008, p. 12). Fiddle instructor Cameron Dick states, "It

has returned a sense of pride to the whole community, even those who don't fiddle. Many students who caught the fiddling fever have also changed their lives at school and with their families" (Henry, 2001; Manitoba Government, 2010). The cultural connection of the fiddle is so deep for Aboriginal communities, has it become a modern day tool for implementing culture, and in effect, success in education for Aboriginal students?

Sometimes we worry about what a child will become tomorrow, in so doing, we forget that they are someone today. I put out there a personal challenge to do something that will make a difference. How we teach a person's heart creates strength on the inside (Brokenleg, Personal Communication, May 20, 2010, Ottawa, ON). Cultural competency is about knowing "who I am from the inside out" and being able to express it to others (Personal communication, Think Tank on Health and Wellness for Metis Children and Youth, Metis Centre, NAHO, March 15, 2010). Individual capacity building contributes to community capacity. Northern Manitoba has been my home since 1970. Additionally, I have the perspective of being a parent of Metis children and cannot help but wonder where they will fall on the spectrum of statistical graphs that portray Aboriginal people. As a result of my life experiences, I personally feel quite close to the issues around Aboriginal education. July 24, 2010, I noted how this thesis project has raised the level of awareness for my family and clarified a process of both deepened understanding and validation of being. For my children, the fiddle continues to take them to a world far beyond our home in northern Manitoba. The adjustment of leaving a nurturing school and community and moving to alien urban public education systems that promote and sustain mainstream Eurocentric ideals was traumatic. The fiddle's curriculum has not only grounded my children in their Aboriginal culture, but also contributed to reaffirming their sense of identity.

The fiddle has contributed to our sense of belonging within our new urban community, and enabled us to become part of a new community.

“We are truly on the *cusp* of a social renaissance as Aboriginal people gather renewed strength” (Fisher, 2009, p. ii). Cultural revitalization is a large part of this renewal. Noting the historical relevance of the fiddle within the Aboriginal community, it is both fitting and timely to explore and document a public school fiddle program. The weighted value in documenting and disseminating the contributions of this could have far reaching benefits to Aboriginal students. There are potential advantages to sharing the outcomes of these programs with the larger education community and informing the gaps that exist in education.



Figure 30: Cormorant trick fiddlers

Source: The Pas Trappers Festival

As reconciliation and healing move to the forefront, it is increasingly important not only

to recognize, but also to investigate and document positive programming for Aboriginal students. The primary issues are summarized within the *Sharing Our Success* proceedings held in Winnipeg 2007:

Progress toward this goal has been hampered by many barriers which have been articulated by numerous commissions and reports over the past decades. One obstacle is the tangled system of governance and funding in which multiple jurisdictions (federal, provincial/territorial, school boards, and band authorities) operate on separate tracks, with no mechanism to facilitate communication across systems or coordinate data collection and policy development. Progress for Aboriginal learners has also been hobbled by the absence of a body of research to provide policymakers and practitioners a shared base of best

practices. Identifying and sharing the features of effective programs and policies is essential if gains are to be generated on a larger scale. (p. 8)

The significance and value of this research project is recognized by the *Canadian Northern Studies Trust* for the contribution it will make to northern research. Across Canada, at least four out of every five Aboriginal students attend provincially run schools (Richards & Hove & Kemi 2008). According to Gottlieb (1994),

the long term needs of Aboriginal youth can be met only through the development of culturally sensitive education...At the same time, the immediate needs of Aboriginal youth must be addressed by programs that enhance their life skills, prevent suicide and substance abuse, and improve educational and leisure activities. (p. 244)

Involvement and engagement of youth in schools and additionally communities is of the utmost importance. Programs and services that are contributing to the well-being of Aboriginal students through culturally-sensitive programming are most worthy of recognition. When youth are involved in positive programming, they are not participating in negative activities. Fiddle playing may be exemplary of positive programming for youth. Researching the narrative of the fiddle further contributes to better understanding if this is the case.

The synergy that is generated in communities and between generations with this fiddle playing cannot be overlooked. The fiddle brings with it an energy and mutual sense of pride. Alongside of that is the sense of hope, where hope was not always present...the good news stories continue to flow and are ongoing...with this knowledge in mind, I ask, where will we be a generation from now? For me, it is most fitting to close with the words of the sole instructor who initiated the first fiddle program. Reiterated several times by Blaine Klippenstein, "This story is absolutely incredible! It is the students and the communities that have made it

incredible. And this is only *scratching the surface of the full potential of what these students are capable of* ...‘Where is it going to end?’ I ask, ‘or is it’...?



Figure 31: Pisew Falls, MB

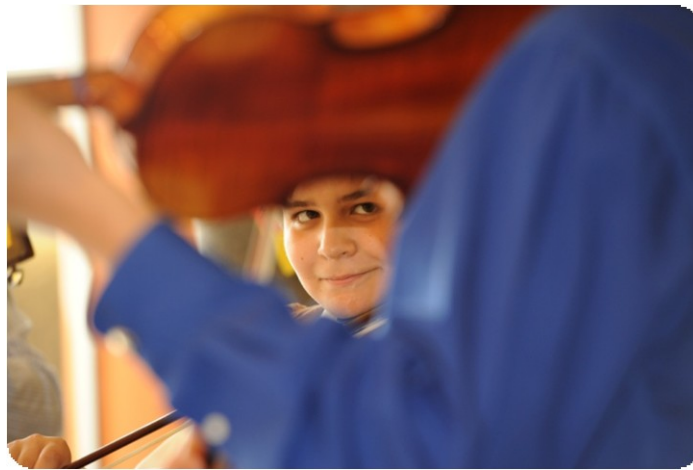
The rivers and lakes of Canada were the main routes of transportation through rugged terrain. These waterways both joined *and* connected relations across vast distances. As the sound of the fiddles resonate in our being, the music reverberates creating a culturally-responsive curriculum.

Like the rivers, the music, the performances, the gatherings, the heart touching moments, and the stories continue to flow. With them we hear the unending timeless and limitless possibilities for our future.

These stories of hope, joy, opportunities and potential, you have heard them now. The truth about stories is, that is all we are (King, 2003). Now that you have heard these stories, in the words of Thomas King (2003), “do with them what you will.” Historically and statistically, we can say we understand the challenges of everything that has gone awry for Aboriginal children and communities. Now we must move to action. I urge governments, policy makers and most importantly educators and administrators, “don’t say in years to come you would have lived *your* life differently if only *you* had heard these stories” (King, 2003). You have heard them and now felt them in the music of the children.

***I Never Fought
I Never Injured The Young Infants
Never Frightened Indigenous Newlyweds
Into Turning Youthful Instantly
Now Finding It Nearly Impossible To Yearn
Illness Never Forgets, Its Next Infection Truly Yuck
Infinity's New Face, Is New, Inspiring, Todays Youth!***

Gunthar Lundie, 2010



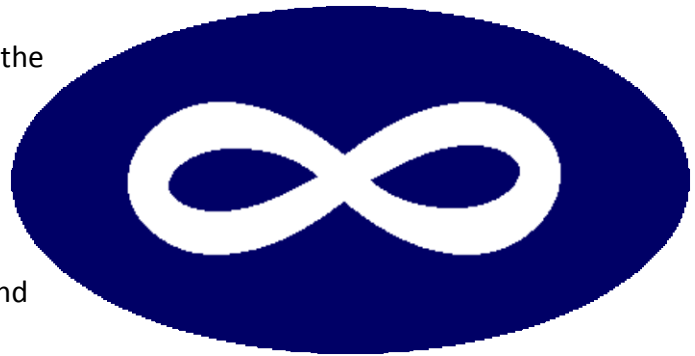
*Figure 32: Quenten looking at Gunthar, fiddle playing at HRSDC
National Aboriginal Awareness Week 2010*

Source: Fred Catroll

Moose Meat and Perogies

During a grade 12 Writer's Craft course Gunthar became inspired to write poetry and rap lyrics. "Passionate and volatile" his teacher wrote on his report card comments. During a conversation his teacher also conveyed that Gunthar's writing was exceptional and he really stood out in the class. Keeping that in mind, I asked Gunthar to write something for me to put at the close of my thesis. He gave me this poem, *Infinity*. "Let infinity fly" he told me. Explaining further, Gunthar said that the Metis people fly their flag of the infinity symbol as an expression of pride in their

culture. The figure eight turned sideways is the symbol of the Metis. The infinity symbol has two meanings; the joining of two cultures and the existence of a people forever. The symbol has also emerged in the traditional dances of the Metis; for example the quadrille, where the dancers move this figure eight pattern.⁷⁷ Embedded within the text of his poem is the repeated word infinity. When Gunthar showed me his poem I did not see the word INFINITY within the words until he pointed it out to me. Offended at my ignorance, he took the poem away from me. He capitalized and bolded the letters in the text, then reluctantly returned it. I sense a subtle connect here between our exchange of words and poetry and Canadian society and



Aboriginal culture. Through cultural awareness Figure 33: *Metis Infinity Symbol, Metis National Council*

and creative expression the richness of the Metis culture injects all Canadians with a sense of community and respect for each other. Perhaps the fiddle itself magically mirrors the infinity symbol when in the playing position. Certainly, it is proving to be on strong component toward cultural renewal, and like the infinity symbol, it reinvigorates a new generation. In turn perhaps it will lead us all to begin jigging in unison to a different narrative dance. *Let infinity fly...*

⁷⁷ Metis Nation Canada. http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/ca_metis.html

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Appendix A Manitoba Map

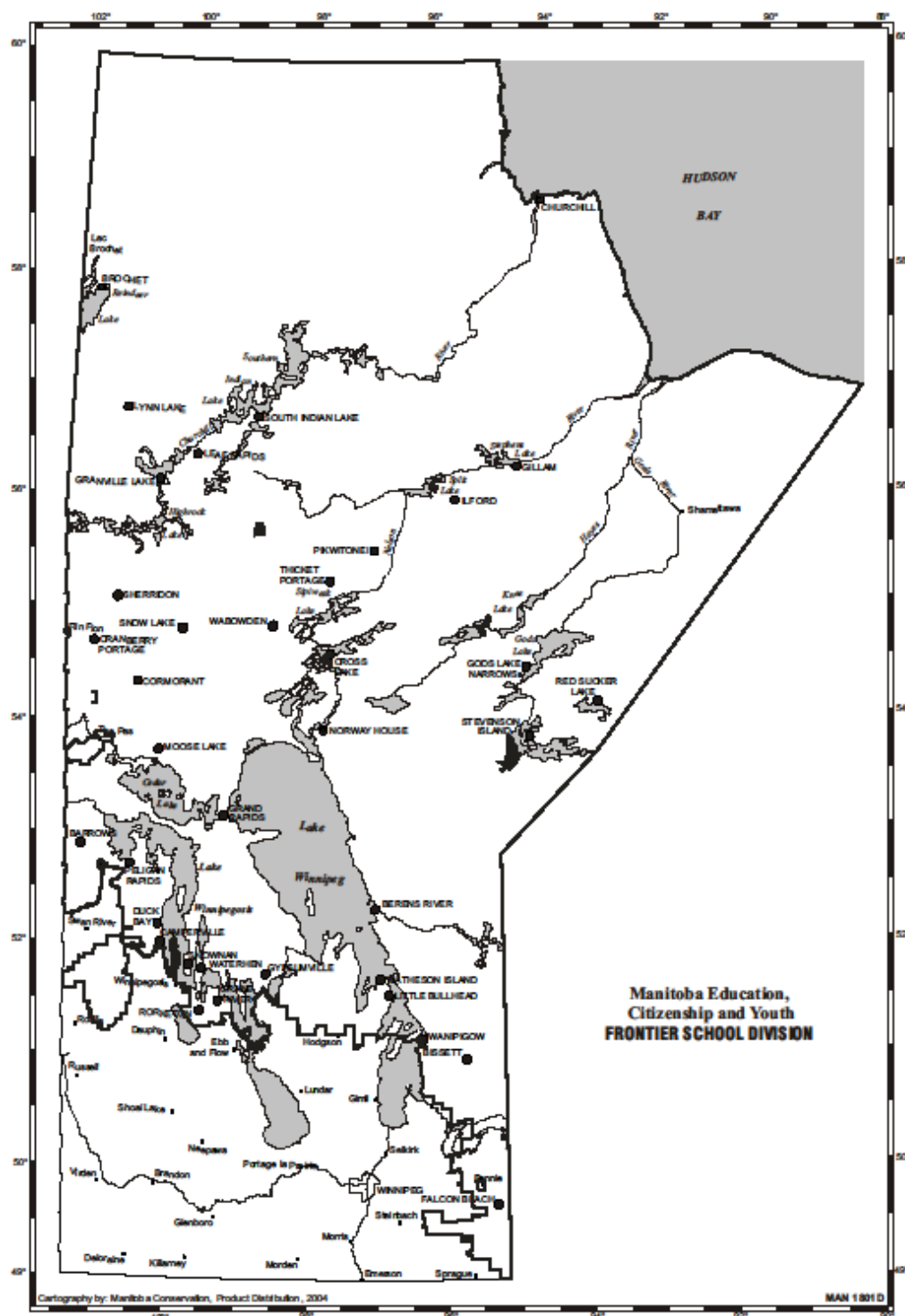


Figure 34: Source: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth

Appendix B Frontier School Division Charting the Future

As stated in Frontier School Division Policy:

Knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture benefits all Division students by providing them with an increased awareness of and sensitivity to Aboriginal aspirations. For Aboriginal students, this knowledge is crucial to the development of identity and self-esteem. Therefore, the following is required in all Division schools.

1. Kindergarten to Grade 8 Native Studies curricula is integrated into the Provincial Social Studies curriculum guidelines to produce a divisional SS/NS program for Kindergarten to Grade 8.
2. High School: All students in Frontier School Division are required to have a credit in Native Studies in order to receive a graduation diploma from the Division. Native Studies 31G has been developed for use in all Division high schools to fulfill this requirement.

The underlying assumption behind the Social Studies/Native Studies Program and Native Studies Curriculum development is that the study of local culture and history can be a stimulating experience that challenges and broadens all students intellectually and culturally, regardless of their ethnic origins

II. Divisional Mission Statement Relative to Social Studies/Native Studies

Our Mission is to provide, in partnership with parents and community, high quality education for all students, so that they can develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and character essential for successful participation in our changing society.

Vision

We envision a school system wherein:

- School programs reflect local culture and history and are designed to provide quality opportunities for all students.

Belief

We believe that students will learn best and experience success when:

- The language and culture of the community influences programs in schools.

Goals

To Educate Students

- To analyze critically, to reason, and to think independently.
- To gain a strong sense of identity and self-esteem.

To Provide Programs

- That support provincial curricula.
- That reflect the needs, aspirations, and culture of the communities.

To Serve Our Communities

- By encouraging staff to be participating members of their communities.

Appendix C Circle of Courage

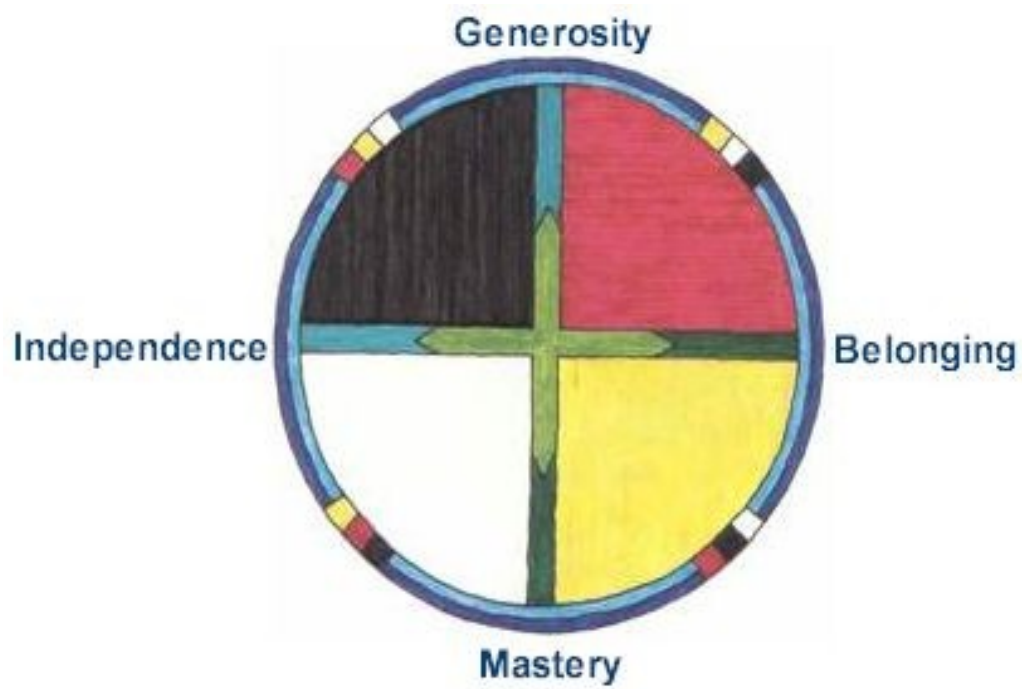


Figure 35

Source: Reclaiming Youth International

Appendix D Ethics certificate of approval

File Number: 09-09-25

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/28/2009

Universite d' Ottawa University of Ottawa
 Service de subventions de recherche et deontologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

Ethics Approval Notice Social Science and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Nicholas	Ng-A-Fook	Education / Education	Supervisor
Virginia	Gluska	Education / Education	Student Researcher

File Number: 09-09-25

Type of Project: Master's Thesis**Title:** Fiddling with a Culturally Responsive Curriculum in Northern Manitoba

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
10/28/2009 (1a: Approval, 1b: Approval for initial stage only)	10/27/2010	1a

Special Conditions / Comments:

File Number: 09-09-25

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/28/2009

Universite d' Ottawa University of Ottawa

Service de subventions de recherche et deontologie

Research Grants and Ethics Services

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/emics/application_dwn.asp

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer 4 weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:
http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5841 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Leslie-Anne Barber
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Barbara Graves, President of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB