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Northern Indigenous Community

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Self-representations of
White Women Teachers in One Isolated
Northern Indigenous Community**

Avril Aitken

**Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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**Faculty of Education
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**FRAGILE FIXINGS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE SELF-REPRESENTATIONS OF
WHITE WOMEN TEACHERS
IN ONE ISOLATED NORTHERN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY**

Abstract

Avril Aitken

This thesis examines how white women teachers, who have worked or are working in one isolated, Indigenous community in Northern Canada, construct a sense of self and their work. It offers an analysis of the self-representations of seven white women teachers that draws on poststructural, psychoanalytic and postcolonial theory. The thesis demonstrates the ways in which the social and the psychic, the exterior and the interior, and discourse and the unconscious interconnect in the construction of gendered and racialized teacher identity.

The thesis takes the position that identity formation is worked out in the intersubjective space between individuals as they position themselves through the continuous renegotiation of power relations and the differentiated discourses that are available to them. Further, the thesis explores the way in which conscious and unconscious processes influence how white women teachers position themselves.

The research methodology highlights the use of film as a research tool. Judith P. Robertson's (2004) technique of Screenplay Pedagogy, which brings unconscious processes to the attention of the researcher and participants, was employed as one of the primary techniques. This approach involves: collective viewing of a film text; attention to deeply felt psychic and somatic moments; writing; and discussion. In subsequent phases of the data collection for the project, each participant wrote a monologue and was interviewed.

The thesis is structured around three major themes that emerged through the research process: communities and relationships; teacher role, values, beliefs and actions; and student and teacher potential. The women's monologues are investigated as individual cases that contribute to the exploration of the importance of each theme in the process of identity formation.

The thesis demonstrates the significance of the dreams, fantasies and hopes that the women associate with teaching. It highlights the impact of the phenomenon of 'othering' on the Indigenous students and community. It demonstrates the role of communities and of competing discourses in education in the formation of professional identity and in the women's sense of being able, or not, to continue to teach in the isolated Indigenous community.

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The seeds of this thesis were sewn in Canada's sub-arctic, a place that (despite being known to some as the barrens) is rich in geographical, ecological and human beauty. I learned the importance of continuously interrogating what it means to teach and learn as a result of the two decades spent serving the Naskapi Nation. During that time, I had the privilege of working beside the dynamic women who agreed to participate in the research. I am deeply indebted to each of the women and to individuals in the Naskapi community, particularly Joe Guanish and Seasi Swappie-Losier.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Each year, white teachers seek employment in schools serving Indigenous¹ students in the Canadian north. They successfully secure the majority of teaching positions available (Harper, 2000a; McAlpine, 2001), yet they are rarely mentioned in the current edited texts on Indigenous education in Canada.² Attention to teachers in these texts is limited to discussion of programs that train Indigenous and Inuit educators. The experience of white, women teachers who head north for work in Indigenous communities is largely unexamined, despite the role such women play in these settings.

This thesis explores the self-representations of white, women teachers whose lives are written between the lines that are drawn by their own histories, their desires and the people they encounter in one specific isolated, Indigenous community. This text is not innocent³; it is part of my own struggle to bring narrative coherence⁴ to my experience of having taught in Canada's north. The research project on which this thesis is based is the result of a struggle to understand how a self forms and is changed and how it appears to splinter and crack under the weight of a thought. This thesis is about how the rough-edged fragments of who we are as white women teachers are continuously smoothed over,

juggled and aligned, to create a *fragile fixing*, a provisionally fixed identity, one of the multiple positions that may appear to be held.

By definition I might be considered a complete-member researcher, as I have studied the experience of a group of women who all taught in a school in which I, too, have taught. Following Burman (2001), I am taking the position that my investments and history strengthen the claims of value of the research. My intention, therefore, is to contribute to the discussion around the preparation for teachers in non-dominant settings through this exploration of identity formation and the evolving, contradictory, and layered experience of being a white, woman teacher.

While whiteness is no longer invisible in the discussion and analysis of race and has become “a burgeoning discourse in academe loosely called ‘White studies’” (Rodriguez 2000, p. 1), much of the work on racial identity has focused on attitude development, which is viewed as the movement through a fixed series of steps or stages (Bennett, 2001). This is a change process in which an individual is perceived to be fully intentional and conscious. Such a process is dependent on the humanistic view of the individual, who is understood to be rational, coherent and autonomous in her thinking (St. Pierre, 2000).

Developments in theorizing around language, discourse, power and subjectivity present alternate ways in which to understand identity, ways that challenge the humanistic notion of the authentic self, described above. Bloom (1998) explains why this challenge is essential; she writes,

“Claiming the existence of an individual essence in Western humanist ideology denies the possibility of changes in subjectivity over time; masks the critical roles that language, social interactions, and pivotal experiences play in the production of subjectivity; and ignores the multiple subject positions people occupy, which influence the formation of subjectivity” (p. 3). This research foregrounds how “language, social interactions and pivotal experiences” contribute to the construction of white women teachers’ professional identity.

There is, as Supriya notes, little work around “constructionist theories of racial identity specifically conceptualized as white identity” (1999, p. 129). And while it is possible to find examples of recent research on white identity informed by subjectivity theorists (Kellington 2002; Cohen 1997), these studies do not focus on the construction of white teacher identity. This is, however, an area of concern that has been identified in Canada by Helen Harper (2000a; 2000b; 2002), Judith Robertson (1994) and Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt (1996).

Harper’s research raises questions about the current preparation of white teachers for work in non-dominant settings; she pinpoints the need to address “how sex and race affect the attempt to define and negotiate a sense of oneself as teacher” (2000b, p. 156). Robertson’s research demonstrates that fantasy formations and identification organize beginning teacher’s identity formation, resulting in “ways of being in the world that potentially mask and perpetuate asymmetries”

(1994, p. 6). Britzman and Pitt (1996) draw attention to the possibility that a teacher may not understand how the construction of her own identity is connected to her perception of the student's identity, and that this may have consequences for marginalized students. The issues that are raised by the researchers mentioned above are issues that I explore in this study.

Further, given that exclusionary and racist discourses continue to shape the landscape of Canadian education (Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery & Zine, 2002; Razack, 1998; Roman & Stanley, 1997; Stanley, 1998) and that in isolated Indigenous communities, the pervasive effects of colonial discourses may continue to reproduce social relations of asymmetry and domination, there is an urgent need to better understand how the construction of white women's teacher identity operates in these settings and in relation to Indigenous students and communities.

This study is built on an understanding of identity, which claims it is:

- in constant and fluid transformation (Bloom, 1998; Masny 2004);
- performed through representations of the self (Hollway, 1989; Robertson, 1994);

- “subject to the effects of unconscious wishes, desires and processes” (Weedon, 1997, p. 84; Robertson, 1994);
- subject to the effects of intersubjective relations (Hollway, 1989);
- subject to the effect of power relations (Hollway, 1989; Foucault, 1997)

In this thesis I have used the writings of those indicated above to inform the position I am taking regarding the identity construction of the white women teachers. I maintain that identity formation is a dynamic and fluid process (Bloom, 1998; Masny, 2004). Further, I claim that what is perceived as a unified identity is actually a temporarily fixed by-product of an individual’s struggle to bring voice and meaning to her lived experience (Mama, 1995; Weedon, 1997), and to secure an understanding of herself. Thus, though language, a moment in the fluid process of identity formation is captured. I maintain that this process of securing meaning is not carried out alone; it is accomplished in relationships, that is, in the intersubjective space between an individual and an other (Hollway, 1989).

The process of attempting to secure meaning is worked out as the individuals, unique in their histories, position themselves through the continuous renegotiation of power relations (Foucault, 1997; Hollway, 1989) and the differentiated discourses (Foucault, 1997) that are then available to them. The white women teachers bring to the intersubjective

space, a dream, a fantasy of who they will be as a teacher (Robertson, 1994). This dream is shaped by their early relationships and histories, memories, and previous interactions with others (Robertson, 1994; Weedon 1997). Their investments in these fantasies provide them with images of what they wish they would be *like* as a teacher, and how they wish they would be *viewed* as a teacher. The women enter into relationships with the other, and through the interaction, they test the possibility of bringing these fantasies to a lived reality.

In this thesis I argue that the process of white women teacher's identity formation has important consequences for the Naskapi students and community. Significantly, this is a result of the fact that the women's attempts to operationalize a fantasy take place on a reserve.

This is a context where the community has experienced the grip of the pervasive effects of colonial discourses that are entrenched through structures and processes, such as the Indian Act (Cooke, 1976; Wilkinson and Geoffroy, 1989). This is a setting where the Naskapi community is struggling to redefine itself and create new identities associated with a postcolonial critique (INAC, 1978; Loon, 1991; McConaghy, 2000a). The school, however, remains a potential site for the reproduction of colonial discourses through, for example: relations among staff, regulations, disciplinary practices and curriculum choices (Aitken, 1993; Harper, 2000a; McConaghy, 2000a).

Thus, the context into which these white women enter as teachers is one where the discursive possibilities available to them, as they interact with each other, may be understood to be constrained. Further, this is a context where power relations around education have disadvantaged these Indigenous people in the past (McConaghy 2000a; Wilkinson & Geoffroy, 1989).⁵

I argue that there is added significance in the fact that the teachers did not live on the reserve but traveled to and from the community daily. Thus, they are truly transients. One of the effects of this is that the perceived distinctions between the white and Naskapi communities are defined with broad strokes (Atwood, 1992; Fine, 1994). For the women in the study, these seemingly “fixed” and “unified” communities play significant roles in the construction of their identity, as they seek, find (or are unable to find), or refuse group affinity and affirmation.

Conceptual Framework

In order to carry out this study of identity, viewed as non-unitary, I have drawn on discourses and theories that would contribute to the interpretation of the white women’s self-representations. In constructing the conceptual framework, therefore, I used poststructural notions of language, identity and of non-unitary subjectivity. Psychoanalytic theory was also employed, since I am interested in understanding how influences beyond an individual’s conscious and rational understanding

contribute to the way she positions herself within particular discourses. Postcolonial theory became an essential element of the conceptual framework as the women's self-representations are linked to their experience in a context that may be explored using a postcolonial lens.

In the section that follows, the conceptual framework is described. The first segment focuses on poststructural notions of language, identity and non-unitary subjectivity. It is followed by an exploration of psychoanalytic theory; finally, postcolonial theory is examined.

Language, identity and non-unitary subjectivity.

The design of this research and its interpretive processes are built on a notion of the self that contrasts sharply with the humanistic image of the self as fixed, and unified, and waiting to be uncovered, "a stable, reliable integrative entity that has access to our inner states and outer reality" (Flax, 1990, p. 8). This thesis takes the position that the self is not a stable entity and that access to inner states is not entirely within our grasp. The research depends on a notion of the self that is defined as, "located historically in language, produced in everyday gendered, racialized, and cultural/social experiences, expressed in writing and speaking" (Bloom, 1998, 6). This is, as Paré (n.d.) writes, "a departure from the more familiar idea of The Self as an enduring and single entity which is glimpsed by others – our family and friends, [and] our colleagues" (p. 8). The non-unitary view, however, permits us to account

for the how people occupy a wide range of subject positions, and allows us to explore how these positions contribute to the construction of what appears to be a unified self.

The suggestion that the self is non-unified or fragmented is not intended to imply that the self is fragile or unstable – according to the common definitions of these words. Rather, that our identity is constructed through positions that appear to be fixed, positions that are dependant on the context in which we find ourselves, and what we need in that particular situation.

At this point I want to introduce the word subjectivity and clarify the way in which I am using it, in relation to the words “self” and “identity”. Common, humanistic uses of the word “self” can be found in the expressions, “one, true self” and “authentic self”; similarly, the concept of “self-knowledge” is often linked with the notion of the possibility of understanding who we “really” are. Authenticity of the self, a true self and notions of who we really are, are not consistent with the theory underpinning this project. For this reason, I have avoided, wherever possible, the use of the word “self”. I will be using the words identity and subjectivity.

I have chosen to retain identity, however, for two reasons. First of all, the words identity and subjectivity are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature; in some cases the words are pluralized to denote the shifts and changes that an individual experiences. Further,

I feel it will be adequate to define the word subjectivity for the reader and emphasize that I will be using it *and* identity to represent the fluid and dynamic positioning of an individual.

Before exploring the notion of subjectivity in more detail, I want to expand on what I have intended by the word “fixed” and how it complements, rather than contrasts with, the word fluidity. I am taking the stance that the process of positioning is in constant movement. This movement is nicely captured by Masny (2004), drawing on Deleuze and Guattari; she writes, “Identities imply a continuous investment in becoming, they are not static or fixed” (p. 5). The becoming process is one of constant transformation. Masny makes a point of indicating that the identities are not *fixed*. In this thesis, I concur, however, I take the position that the *perception* of fixing occurs. The fixings are temporary, and fleeting, and occur as an effect of language. Thus, with each self-representation the women make, there is the perception of a fixing; these fixings, however, are like snapshots which capture a two-dimensional image, frozen in time. The two-dimensional linguistic snapshot does not necessarily allow us to view the process of becoming that is taking place. Thus, a fragile fixing can be considered a moment within a dynamic and continuously transformational process, at which time, through language, an individual appears to be positioned statically. ⁶

Hollway’s (1989) writing around subjectivity allows us to better understand the role of language in the process. In drawing on her work

with Henriques et al. (1984, pg. 3), she writes, “We use ‘subjectivity’ to refer to individuality and self-awareness – the condition of being a subject – but understand in this usage that subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to discourses and practices and produced by these – the condition of being a subject” (p. 25). Similarly, for Foucault, subjectivity is the process through which we become the subject of practices, rules, laws and organizations (1997). Further to Foucault, Weedon (1997) explains the relationship between discourses and practices and changes in subjectivity,

The individual is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity. As we acquire language, we learn to give voice – meaning – to our experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which pre-date our entry into language. These ways of thinking constitute our consciousness and the positions with which we identify structure our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity. (p. 32)

Discourses, as Weedon suggests, offer a specific range of ways of giving meaning to the world. Each discourse is a system of thought, a network of historically, socially, institutionally specific beliefs, categories, statements and terms which give meaning to the world, yet in doing so, differentiate that meaning from other ways of understanding the world (St. Pierre 2000; Weedon 1997; Flax 1990). Language, therefore, cannot be understood to be transparent, but is the means through which specific meanings and perspectives can be communicated⁷. Foucault writes, “Discursive practices are characterized by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject

of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories. Hence, each of them presupposes a place of prescriptions that govern exclusions and selections” (1997, p. 11). Thus, individuals give meaning to their world through ‘discursive positions’. An example would be that the meaning I give to being a *white woman*, meaning that can be linked with specific historical and social beliefs and statements, may contrast with the meaning which another individual gives to being a *white woman*.

If we understand that we give meaning to the world through discursive practices, then we need to address how individuals position themselves in discourse. According to Althusser (1971/2001), what appears to be an independent choice of beliefs by individuals is actually the result of ideological recruitment. Althusser theorizes how ideology functions in the interest of certain groups, providing the maintenance of, for example, capitalist relations, through the state mechanisms: schools, churches, family, law, and so on. An individual is “interpellated” (Althusser, 1971/2001), that is, unconsciously takes up the ideology of the state, which can be considered to be the ideology of those in positions of power. Persons are, according to Althusser, only able to take up, or resist positions that are already defined and available. Without awareness that positions are defined and determined by language, the individual, “on assuming the position of subject in ideology, assumes that she is author of the ideology which constructs her subjectivity”

(Weedon, 1997, p. 30). Haug (1983) likens the process to one “by which individuals work themselves into social structures they themselves do not consciously determine, but to which they subordinate themselves. The concept allows for the active participation in heteronomy” (p. 59).

To summarize, we can say that the use of poststructural notions of language as part of the conceptual framework allow me to explore the critical role that language plays in the construction of identity.

To further underline the value of creating a conceptual framework that incorporates the poststructural notion of non-unitary subjectivity, I offer a reinterpretation of my own reflections on attempting to use techniques of critical pedagogy, written in 1992 and 1993. The following segment illustrates how the poststructural notion of non-unitary subjectivity provides an explanation for my experience that is enabling, and that contrasts with the explanation offered by the discourses of critical pedagogy, current at the time. Those discourses employ a humanistic understanding of the self.⁸

The segment begins with a journal entry written near the end of a year of experimentation with methods of critical pedagogy. The journal excerpt and the reflection that follows became part of a monograph in which I described my experience.

Journal entry – June 6, 1992. Made me think that’s the problem, I can’t get back into my own shoes, they don’t fit any more – I need a new pair – a new way to define what I think I have to do.

[Reflection on the entry, written in 1993] I wanted to work critically in an institution which had more traditional goals. I struggled to find

a way to balance the voices of my students, my own goals, and the expectations of the institution. But, in believing myself to be responsible to both students and the institution I found myself feeling, at times, inadequate, helpless or overwhelmed (Aitken, 1993, p. 41).

Later in the monograph I explain the above feelings of helplessness as a result of what critical pedagogues describe as the immobilizing tautology, “Nothing can be done until the basic structures of society are changed but the structures prevent us from making any changes” (Willis, cited in Anderson, 1989, p. 262). There is no attempt to address the role of my understanding of the situation, nor my identity. Getting over the immobilizing tautology is understood to be possible through a “passionate faith...a vision – one that celebrates not what is but what could be” (Giroux, 1983, p. 242). Again there is no exploration of the teacher who has this passion, or why that is the case.

If I look at the same excerpt of my monograph using the lens of non-unitary subjectivity, I can identify my struggle to reconcile competing discourses around education. I can identify the discourse that prioritizes the voice of Indigenous students, further, that of the traditional educational structures, as well as the discourse grounded in critical educational theory. Identifying the discourses would allow me to address the power relations at work in the context.

My use of the metaphor of “new shoes”, which presumably would put me on the *right path*, suggests that I felt there must be one way to unify the experience. Additionally, moving forward on the right path is

understood to require a blind leap of faith, rather than an informed exploration of the discursive positions available to me, and the way in which the power relations inform the context.

My original interpretation provides few avenues to understand the situation, my role within it, and the tremendous conflict I was experiencing. The lens of non-unitary subjectivity, on the other hand, allows me to explore why I may choose to take up a specific position and reject others; it allows me to explore the power relations at work in the situation. It suggests that action can be linked to analysis rather than blind faith.

The above segment illustrates the utility of poststructural notions of language and subjectivity. Exclusive attention to the discursive construction of subjectivity, however, can ignore unconscious processes that might contribute to an explanation of why subjects take up certain discourse and refuse others (Ringrose, 2002). This is the contribution that psychoanalytic theory makes to this study of identity construction.

Psychoanalytic theory

The concept of non-unitary subjectivity is consistent with psychoanalytic theory because both challenge the notion of the humanistic self as rational and unified. Psychoanalytic theory does so through the promotion of the role of the unconscious (Flax, 1990; St.

Pierre, 2000). “The psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious undermines the belief that it is possible to have privileged access to, accurate knowledge of, or control over one’s mind” (Flax, 1990, p. 228). The unconscious is understood to have an impact on what we think and feel, and how we act. Hollway (1989) explains; she says that our actions, thoughts and behavior are motivated, and sometimes in ways that are unacceptable to us. Our response is to repress these “ideas, feelings, desires and fantasies” (p. 29), and they then become the material of the unconscious.

The unconscious and repression.

Hollway, calling on the work of Sigmund Freud, explains the workings of the material of the unconscious. “Rather than disappearing, this material is constantly threatening to obtrude...it is not just kept down, but transformed, through displacement or projection, to appear in other guises, or other places” (1989 p. 29). Britzman, again drawing on the work of Freud, writes, “What is refused cannot go away, but is instead repressed, only to return through indirection, in new and disguised forms such as negation, dreams, slips of the tongue, baffling and bungled actions, jokes, fantasy, irreverence” (Britzman, 1998, p. 7). Thus the use of a psychoanalytic lens in research allows us to explore how influences beyond an individual’s conscious and rational understanding contribute to the way she positions herself within particular discourses.

In the case of educators, Britzman and Pitt (1996) write that there is an urgency to explore what psychoanalytic theory can tell us about individuals and their conflicts and desires; of concern is the impact this may have on the pedagogical relationship. They write that not only it is possible that “teachers’ encounters with students may return them involuntarily and still unconsciously to scenes from their individual biographies” (1996, p. 118); further there is the troubling notion that teachers may, “imagine the cultural identities, desires and perhaps learning difficulties of their students as unrelated to themselves” (p. 120).

Transference.

The “involuntary return” to scenes from our past is referred to in psychoanalytic theory as the concept of transference. It is one of the most definitive aspects of psychoanalysis. Transference unfolds as, “[A] current relationship becomes infused with the authority of and feeling about a past, usually a parental one. The continuing but unconscious power of the past renders an individual vulnerable to the present authority’s judgment and susceptible to its influence” (Flax, 1990, p. 69). This cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory, first conceptualized by Sigmund Freud, maintains that, “infantile strategies of attempting to rescue or secure the love one wants from another do not go away but are instead elaborated throughout a life” (Britzman, 1998, p. 34).

Once again, Britzman and Pitt (1996) demonstrate the significance of transference to the lives of teachers. Drawing on Anna Freud, they

note that there is an ethical obligation at stake when it comes to a teacher's "old conflicts". Teachers, they feel, need to learn about those conflicts and control "the reenactment of old conflicts that appear in the guise of new pedagogical encounters" (p. 118). Ultimately, they write, "transference shapes how teachers respond and listen to students and how students respond and listen to teachers" (p. 120). This is echoed by Sharon Todd (1997) who, in describing teachers and the pedagogical process, writes that "what we do (or not do), say (or not say), and represent (or not represent)" (p. 5) are part of a process of positioning that is not fully intentional and conscious.

Multiple meanings, identification and desire.

I would like to return to the multiple positions associated with non-unitary subjectivity and underline that positioning oneself within particular discourses, and moving among positions does not suggest that identity is then the sum total of all those positions. Identity is the phenomenon of temporarily fixing a position, which significantly gives individuals the impression that they are unified subjects. Julia Kristeva's concept of the subject in process provides a theory that accounts for the continuity that the individual experiences, despite the multiple subject positions taken up by the individual (Mama, 1995; Weedon, 1997). Kristeva claims that a person maintains and creates the perception of being a "unified, transcendent, self-present subject" (Weeden, 1997, p.

85) through rational discourse, which by syntactic structure ensures a fixed subject and object – the “I”.⁹

Hollway writes that the psychoanalytic concept of identification helps us account for the meanings that an individual takes up (1989). Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) explain that identification is “the operation itself whereby human subjectivity is constituted” (p. 206). Identification takes place when an individual imagines a connection: self with other, and other with self, thus, as Hollway writes, this “create[s] a we” (p. 128). Alternately there can be, as Robertson writes, a process of “expelling the feeling outward” (2004, p. 91). This process is not neat; Britzman and Pitt (1996) explain, “[A]s a dynamic, identifications are partial, ambivalent, and shifting. They pass through specific memories and unconscious desires and therefore are uniquely singular” (p.120).

As Britzman and Pitt suggest, the meanings taken up by an individual are influenced by desire, which can be defined as the conscious and unconscious wishes and fantasies of the individual. Desire drives the individual’s struggle to construct a sense of self, and has consequences for the others with whom we relate. For example, Robertson’s (1994) study of occupational identity formation in primary school teachers, which uses psychoanalytic and poststructural theories as lenses, highlights the significance of desire. She provides evidence “of ways in which versions of purity and charity can be deployed in the service of engendered and racialized constructions of social service, that

do not necessarily provide liberating possibilities for a self or another” (p. 293).

The research process and psychoanalytic theory

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2002), in writing about subjectivity and the qualitative method, state, “We suggest that social and cultural analysis desperately needs an understanding of the emotional process presented in such a way which does not reduce the psychic to the social and cultural and vice versa, but recognizes their mutual imbrication” (p. 185). This is what has been attempted through this research. With respect to how this unfolds through interpretive processes, line-by line analysis of texts can be used to reveal conscious and unconscious thinking and their interdependence (Billig, 2001; Bloom, 1999; Cohen, 1997; Hollway, 1984; Mama, 1995; Robertson, 1994).

A close look at an individual’s rhetorical strategies in speech and dialogue reveals, for example, repression (Billig, 2001). Further, Hunt (1989) writes that the repressed material, the unconscious images, fantasies and thoughts, “make their most overt appearances in the jokes, parapraxes, dramatic themes, dreams, fantasies and affective intonations that punctuate social experience” (p. 25). Thus, rhetorical features and tone can be noted qualitatively and quantitatively, with the purpose of rendering desire, transference, identificatory practices and repression visible to the reader.

To summarize, if we are to understand the development of subjectivity as a process that happens through the interdependence and interrelation of conscious and unconscious processes, locked in “mutually advancing production and change” (Mama, 1995, p. 1), then we need to explore how influences beyond an individual’s conscious and rational understanding contribute to the way she positions herself within particular discourses. We need to take the position “that much thought and activity takes places outside of conscious awareness” (Hunt, 1989, p. 25), and that the unfolding of our sense of self in relation to the world and others is essential to understanding ongoing construction of subjectivity. This is the position I have taken with this research.

Post-colonialism

Postcolonial theory is employed as a lens in this research because of the context in which the white women taught, which is an isolated Indigenous school in northern Canada that is located on a reserve. In the exploration that follows I explain how I am using the terms colonial and postcolonial, and how postcolonial theory contributes to the research.

There is much discussion about what constitutes colonialism and equally, what is meant by the term postcolonialism (Loomba, 1998; McConaghy, 1998a, 1998b; Gandhi, 1998; Hall, 1996; Hickling-Hudson, 1998). At its simplest, colonialism can be defined as a repeated feature of human history: the conquest and control of other people and their lands.

In order to construct a conceptual framework using postcolonial theory, we need first to differentiate between the simple definition of colonialism stated above, and that of “modern colonialism”. It is modern colonialism, described by Loomba (1998) as “the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism” (p. 4) that had, and continues to have, an impact on Indigenous groups in Canada. It does so through “a host of resilient and pervasive cultural, economic, linguistic, administrative, judicial and popular processes that continue to reproduce social relations of domination and oppression” (McConaghy, 2000b, p. 13).

McConaghy’s position, that colonialism is more than a period of time, and that it persists and is maintained through a network of processes, can be linked with the view that *postcolonialism* is more than a temporal marker, more than the period “after” colonialism. While McConaghy uses the term *postcolonial* to refer to a context “characterized by shifting power relations and emergent identities” (1998b, p. 121), Gandhi (1998) refers to *postcolonialism* as “a disciplinary project devoted to the task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (p. 4). For the purpose of the research, I am using both McConaghy and Gandhi’s definitions to define the elements that will be employed in the interpretive process. Thus, using postcolonial theory involves the process of identifying, through the data, the power relations¹⁰ at work, with the understanding that the colonial past has an impact on the current cultural, economic, linguistic,

judicial, administrative and popular processes, among which educational processes can be counted.

If we are to understand the legacies of colonialism in educational contexts, we need to understand the relationship between education and the reproduction of colonialism. This requires us to look at what is valued, what counts as knowledge, and whose understandings are powerful and influential in educational institutions.

Lingering colonial discourses continue to influence what counts as knowledge. One such discourse is what Emberley (2001) refers to as the “narrative of cultural evolution. This is the notion that all cultures go through similar stages of cultural development, from the simple to complex. In this Darwinian tale of evolution applied to human culture, aboriginal cultures are made to represent an earlier stage of cultural evolution. Specifically, they represent the roots, if not the infancy of a mature and progressive (i.e., European) civilization” (p. 60).

Significant to the research is the notion of the perception of a two-race binary. This is understood to be the result of the privileging of “anthropological notions of culture as the primary analytic tool in all contexts” (McConaghy, 1998a, p. 1). The anthropological view sees cultures as bound, fixed and distinct. McConaghy refers to this phenomenon as *culturalism*.

She claims that the two-race binary that is characteristic of culturalism continues to be evident as an integral notion in the

competing discourses within Aboriginal education in Australia today. The notion of the two-race binary is also implicit in the competing discourses of Indigenous education in Canada¹¹. Thus, we can say that it is culturalism and the resulting two-race binary that are the legacy of colonialism. McConaghy explains that the binary is used in different ways in competing discourses in Indigenous education.

The Construction of the Two-Race Binary in Competing Educational Discourses.

McConaghy names five theoretical approaches to Indigenous education that have competed for authority in an Australian context: pastoral welfarism, cultural relativism, radicalism, neo-assimilation, and post-Aboriginalism (1998a). The first four are considered to be “culturalist traditions,” that is, they incorporate the notion of a two-race binary. The fifth, post-Aboriginalism, is the model that McConaghy proposes will constitute new conditions that remove the discussion around Indigenous education from a context defined by an anthropological, and thus, colonial notion (2000a).

McConaghy demonstrates how the binary is used within each of the four culturalist traditions. She writes, “Each of the major discursive regimes within Indigenous education constructs the binary then seeks to address it in various ways” (1998a, p. 2). Thus the binary is seen as a “problem” that needs to be addressed, yet, as McConaghy demonstrates, the “solution” also depends on the binary.

The table that follows demonstrates how the theoretical positions pinpointed by McConaghy can be identified in the discourses of Indigenous education in Canada.

Table One: Theoretical Traditions in Indigenous Education

Theoretical Traditions (McConaghy, 1998a; 2000a)	Role of the Two-Race Binary (McConaghy, 1998a; 2000)	Resulting Conditions in a Canadian Context
Pastoral Welfarism (Culturalist)	The binary is present in the creation of a “deficit relationship,” wherein the Indigenous person is viewed as naturally inferior to the superior non-Indigenous person.	This view is represented by Clifford Sifton, Minister of Indian Affairs in 1904, who said, “I have no hesitation in saying – we may as well be frank – that the Indian cannot go out from school, making his own way and competing with the white man...He has not the physical, mental or moral get-up to enable him to compete. He cannot do it” (Armitage, 1995, p. 104). The results of this view are evident in residential school curriculums, until beyond the mid-twentieth century. The curriculums focused on preparing students for manual labour and menial jobs. (Armitage, 1995)
Cultural Relativism (Culturalist)	The binary is present through a model of cultures in conflict, cultures that are incompatible.	This view supports approaches which are built around understanding, for example, “Indigenous learning styles”, and attempts to adjust curriculum content, classroom organization and pedagogy to correspond to perceived cultural differences (Antone, 2000; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Goulet, 2001; Kirkness, 1998; Stairs, 1994; Stairs, 1996).
Radicalism (Culturalist)	The binary is present as a hierarchical model in which the non-Indigenous persons assert authority over Indigenous persons, through, for example, oppressive structures.	This view incorporates the use of critical theory, critical pedagogy and critical ethnography aimed at identifying and overturning oppressive structures; an example is the restructuring of an adult education center described by Haig-Brown (1995).
Neo-Assimilation (Culturalist)	The binary is present in the move to make over the Indigenous person in the image of the non-Indigenous person.	In the example found, embracing Indigenous cultural identity is seen to prevent Indigenous people from “fully embracing the modern-Canadian knowledge-based economy” (Clifton and Rubenstein, 2004, p. 12).
Post-Aboriginalism (1998a) Post-Culturalist (2000a)	Acknowledges the discursive construction of the binary, in order to move outside of it.	No Canadian examples found

Table One demonstrates how McConaghy's (1998a) framework can be used to identify the discursive traditions in Indigenous education in Canada. The current Canadian writing in this area draws exclusively on what McConaghy identifies as the theory of cultural relativism. Educators and researchers working within this tradition focus on learning and teaching styles, on inclusion of Indigenous content and language, and on pedagogy and classroom organization intended to correspond to perceived different needs of Indigenous students.¹² While, I was able to find little work driven by radical views and neo-assimilationist discourse, examples of both¹³ corresponded to the categories as described by McConaghy (1998a).

In addition to McConaghy's work regarding discourses of Indigenous education, Helen Harper has identified two discursive positions that are evident in the language of white women teachers working in the north, who were involved in her research (2000a). Harper traces the roots of these positions to British imperialism describing them as, the "mother-teacher in service to the empire and that of English lady traveler and her adventures in the colonies" (2000a, p. 131). Harper uses the titles "Lady Bountiful" and "Lady Traveler" to refer to these positions. She claims that for both, the suppression or invisibility of whiteness are necessary. This is because the focus is placed directly on the other. In the case of Lady Bountiful, the selfless caregiver, she "must know and feel what is wrong and be able to fix it. For 'Lady Bountiful' to

be bountiful, she needs to know, to feel, and to be in control. She needs to be at the center but at the same time her needs – her own ‘self’ remains absent” (p. 132). For the Lady Traveler, the self is also absent, yet she too is at the center, because her focus is on investigating, knowing and understanding the other. The Lady Traveler must assume the role of insider and outsider. She is constructed in contrast to other white individuals, because, “if she is seen as too much the outsider, too white, it would be difficult for her to investigate and experience the other” (p. 133). These two positions have a history in the documentation around colonialism and white women teachers, and can be identified in Indigenous education in the past (Harper, 2000a). Further, Harper writes that “current multicultural educational policy and practices in Canada employ the same image of Lady Bountiful” (2000a, p. 133).

In this research, postcolonial notions related to Indigenous education and the discursive positioning of teachers are elements of the interpretive processes. Further, there is attention to the ways that culturalism and the perception of a two race binary make themselves heard in the language of the participants. There is attention to how Naskapi people are constructed, through language, as “others” (Atwood, 1992), and I have attempted to identify the “narrative of cultural evolution” (Emberly, 2001) in the women’s representation.

Conceptual Wrap-up

This study focuses on the identity formation of women who have taught in an isolated Indigenous school on a reserve in northern Canada. This thesis takes the position that “identity is not the sum of singular and conscious acts, but rather a social relation and a psychical event caught up -- even as it catches itself – in the unconscious detours of history, memory and communities” (Britzman, 1998, p. 103). Thus, psychoanalytic theory, postcolonial theory, and poststructural notions of language and subjectivity inform this study of the self-representations of white women teachers. Fundamental to the study is the understanding that the women’s self-representations are not transparent narratives, nor absolute truths of lived experience, but are representations of a desired, cohesive self.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

This study focuses on the identity formation of white women who have taught in an isolated, Indigenous community. The focal point of the thesis is the diversity of the representations of the experience of whiteness as it intersects with gender in one isolated indigenous setting. At the heart of this research are two notions: that identity formation is an ongoing struggle that is both psychic and lived, and that this process has implications for pedagogy.

The guiding research questions of the inquiry are:

1. How do white women who have taught in an isolated Indigenous community give voice and meaning to their experiences?
2. What ways of thinking and particular discourses inform their understanding of themselves and their experiences?
3. What are the psychological and social uses of the women's representations of self and the experience of working in such a setting?

The research problematizes the construction of white womanhood by exploring the conscious and unconscious desire of the women, evident in language, as well as exploring the relations of power and discourse

that inform the isolated, Indigenous context in which the women have worked.

The research design consists of three phases; in the first phase, the participants were brought together for two days, during which time they engaged in ten hours of research activities, including viewing a film, journal writing and group discussion. During the second phase, the women composed monologues. In the third phase the women were interviewed individually.

In what follows, I provide greater detail about who the participants were, how they were found, and the methods used to generate the data.

A Profile of the Participants

The seven women who participated in the research were selected based on several criteria. The first criterion was that of the common experience of having taught in the same, isolated Indigenous school located on a reserve in Northern Canada. Since the opening of the school in 1985, over thirty women, in various stages of their careers, have worked in the school for periods of one year to periods of over two decades. All the women who worked at the school since its opening were invited to participate in the research. The invitation was extended through letters of recruitment [Appendix II], to which were attached return envelopes and forms on which they could express their interest. If

interest was expressed, the potential participant was asked to fill out a biographical questionnaire [Appendix III].

The selection was made, using the biographical questionnaire, based on the following criteria: a) self-identification as white; b) willingness to discuss and write about the experience of having taught in the school in question; c) willingness to travel to a designated location for a specific period of two days. My intention was to build a sample of six to eight women using the strategy of maximum variation sampling (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I intended to build the sample with particular attention to: age, experience, training, religious affiliation, ethnicity, self-representation of class, and circumstances surrounding the move to the community.

While my intention was to select the women from among those who met the three essential criteria, there were only seven respondents who met them all. These women became the participants. The following is an overview of who they are, based on the information they submitted on the questionnaire. The information is also available in Table 2, on page 36.

The school has been open for nineteen years, and among the seven participants was a woman who had taught there, on and off, since the school began operating in 1985. She first worked as an irregular substitute teacher, later on longer-term replacement contracts, and for the last five years has been employed as a full time teacher. She had,

therefore, worked with all the other participants at some point in the last two decades. She was one of two participants who still work in the community. The other five women had moved out of the area as long ago as twelve years, or as recently as five years ago.

While the first participant mentioned above is a long term resident, most of the other women stayed for shorter periods of time, although they all returned after a first year. They stayed for between two and seven years. It is the woman in her seventh year who is another current resident of the community. While some of the participants had never met each other, they were in most cases, familiar with the names of the women who either preceded them or followed them closely. This is due to the sustained contact that most women have had with each other. The greatest concentration of research participants to work in the school at the same time, took place in the early 1990s, when four of the women worked together for two years.

Five of the women started their teaching careers at the school, thus, while they now all range in age from thirty-six to forty-six, they were young novices when they moved north. For the most part, they arrived with newly minted undergraduate degrees in liberal arts as well as graduate diplomas in education. Two, however, began teaching without certification, having been hired based on related qualifications.

In answer to the statement on the questionnaire, "Describe any courses or programs you followed or workshops you attended that

focused on anti-racist education, multicultural or Indigenous education,” three participants indicated they had not received any such training. One participant wrote, “Were there any?” The others followed related courses during their undergraduate work or by distance while living in the community. Some of these courses were only loosely related to their work. Significantly, no specific training was offered through the school board or through the school itself on topics related to anti-racist education, multicultural or Indigenous education.

There were common patterns among the group, beyond the fact that they were for the most part, young, white novices when they began work at the school. Five of the women indicated that they had been raised in middleclass homes, while the remaining two positioned themselves slightly above or below this socio-economic indicator. Only two women claimed any political affiliation, considering themselves either Liberal or left-leaning. Among the seven, four self-identified as belonging to a religious community; these they named as Catholic or Protestant (Anglican or Presbyterian).

A range of reasons brought the women to the school and community. Five had some sort of previous contact with Indigenous students in some capacity, possibly as a student teacher. One participant had worked up north in an isolated Cree community for one year, and was seeking another northern experience. The only other woman to arrive with a year of experience had worked in a remote, less

isolated region where a significant portion of the student population was Cree. She had accepted a compulsory transfer to the community when her previous job was no longer available.

The teacher who has been at the school the longest worked for six years in the area as a research biologist before beginning work at the school. Initially the teaching work simply augmented her scientific work. Eventually however, she went south and sought teacher training because she wanted to continue to live up north and saw teaching as the means to do so.

These are women in some ways like myself. I am a white woman, raised in a middleclass suburban home, and I went north in my twenties. I was a young, white novice with a Bachelor of Education degree when I did so. I went north because I had not secured work in the south. After graduation in the spring of 1980, I began a temporary job in a bank, where I watched the summer pass, and where I felt the increasing desperation that I would not find a teaching job. When the opportunity arose to work in a northern mining community, I jumped at the chance; and when production at the mine rendered the little school less viable a year later, I was happy to move further north for my second year. I asked few questions about whom I would be teaching; I was simply grateful to be able to do so. Unlike most of the participants, I had no previous experience or contact with Indigenous students.

Table Two - Participant Profiles appears on the following page.

Table Two: Participant Profiles (Pseudonyms Used) – Questionnaire Data

Participant	Guinevere	Marie	Brenda	Ann	Zoë	Linda	Hope
Age	36	38	40	38	35	41	46
Self-declared Racial /Ethnic Membership	Caucasian	None	White	White - Caucasian	White and Black (Jamaican)	(blank)	None
Religious Affiliation	None /Member of Presbyterian Church	None	Catholic	Catholic	Protestant - Anglican	Protestant - Anglican	None
Class Status	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	None
Class Status while raised	Upper-middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Lower-middle
Political Affiliation	None	None	None	None	Left leaning	Liberal	None
Post Secondary Programs	B. Ed.	Diploma in Recreation; B.A. in Special Needs Education	B.A. French Diploma in Education	B.A. Honours Certificate in Education	Honours B.A. Diploma in Education	Honours B.A. Diploma in Education	B. SC M. Sc. Certificate in Adult Education
Courses in Antiracist, Multicultural/ Indigenous Education	Workshops: Multiculturalism; U.N. Declaration of Human Rights	University Distance courses	University Distance course	None	Minorities in Canadian Literature; Native History; History of Blacks in the US.	None	None
Employment Experience as a teacher, prior to arrival in the community	None	None (Recreation Technician)	1 year	1 year (1 non-official year)	None	None (Teaching Assistant for 1 year)	None
Circumstances leading to Employment	Student teaching experience in the community	Heard of the job through a connection in the community	Compulsory transfer	Previous experience: northern Cree community	First interview for a job; offer made and accepted	Seeking experience in the north	Part-time supply work in the school
Number of Years at work in School	2	6	7	4	2	7	18

I arrived in the very same setting in which these women found themselves and have worked side by side with six of them. Additionally, I have continued to work as a fly-in pedagogical consultant since my departure, therefore I have worked with the seventh participant, as well. These women are friends and colleagues; we have shared significant moments in each other's lives: the births of our children and the deaths of students or family members. We have witnessed marriages, and shared personal triumphs and losses. To differing degrees we have also shared the ordinary moments: stories, meals, rides, and laughter. While I see most of the women quite infrequently, and while our contacts may be limited to yearly messages passed through a common acquaintance, we have a shared history, which in all but one case, goes back to when we met up north. While I self-consciously take the stance of researcher, my own story intersects over and over with their stories. This is most notable in the case of my relationship with one of the women, who is described below.

Guinevere arrived in the northern community nine years after I did. We ended up in there for different reasons, yet our paths had intersected repeated always through some sort of educational context. She and I were raised in the same suburb of Montreal. I taught her Sunday school when I was sixteen; her father, who was the superintendent of that same school, wrote a letter of reference for me when I sought entry to a university teacher-training program. Several

years later, when I was a teacher-in-training, she was the ten year old who participated in my Piaget-inspired experiments. She and I did not see each other after that, yet our families continued to run into each other in the community, so they kept each other posted on family details. As a result, she knew where I was, and when the opportunity came for her to have a remote teacher training experience, which was by chance in the community in which I worked, she mentioned my name to the school board's Director of Instructional Services, thinking that a contact might facilitate her selection. This is an element of the story that I discovered while interviewing her. Currently, she is teaching at a location to which I have recently begun to travel since her school is involved in a Ministry of Education project on which I work.

The intersections in the lives of participants and a researcher present challenges for that researcher. While partiality and implication are inherent to a qualitative approach, I must account for the interpretive resources I bring to bear in arriving at the interpretations. Significantly, in choosing to make claims for the value of using a psychoanalytic lens in the research, I must also underline the impossibility of being fully intentional in how I read, interpret and construct the story. Clough writes, "[N]o subject, male or female, could be author, fully self-identified, fully aware or self-consciously intending what she writes" (1998, p. xvii). Given this concept, this text must to be viewed as a construction that needs to be constantly interrogated. How do my own conscious and

unconscious desire shape what it is that I claim needs to be said in these pages?

Robertson (1994, 2004) and Bloom (1998) demonstrate that it is possible for the researcher to make claims when interpretation is the result of “an intersubjective relationship between women” (Bloom, 1998, p. 149). However, in order to ensure that the distinct voices of the women are heard, I have quoted at length from the data sources. This assures that the pertinent passages remain contextualized. Further, I have engaged in an interrogation of my own investments and identifications. Thus, this research has incorporated theory-driven reflection throughout the process of structuring, engaging in, and in portraying the outcomes. This includes critical self-reflection, which, must, as Bloom (1998) maintains, be more than statements about positions I believe myself to hold.

I seek to do more, however, than treat my investments and history as potential liabilities in the research process. Following Burman (2001) my history and experience is understood to strengthen the claims of value of the research, through a focus on, (rather than a confession of) experience and investment. The role of white woman teachers in this specific community is one in which I have both experience and investment. It is these facets of my history that have shaped my interest in antiracist theory and politics; my experience and investments led me back to university, more than once. It is these facets of my life that have

played a role in shaping my interest in broadening the discussion around training teachers for work in non-dominant settings. My experience and investment are aspects of this research project from which I am unable to extricate myself. However, I have no desire to do so, because I am taking the stance regarding knowledge and the self, about which Richardson has written. “Knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledges” (Richardson, 2000, p. 929).

Research Design

As mentioned previously, the research design is composed of three phases. The first phase hinged on the notion that the film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, can be used as a provocateur that will, “bring objects of the unconscious into research in a way that could more systematically ascertain, through dialogue and analysis, their possible meanings and effects for pedagogy” (Robertson, 2004, p. 80). Thus, in the first phase of the data collection, participants were brought together for two days. During that time, they participated in approximately ten hours of research related activities. The women viewed the film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, together, and were asked to take note of any deeply felt moments they experienced. They were asked to take note of the event, character, or other dimension of the film that would help them later as they referred back to their notes during the journal-writing step of the research [Appendix IV]. Following the viewing, participants were required to reflect

individually and prepare a two-page (300 – 500 word) journal entry. They were asked to respond the following question: In what ways (if any) does *Rabbit Proof Fence* raise issues for you about your experience of teaching in an isolated Indigenous school? [Appendix V] They were asked to use the deeply felt moments they noted, as points on which to reflect.

Participants completed their journal writing individually, following completion of the film, in a location that suited them. The following day, participants brought their journal entries to a two-hour long group discussion where they exchanged information about the deeply felt moments they had experienced while viewing the film. [Appendix VI] They also discussed the content of the entries they had written. This concluded the first phase of the research.

In the second phase, the participants had three months to submit a monologue they had written. They were given the following instructions: “You are asked to write a 250 – 400 word monologue that either captures a significant moment of having taught in an isolated indigenous community, or that expresses what you feel is the most significant aspect of the experience”. The women received a description of dramatic and interior monologues and were offered information on pre-writing techniques, if desired. [Appendix VII] None of the women asked for further instructions. The monologues were submitted electronically, by mail, or were hand delivered.

In the third phase, the women were interviewed individually about the decision making process they had gone through to arrive at their finished monologue. The women's perceptions of the research process were also explored in the interview, along with requests for clarification of points they raised in their journals, in the group discussion, or in their monologues [Appendix VIII]. The interviews were conducted in person where possible, and over the phone when a face to face interview was not possible. Three of the seven participants were interviewed in person. The phone interviews were scheduled according to the women's availability; the face-to-face interviews were conducted in a location of the participant's choice.

During the research, instructions were available in French for the participants for whom French was a first language. A translator completed the translation of the instructions into French. All of the interviews, but one, were conducted in English. The remaining interview was conducted bilingually, with both with the participant and I speaking in English and French as we are both bilingual. One of the participants submitted the monologue in French. A second translator translated this text.

The journal entries and the video and audiotapes of the group discussion (phase one) of the research were transcribed. Monologues that were submitted in electronic format (phase two) did not require transcription; those that were typed or handwritten were transcribed.

The audiotapes of the individual interviews were transcribed as well. It took an average of one hour to transcribe each ten-minute segment of audio taped talk.¹⁴

There are approximately 300 pages of single spaced typed material from the four above-mentioned data sources. There are two additional sources: the questionnaire which each participant completed before participant selection took place, and a researcher journal that was used throughout the research process.

My original intention was to do the coding and organization of the data manually, in conjunction with the analysis. I began the process of creating files to manage the work with the data. For example, the transcriptions of the individual interviews were printed onto coloured paper, with participants being assigned a specific colour on which their individual interview would be printed. After discussion with colleagues, and studying methodologies that compared the manual and electronic coding processes (Basil, 2003), I decided to make use of a software program to facilitate the coding. QSR's Nvivo was the program that I chose to use for data organization.

All of the transcribed texts were saved as Nvivo documents in a file created for the research project. I was then able to review individual texts and attach key words to segments using a coding tool. The coding tool contained key words and phrases that arose from the literature and from my ongoing reflection. The program facilitated the search and retrieval

processes, allowing me, for example, to print reports in which relevant segments of data were compiled for my inspection and analysis. The specific location of each segment of text segment that is retrieved is indicated on the reports. I worked with both the texts on the computer screen, and the printed copies of the same texts, onto which I made notes. The data analysis remained a “dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing” (Basit, 2003, p. 143) that was simply facilitated by computer-assisted storage, coding, searching and retrieval.

I have taken the following steps to represent the women’s spoken and written language in this thesis. After a specific passage I have indicated, in parentheses, the initial of the pseudonym of the speaker/writer. A letter indicating the source of the transcribed text follows the initial: J (journal), G (group discussion), M (monologue), and I (interview). The number of the paragraph in which the participant’s words appear in the text follows the initial and the letter. The paragraphs were automatically numbered as part of process of saving them as documents in Nvivo. In order to locate a specific passage in the data, I have used the system in the following way: (ZJ 21-22) would indicate that the excerpt would be found in Zoë’s journal in paragraph 21 and 22.

The women’s utterances are reproduced as spoken, with pauses, repetitions, incomplete words and/or phrases. Punctuation, typically in the form of commas, has been added to facilitate the reading. Pauses are

indicated using a long hyphen: – . Vocal emphasis or other defining characteristics have been indicated in parentheses after the words that were uttered differently. In some cases, vocal emphasis was indicated using parentheses before the word, as follows, (emphatic:). The utterances have not been revised in any other way. Similarly, the written entries appear as submitted, with errors noted through the use of “sic”. If, in quoting, parts of an utterance of transcribed text were omitted, the omission is indicated with the use of an ellipsis. Throughout the thesis the name of the town has been replaced with the fictional name Ridgeville and the name of the reserve has been replaced with the fictional name Broad Lake Reserve.

Interpretive Approach and Analysis

The data was collected in three distinct stages over a period of four months, so the interpretive approaches I used were influenced by the type of data with which I was working and the context in which the data had been collected. The techniques I employed to interpret and analyze the data were influenced by the approaches to textual analysis used by Billig (2001), Bloom (1998), Hollway (1989) and Robertson (1994, 2004). For example, immediately following the phase of the research connected with the viewing of the film, I worked with the women’s journals and the transcription of the group interview. I noted the frequency of participant’s reference to particular scenes, shots, ideas or characters in the film

(Robertson, 2004). At this stage, I also identified phrases that are specific to more than one participant, and explored the meaning accorded to a phrase by the women (Hollway, 1989). This was an approach that I repeated when working with the women's monologues and their individual interviews.

It was important to read the participants' monologues as carefully constructed narratives. I therefore read them repeated as whole texts in order to identify the intentionally chosen themes, before doing a line-by-line analysis. And while I worked with each type of data separately, I also read each woman's journal, monologue and individual interview together, in order to grasp the women's self-representations as a whole. Thus, I looked for recurrent issues in each type of data, as well in the collection of each woman's self-representations.

When working with the collection of data attributed to each individual, I identified conflicting or contradictory ways the participant represented meaning (Bloom, 1998; Hollway, 1989). I also looked for frequency of figures in language and tone (Robertson, 1994; Hunt, 1989). In the transcription of the group session, and in individual interviews, I looked for the repetition of rhetorical forms (Billig, 2001), most specifically the use of a "topic shift", that is, a subtle change of topic.

Throughout the transcription and coding process, I entered hunches and questions into my researcher journal. Provisional categories were made and revised through an ongoing process of movement back

and forward through the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse & Richard, 2002).

Following Richardson (2000), I employed writing as a significant part of the analytical process. She distinguishes between occasions when writing is understood to be a transparent activity of reporting information, and when writing is employed as a method of inquiry. Much exploration was carried out in process of writing. I approached the task with the belief that through writing we “can investigate how we construct our world, ourselves, and others” (2000, p. 924). This was essential given my own investments. So, on the one hand, my researcher journal is filled with what appear to be hastily scribbled notes to myself, lists, questions, short entries, diagrams and other graphic displays of what I was trying to understand. Exploratory writing was born in the space between the journal and the thesis. These exploratory texts often incorporated my impressions of seemingly unrelated events that made up my day. In these texts, however, I could feel the restructuring of thoughts and the discovery of new connections and new paths for reflection.

In the chapter that follows there is an exploration of the terrain in which this journey began. While white women are at the center of the research, it was the possibility of teaching Naskapi students that drew these women to the community. Thus, to understand the construction of these women teachers’ identity in this context, it is important to

understand the contours of the history of the people with whom they worked.

CHAPTER 3

The Contours of a Relationship: The Naskapi People

Arctic Flight

January limped in like an old crone:
haggard snow, a weak pulse
of sky through skinny trees.

All last fall, the graveyard leached
into the water table. Leaves wallowed
in their own waste. Soon,
even the birds were spent.

I myself flew
into exile –

way north of the trees
with a knapsack, and a bottle of brandy
buried in my eiderdown coat

stared from the small plane
as my fissured, brown
liver-spotted town
vaporized in the dark air

and when I woke, the world had accumulated again
outside my window

the strapping, white, freshness of it
shoveling life
back into my eyes.

Carolyn Marie Souaid

North - *way north*. The words conjure a vast, monolithic, somewhat frozen, unitary expanse. It is, however, rich in geographic and ecological diversity. It is also home to many of the First Nations. *The First Nations* – It is another ‘title’ that masks the diversity of the distinct

communities, languages and histories that have been shaped in relation to “The North”.

This research focuses on the self-representations of white women teachers, who have worked in one, specific isolated Indigenous school located on a reserve in Northern Canada. The reserve is home to members of the Naskapi Nation. While the reserve will not be named, an introduction to events in the history of these Indigenous people is essential to the reader. Keep in mind, however, that histories are somewhat suspect “narratives that people construct in order to make meaning of the past” (Stanley, 1998, p. 41). This history is a construction made possible because of the existence of other texts, written about Naskapi people and their movements in the last two centuries. The voices of Naskapi people are notably absent from these writings.

While oral traditions continue to be part of the lives of Naskapi community members, recounting the past to non-Naskapi transients who arrive in their midst is uncommon. Similarly, a history lesson is not part of the initiation of people new to the community. Thus teachers, like the women who participated in this research, may work on the reserve without any knowledge of the conditions through which the Naskapi people came to live on a reserve in this particular location.

Contours of a Community

The Naskapi, it is written, are among the “least known, least assimilated, and least anthropologized Natives in North America” (Millman, 1993). Anthropologist Frank Speck, who was one of the few who studied the Naskapi for many years in the 1910s and 1920s, lamented that at the time there was only one published ethnology of the region (Speck, 1977). Little more has been published since Speck’s contribution, *Naskapi: The Savage(sic) Hunters of the Labrador Peninsula*.

What is known about the past of the Naskapi can be pieced together from the accounts of Speck (1977), from the journals of anthropologist Duncan Strong, (Leacock & Rothschild, 1994), and from the records of the Hudson’s Bay Company. The few sources that are available tell us that the Naskapi are part of an Indigenous population that include the Cree and Montagnais; they followed the caribou herds throughout a huge northern territory that ranged from Hudson’s Bay in the west, to the Labrador coast in the east, and as far north as Ungava Bay. They did so until well into the twentieth century. These Indigenous people formed “loose local bands more or less held together by kinship and possession of common hunting grounds” (Leacock and Rothschild, 1994, p. 4). As well as sharing overlapping territories, the Cree, Montagnais and Naskapi all spoke dialects of Algonquian (MacKenzie & Jancewicz, 1994).

It is possible that few people ventured into the territory of the Naskapi because of the environment in which they lived, the heart of which is known as the barren grounds. This land is described by non-Indigenous travelers who passed through it in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as poor, rugged, miserable, dreary, lifeless, cruel and desolate (Leacock and Rothschild, 1994, pp. xxii - xxiv). As for the Indigenous people who occupied such a landscape, they are referred to by Speck as crude, savage and simple; they are also described as degraded, indolent, thieving and malicious, according to early traders in the area (Speck, 1977; Cooke, 1976). These descriptions are woven through representational discourses that construct the Naskapi as primitive and uncivilized in contrast to the civilized Europeans.

While trading enterprises such as the Hudson's Bay Company had been establishing posts in the Canadian wilderness as early as the seventeenth century, the Hudson's Bay Company did not turn their attention to the territory of these Indigenous people until the nineteenth century. It was in the 1830s that posts were established in Ungava Bay and on the Labrador coast. When the Hudson's Bay Company opened the posts, the Naskapi incorporated the trapping of small fur bearing animals into their traditional hunting practices. The furs were exchanged for European goods (Henrikson, 1974; Leacock & Rothschild, 1994). Details about the relationship between the traders and the Naskapi can be found in the Hudson's Bay Record Society's 1963 text entitled

Northern Quebec and Labrador Journals and Correspondence. In the introduction, Williams describes the relationship between the Indigenous people of the area and the traders. He writes,

Like most other company traders who came into contact with the interior Indians, Finlayson (the first manager of the Fort Chimo post, author's note) showed little real understanding of the relationship between the yearly routine of the Naskapi and the implacable environment in which they struggled to keep alive. His normal reaction was irritation at their unwillingness to make an abrupt change in their way of life to suit European trade requirements. However, he was unable to deal with them as sharply as he wished, because he was dependent on them for fresh meat (Williams, 1963, p. LXVI). (Henrikson, 1974, p. 12)

Despite the arrival of the traders, Henrikson writes that the Naskapi retained a certain amount of independence, continuing their semi-nomadic existence hunting the caribou (1974). Despite brief contacts, a relationship of mistrust was built. Davies demonstrates this with an excerpt from the 1833 journal of Erlandson, who was responsible for one of the posts, located in north central Quebec. Erlandson writes,

It was by great persuasion and extraordinary encouragement I induced them to look after martens in the early part of winter. Subsequently some of them were starving, which they blamed me for, saying that I enticed them to hunt furs when they could have killed abundance of deer; they then came to me not only expecting, but demanding, food which I was unable to supply them. Now, said they, we hunted skins for you, we are hungry and you have nothing to give us, do you expect that we will again hunt for you? There are beaver up this river and a few also up the Natchecagamy River, but they will not kill them unless I reckon each large skin as two skins; but the truth is they are too indolent" (Davies, 1963, p. 221 – 222, cited in Henrikson, 1974, p. 12)

Erlandson was not alone in viewing the Naskapi's unwillingness to render the desired services as indolence. Another trader referred to them

as “lethargic”. Still another wrote, “Nothing but necessity or extreme want will ever produce a spirit of exertion, in such Indians as these” (Williams, 1963, XXXVII, cited in Henrikson, 1974, p. 11). In 1838, trader John McLean wrote in his journal about the independence of the Naskapi, which he claimed,

prevents the Gentlemen in this quarter from introducing regulations, that might tend to make them more industrious, a result which it is now sufficiently well known kind treatment alone can never produce. Fear and a thorough conviction of their dependence upon us, in conjunction with kind treatment judiciously applied might have some effect in producing a change for the better. (Cooke, 1976, p.13)

McConaghy writes that, “representations of Indigenous people are instrumental in the exercise of colonial authority” (1998, p. 2), and this is what is exemplified in some of the writing from which I constructed this ‘history’. Central to these descriptions of Naskapi people drawn from Speck, Strong and the Hudson’s Bay Company texts, is the construction of the Naskapi as “objects of knowledge” and also, as “others”. The first is a phenomenon about which Attwood (1992) writes, “Colonialism provided anthropology with its subject matter – ‘primitive’ societies – and its asymmetric relationships of power – between the observing subject and the observed object” (p. vi).

Through Speck and Strong’s accounts, and more significantly through the Hudson’s Bay Company journals, it is possible to identify the way in which the Naskapi were constructed as “others”, in contrast to the non-Indigenous observers and writers. They were constructed as

primitive and uncivilized in contrast to the civilized Europeans. To Speck, Strong, and the traders, the Naskapi people were a unified and homogenous “other”. It is through the authoritative action of *naming* and *knowing* these Indigenous people that we witness the trader’s undeniable desire to dominate (Smith, 1999). Such were the contours of the first contact.

While European goods simplified the hunting process, the measures used to “manage” the Naskapi resulted in a relationship that privileged the traders while endangering the Naskapi. In the words of Finlayson, “They must be sharply dealt with before they are properly domesticated” (1832, cited in Cooke, 1976, p. 13). At one point the manager of one of the posts distributed bullets to the Naskapi in restricted numbers, making it difficult for them to take lengthy trips away from the post. With little ammunition they were unable to travel out to the barrens to hunt the caribou, and stayed instead in the wooded valleys in the hopes of finding fur-bearing animals; significant starvation and death occurred. Thus, as Cooke (1976) demonstrates, over the course of a six-year period, the Hudson’s Bay Company employees were directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of 110 Naskapi of a group of 276.

Between 1830 and 1956, the Naskapi shifted their patterns of movement to correspond to the interests of the Hudson’s Bay Company, which opened, closed and reopened the three trading posts to which the

Naskapi brought furs. This was, as Wilkinson and Geoffroy (1989) write, “purely for its own commercial purposes and without any concern as to whether the areas where these posts were situated offered the Naskapis the possibility of harvesting the fish and game that they required for food” (p. 26).

The Hudson’s Bay Company also had an indirect impact on the Naskapi’s spiritual traditions, as a result of the company’s practice of inviting Anglican missionaries to their posts. The efforts of the clergy focused on forming new Christian communities in the isolated territories, where they believed no spiritual practices could be found. The Naskapi, however, were deeply spiritual (Speck, 1977). One by-product of the work of the clergy was that the Naskapi learned to write their language using syllabics, which had been used to write the religious texts brought to the posts ¹⁵.

In the early twentieth century, the Naskapi began a period of closer, sustained contact with the trading posts as the migration route of the caribou herd they followed had changed significantly (Strong, 1928). Their dependence had grown. At this point the Naskapi split into two groups: one group of Naskapi, who now refer to themselves as Innu, headed for the Labrador coast (Byrne & Fouillard, 2000); the other group headed north. This is the group whose current community is the context with which this research intersects.

The Community in Context

Despite being among the first Indigenous groups in Canada to successfully remove themselves from the Indian Act through the Cree-Naskapi Act of 1984, and thus obtain self-government (Loon, 1991), their story has not received much public attention. Their population currently numbers approximately 700, most of who live on one isolated northern reserve which is accessible only by rail or air. In contrast, the Cree of the James Bay area and the Montagnais-Innu of the north shore of the St. Lawrence and Labrador coast, who both number approximately 13,000, inhabit networks of communities with common political, social and educational agendas. Roads have begun to stretch up the coast and into the northwestern limits of the province, linking many of the Cree and Montagnais-Innu communities with urban centers and a range of resources. The Naskapi continue, however, to live in isolation, and as Wilkinson & Geoffroy (1989) note, “They perceive themselves as being poorly educated and less naturally gifted than other Natives, particularly the Crees, the Inuit, and the Montagnais, and also non-Natives” (p. 93).

The events leading up to the move that took the Naskapi to their current home deserve a look as they created the context in which the formal education of this Indigenous group unfolded. Following the split of the Naskapi into two, the group on which I am focusing continued a semi-nomadic existence spending much of their time in close proximity to the two Hudson’s Bay Posts that remained open. By the time one of

the two posts closed in 1948, many Naskapi were suffering from hunger and tuberculosis. They headed to Fort Chimo where the most seriously ill were forcibly removed, and taken for hospitalization in the south (Cooke, 1976).

Over the next five years the government attempted to assist the Naskapi to relocate inland to resume hunting and fishing. This proved to be too costly, so in 1956, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) arranged to move the Naskapi south to a point that would be less expensive to supply. The government agents determined the location would be a mining community in that was under construction at the time. Cooke (1976) suggests that the Naskapi had little input into the location to which they were moved.

The mining company in question was not prepared for the arrival of the Naskapi. The 280 Indigenous people were given makeshift housing four kilometers from the town, on a small tract of land squeezed between a mining exploration road and a lake. There was no running water nor sewers, and the promised educational and health facilities were not in place (Cooke, 1976). The Naskapi were ignored and invisible, as Attwood's (1992) would say. This is evident in the mining company's official history of the town (Geren and McColloch, 1990) in which the Naskapi and Montagnais merit one short paragraph in a text of 350 pages.

First Formal Schooling

Soon after the Naskapi arrived in the area, an Anglican priest moved to the community. He was the first to teach the young people English, and by the early 1960s some students were being sent to a residential school over 1000 km away. Around this time the first Naskapi began to attend school in the mining town (Wilkinson and Geoffroy, 1989).

These are the conditions under which the Naskapi lived, until 1968, when a fully serviced reserve was built one kilometer from the mining town to accommodate the Naskapi and some Montagnais who has also settled in the area. By the end of the decade, most of the young Naskapi people were attending the local English school that had been built to accommodate the non-Indigenous children of the mine employees. Students were segregated, with the non-Indigenous students placed in what were described as “town classes” in contrast to the “Naskapi classes”. Overall, formal education was introduced under conditions that placed the Naskapi people’s language, culture and personal needs beneath those of the non-Naskapi community (Wilkinson & Geoffroy, 1989).

This was the context in which I taught at the beginning of the 1980s. In those first years, I observed that Naskapi students who were successful in the first two years of secondary school (Grade 7 and 8) were often sent out for vocational training in a regional school southeast of

Montreal. Further, the students who were perceived to be exceptional were permitted to be in the “town” classes.

Segregated classes persisted until after the mine was closed in 1982; at this point, with a mass exodus of non-Indigenous families, classes were desegregated and the Naskapi student population became the majority. The school, which was administered by a school board located one thousand kilometers away in a major urban center, continued to use the provincial curriculum and instruction was delivered in English¹⁶ from preschool to Secondary V (Grade 11). Wilkinson and Geoffroy write that in 1978 one Naskapi person had earned a high school diploma, and “the majority of the Naskapis had not proceeded beyond the middle grades of high school” (1989, p. 82). In 1986, the number of high school graduates had risen to eight, out of a total of 169 Naskapi, who by that time would have had access to secondary schooling.

In 1978, the Naskapi signed the *Northeastern Quebec Agreement* (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1978), through which they relinquished ancestral rights to the territory, in favour of a multimillion-dollar financial settlement. This led to the creation of a new reserve in the early 1980s where a school was opened in 1985. Wilkinson and Geoffroy (1989) write that the opening of the school led the Naskapi to have a “significantly greater degree of control over their education” (p.86). The staff, however, simply moved from the school in Ridgville to the

newly constructed building; the southern school board continued to provide administration of the school.

Chapter 11 of *Northeastern Quebec Agreement* describes provisions for education. While the agreement gives the Naskapi the right to initiate program, textbook and material development, to introduce new content, and to determine the use of standardized testing, any decision making is subject to the approval of the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, and only after the Naskapi have consulted with the board that administers the school. This is another feature of the agreement. The administration of the Naskapi school is to be carried out by a provincial school board; further, the government may, "at any time...designate another school board to assume...the responsibilities assigned...to the Regional School Board" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1978, p. 11-2).

Within the community, "the everyday lived reality of the school...is a landscape for the playing out of contemporary discourses and relations of power" (McConaghy, 1998b, p. 121). Over the course of the sixteen years that I lived in the north and worked in the Naskapi community, I observed, endorsed or struggled with the discourses of pastoral welfarism, cultural relativism and radicalism. Each member of the school community engages daily in the negotiation of power relations through the use of curriculum, pedagogical choices, classroom organization and management, participation in decision-making and relations with others. The competing discourses of Indigenous education inform each of these

points of negotiation. The Naskapi school, therefore, is potentially “a site for the production and reproduction of the inequities, violences and oppressions that are the products of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism” (McConaghy, 1998, p. 121).

Currently, the discourse of cultural relativism is likely to be heard in the school in discussions around curriculum and pedagogy; this is most obvious in the use of Naskapi as the language of instruction in the first four years of schooling. Yet, the formations of colonialism are fluid, as McConaghy writes (1998b), so, for example, while there are growing numbers of trained Naskapi teachers, they may sit silently through staff meetings, while the non-Indigenous transient teachers voice their views and influence policy.

In the chapter that follows, you will hear the voices of seven of the white women who have taught in the above school. At least one of the participants was working in the school in each of the nineteen years since it first opened. For the period from 1989 to the present, at least two of the participants and up to four were at work in the school at the same time. Thus, they all came to the research with some history of shared experiences.

CHAPTER 4

The First Phase of the Research:

Text Acts & Speech Events Set in Motion

Felman (1985) writes that the questions we need to ask about a text are not what it is, or signifies, “but what it does – what are the textual acts and speech events it activates and sets in motion” (p. 31-32). The initial event of the first phase of the research, the viewing of *Rabbit Proof Fence*, set in motion “text acts and speech events”. And while transcriptions of the journals and group discussion are the data with which I worked, I feel it is essential to take a close look at the context in which the women watched the film, and the way in which they worked with it.

The Context for Phase One: “A Reunion of Sorts”

“Dear Avril,
I don’t think we thanked you enough for giving us the chance to come to Quebec to see you all this fall. It was such a gorgeous weekend – perfect circumstances for a reunion of sorts with old Ridgeville friends. The children had a marvelous time as well. It had been years since we have had the opportunity to stay in a hotel and we felt very spoiled. Thank you for all the meals you provided for us – just like the old dinner party events at the Willett residence in Ridgeville” (L. Note accompanying the monologue).

Bringing seven participants together on Thanksgiving weekend from Nunavut, New Brunswick, Northern Quebec, Ontario and Western Quebec raised certain issues. I did not decide on the location for the first

phase of the research until I had confirmed who the participants would be. There were other possible locations that would have better suited women coming from other corners of the country. Once I had determined who would participate, however, my own city, Quebec City, seemed to be a realistic choice.

My original intention was to gather the women together for the entire weekend in one site, for example, a large rental property at the foot of a ski hill, or a large cabin in a resort area. I imagined using some of the money I had budgeted to treat them to massages, or to another spa treatment. Things unfolded differently, however. The fact that it was a holiday weekend meant that several of the women did not want to leave families behind at home. Some of the women, who had not seen former colleagues for a while, were anxious to become reacquainted with old friends, and this included spouses and children. The seven women were, it turned out, traveling with ten family members. The plans, therefore, had to change, and as a result the gathering began to take on a reunion-like organizational structure, with large shared meals, and recreational options suggested for the people accompanying the participants. The women and their families were lodged in a hotel with a swimming pool for the children, for example. Financially, it made sense that the meals were provided at my home, and so my own family participated to some degree in the preparation and serving of three dinners, one breakfast, one lunch and one brunch for the participants and their family members. It was, as

the participant's letter implied, like old times; sharing meals had been an integral part of northern life, and my family had often hosted large dinner parties. All the participants had been dinner guests in our former, northern home, at some time in the past.

The weekend seemed to be as much a reunion as a research event for some of the women. Most arrived in the city throughout the evening on Friday. They either dropped into my house for supper, or went straight to the hotel, where some connected immediately with other participants. Breakfast was served to everyone at my home on Saturday morning, before the research events took place. I wanted to ensure that the women had a chance to become reacquainted before viewing the film.

The participants traveled together to a nearby Adult Education Center, where they watched the film in a classroom that was located in a newly constructed wing of the building. The room was well lit; tables were set up in a horseshoe formation, with one or two participants seated on upholstered chairs positioned at each table. The participants viewed the DVD format of the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* on a large screen, stereo television.

Semiotic Provocateur

Rabbit Proof Fence is a ninety-five minute Australian feature film that premiered in January 2002, and was released in DVD format in April 2003. The film, directed by Philip Noyce, is based on the published

memoirs of a woman whose mother was one of many “mixed race” children removed from their Aboriginal mothers in the first half of the last century in Australia. *Rabbit Proof Fence* depicts how government policy served the colonial drive in Australia, and demonstrates the role of educational structures in the implementation of policy. It also highlights the impact of the removal policy on women, as well as women’s role in implementation of the policy.

The removal of the children was part of a social-engineering project carried out by A. O. Neville, who was the long serving, Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Western Australia. Robert Manne, historian and author of *In Denial: The Stolen Generations*, explains,

Neville was not only the most enthusiastic practitioner of “half-caste” child removal in interwar Australia. He was also one of the most influential advocates of the policy popularly known as “breeding out the colour”. If it was believed, as it was by Neville, that tribal or “full blood” Aborigines would not survive, then a scientific program for the racial extinction of the “half-castes” represented a policy for the elimination of the Aborigine. This Neville understood. In April 1937, at the first conference of Aboriginal administrators, Neville posed the following question: “Are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there were any Aborigines in Australia?” At this conference Neville’s absorption policy was accepted as a national goal. (Manne, 2002, February 23, n.p.)

The film focuses on the experience of three young girls who are taken to Moore River Settlement, where the mixed race children are to be prepared to work as manual labourers or domestic servants. The three girls, between the ages of eight and fourteen, escape and make the 2400

kilometer trip home, on foot, while being pursued by an Aboriginal tracker and the police.

Rabbit Proof Fence was chosen for the research for two reasons. On the one hand, many parallels exist between Australian policy on Aboriginal persons in the twentieth century and Canadian policy on Indigenous persons in Canada. Both countries removed children from their families and communities; both involved religious orders in the education of the children who were removed; and the competing discourses around Aboriginal education in Australia are mirrored by the discourses around Indigenous education in Canada. Further, like Australia, Canada engaged in eugenicist practices (McLaren, 1990).

More importantly, however, is the notion that the use of the medium of film allows a researcher to investigate participants' language and identificatory or fantasy processes. Robertson explored this possibility in research and developed an approach she refers to as screenplay (1994) and screenplay pedagogy (2004). Understanding the film as text, and understanding the viewing process as an act of reading, screenplay pedagogy employs a psychoanalytic understanding of the reading process, which maintains that texts speak to us beyond the level of the narrative structures (Felman, 1985). A psychoanalytic approach to reading challenges the notion that readers are simply engaged in a process of consumption or reception of texts (Bennett, cited in Robertson, 1994). Such an approach attends to the psychological uses

that readers make of a text (or cinematic text) by exploring the implications of reader identifications, and the role of conscious and unconscious desire in the process.

As Robertson explains, old emotional patterns are unconsciously activated during viewing, as viewers read scenes, shots, ideas, characters, and so on. The process that occurs, transference, takes place when “unconscious impulses or needs that are not remembered” (Robertson, 2004, p. 91) are activated, and subsequently influence the meaning that is being made by an individual. Screenplay pedagogy requires viewers to focus on the deeply felt emotional or somatic moments that are experienced while watching a film. It is understood that the deeply felt moments signal that the activation of unconscious dynamics is taking place, and therefore, that these dynamics are influencing the meaning that an individual makes. This notion is important to a researcher exploring identity formation because it makes it possible to bring the unconscious into research through an exploration of the language that the viewers use.

Rabbit Proof Fence: The Cinematic Representation

The film begins with an image of the unimaginably vast Australian outback, where the focus gradually narrows to allow the viewer to be introduced to the three girls in the environment that, while isolated and harsh, is one to which they are comfortably accustomed. They are soon ripped from the community and are transported, caged, in a train to the

Moore River Settlement where they are not permitted to speak their language. They escape, taking advantage of the cover of rain, and begin their journey back to the settlement of Jigalong, which is their home. To find their way, they rely on skills learned in the environment in which they were raised. When they find one of the fences erected to prevent animal movement across the continent, a rabbit proof fence, they realize they can follow the fence home, since it runs through their community.

As the voyage unfolds, the viewer learns about the policy that resulted in the girls' removal. This aspect of the story is shown through the introduction of A. O. Neville, who held the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia from 1915 to 1940. Viewers learn of the removal policy and its aims and see the lengths to which Neville went, to ensure that the girls were captured and returned to the settlement.

The film depicts how two of the three children made the entire journey, but the third was captured. Viewers learn in the epilogue that all the girls were eventually returned to the Moore River Settlement, with one escaping a second time. Sadly, with the second escape, one of the girls was separated from one of her own children, who she never again saw.

The Trouble Around Deeply Felt Moments

The research participants were provided with notebooks and pens and were instructed to track the points at which they experienced deeply

felt emotional or somatic moments, by taking note of the scenes, shots, characters, and so on, with which they linked the deeply felt moment. The instructions were handed out on a sheet before the film was played. The women were required to attempt in their journal afterward to link the deeply felt moments to their experience of teaching in the isolated northern community. Thus, following Robertson (1994, 2004), I asked the women to attempt to explore the meaning they made of an element of the film, rendered significant because of its association with a deeply felt moment; I then asked the women to connect the meaning they made to their isolated, northern teaching experience. Through this process, the role of unconscious dynamics in meaning making is made evident to the women. Their reflections on the meaning they have made are then used to help them make sense of their teaching experience.

As one woman suggested, the process of connecting deeply felt moments to her experience rendered unexpected results. She said, “It felt a little inauthentic, at the beginning, because I was forcing these connections that I don’t think I would have made, had I just been watching the movie, because I don’t go around thinking about the Ridgeville years, all the time. Um, but (emphatic), at the same time, at the end, I think I’ve, I kind of resolved, sort of, um, you know, -- maybe, maybe some negative feelings that were left over from that. And I kind of, (gesture of pushing away), ‘Oh (emphatic), that’s what it was’ ” (GG 671).

The participant's concluding words, "Oh (emphatic), that's what it was," demonstrate the way in which the process of identifying unconscious dynamics at work and then attempting to establish connections to other "meanings" made allows a person to understand her experience in a new way, and gives her insight into how she makes meaning.

In psychoanalytic terms, in viewing the film, the participant is using it to explore, engage with, and digest issues around power and desire. Viewing the film has set in motion "the performance of a compulsive, unconscious repetition of an archaic emotional pattern" (Robertson, 1994, p. 161). The archaic emotional pattern influences the broad strokes of the way we understand events and ideas in our lives. It is like an invisible thread that we unconsciously use to stitch together our personal stories – lived daily – into the narrative of our life.

Of the seven women, no one openly questioned the notion of recording deeply felt moments. One woman, however, reacted openly and strongly about what might trigger a deeply felt moment. Her concern was that viewers would respond to elements that have been strategically chosen by the filmmaker or director. Further, she felt it was a problem that elements of the film that moved the narrative along might not be completely accurate. During the group discussion on the following day, she spoke very little. After all the participants had spoken during the first

half of the session, I asked her if she experienced any deeply felt moments. Without answering the question, she responded by saying, “Well I was just wondering how much of this was true. I mean, it’s a nicely written script, and it’s based on a true story, but, you know, you see other movies based on a true story, and you -- what actually happened?... I just felt it was so nicely staged. The bird, the children, their reactions, but it was too nicely staged. All the camera angles were effective but they're just camera angles” (HG 202 - 204).

I pushed on, “So...”

She continued, “And that manipulated us into feeling this way. And you do feel pissed off, and, about the injustice that was done to the girl, but...I mean you know what Neville said, might be true and what happened to the girl was true, but in between, it’s made up....And I was thinking, this is heading for a Walt Disney ending movie. And it was, until the end when they put, you know, Molly’s life was ruined, again, and that sort of made up for it, but in between it was nicely crafted” (HG 206 - 210).

I later discovered that the same participant had opened her journal entry with the comment that she did not have any deeply felt moments. She admitted to feeling angered by Neville and the white women depicted in the story, but refused to characterize the anger she experienced as a deeply felt moment. Possibly, she wanted to remain detached from the emotional impact of the viewing experience, by critiquing the film’s

technical aspects and the filmmaker's hand in the unfolding of the narrative. The epilogue, which moved several of the participants to tears, did not move her, she explained. She claimed, instead, that the ruin of Molly's life makes up for the possibility that the filmmaker would craft a happily-ever-after ending for the story.

Despite her refusal to acknowledge deeply felt moments, the participant filled her journal with more than the required number of words. The same is the case for all the women. I asked for 300 – 500 words, yet the average entry is over 1000 words. Every woman exceeded the requested limit. Even the reluctant participant who began her journal with, "I can't say I had any deeply felt moments as I watched *Rabbit Proof Fence*," had continued on with, "Nor did I feel teary eyed at the end, feeling sorry for poor Molly and the hell her life became because of some misguided Australian bureaucracy. I guess I've heard it too many times, stories like hers, from my parents and their friends who's (sic) lives were ruined by other misguided idiots who caused wars" (HJ 3). Thus, while she claimed to not have experienced deeply felt moments, she juxtaposed the tragic events of the film with tragic events in her parent's life. She has made a direct and powerful, perhaps painful, connection to her parent's lives, with no reference to the impact of those tragic events on her own life. [I return to this in the exploration of her monologue in Chapter 6.]

For other participants, the process of connecting their teaching experience to deeply felt moments proved disconcerting. While the participants volunteered the scene, shot, angle, dialogue or other feature of the film that they had noted, when I asked if anyone would like to describe the connections they had made to their teaching experience, there was collective nervous laughter. After a pause, one of the women said, "I'm just curious, like mine came out really negative, and I'm not sure if that's because I'm still there, and, and living with the experience. Because I don't know if once you're away your memories become, you know, not nicer, but, not tainted, but you sort of highlight the high points and let go of the rest. I don't know. I'm just curious. Cause I came out thinking, 'Oh my god!' I wrote an apology letter to Avril, at the end, because, I thought, this is just so negative" (BG, 349 - 351).

The participant was not alone, as three of the seven women had apologized in writing for the tone or content of the journal entries. As one woman explained, "I reread it last night, and, and sort of wrote a note that said, you know, this journal doesn't, sort of, summarize the experience...there was a lot of really great moments and memories and this movie tapped into some of the hard stuff, you know, and I've moved out, moved on, and left it there" (GG 357 - 359).

She had, in fact, moved out of the community twelve years ago, yet the journal writing had stimulated some observations that raised the question for me, of what it means when an individual claims to have left

the “hard stuff” behind. Near the end of the group discussion, she made an emphatic speech that included the following: “And, while I was writing this, I kind of realized, that, you know, being so young, and having these, you know, this wonderful dream of how life was going to be forever and ever, um. That was not really, it was arrogance, and I was walking into that world, thinking that I was going to become part of it, and, you know, I look back now, and, who the hell did I think I was doing that.... I went in there, faked my way through it, thinking that I had, everything that they needed, where I had nothing. And my job should have been, to, to assist them in going where they wanted to go. I had no business walking in there, saying, this is where you need to go. And, and that was, sort of a, moment (wry laughter) last night” (GG 564). Thus the process of working with deeply felt moments had resulted in speech acts and text events whose force surprised the participants.

The teacher who first questioned whether other participants’ entries were negative agreed with the previous woman, that the film “tapped” into the negative. But how does one “tap” into the negative? I asked for clarification and was told, “It, yeah. I guess I thought, I was thinking in coming, it was like going to be the whole (emphatic) experience. And I, I have had some good moments that came from the most unusual places. But, the, when I started writing, it was like, ‘What the hell am I doing there?’ (laughter) You know, and, and, ahh, I’m never going to make an impact. And maybe the system’s wrong, and maybe the

kids are wrong, and maybe the teachers are wrong, maybe. I don't know what's wrong, but there's something wrong. And, and, so I think the movie taps into, I mean, okay, she gets back, that's great, but then she gets dragged back there. Like it's not a happy ending, it's not a Walt Disney ending, so it doesn't encourage you to tap into the high light, high points of, living up there" (BG 363).

The participant tries to explain why she, and the other participant, have responded as they have. She feels that without a happy, Disney ending, one's response to the film will not tap into the "high lights", "high points" and "good moments". Instead, thinking taps into the negative, she feels. However, unlike a positive response, which she feels would draw you to specific "*points*" or "*moments*", tapping into the negative does not simply result in the inverse: that is, recognition of low "points" or low "moments". Instead, the "negative" is connected to ideas that challenge the participants' perceptions and desire around the entire teaching experience. After viewing the film, and much to the surprise of the two participants quoted below, they reacted with:

- "What the hell am I doing there?"
- "I don't know what's wrong, but there's something wrong."
- "I went in there, faked my way through it, thinking that I had, everything that they needed, where I had nothing"
- "I'm never going to make an impact"

These are not references to low points or low moments but are thoughts that challenge the notion that teachers use their knowledge and skill to intervene effectively in the lives of their students, and in so doing, bring meaning to their own lives.

Clearly, the film has set in motion some difficult thinking, particularly for the participant who is still working in the community. She perceives that there is a serious problem, yet the problem is compounded by her inability to identify its source. Is it the educational system, the students, or is it the teachers? Overall, she wonders if she will make any impact.

For women who have agreed to participate in the research with expectations that it will be a joyful “reunion of sorts”, the reevaluation of the wonderful dreams of fovever and ever, the absence of Disney endings, and the need to question what you are or were “doing there”, are unsettling for them. In coming to the viewing without the benefit of a theory of reading, such as a psychoanalytic theory of reading, to explain a powerful and destabilizing reaction, some of the participants are quite disturbed.

Tracking the Deeply Felt Moments

My first step in exploring the evidence of the unconscious at work in the viewing process was to track the frequency of the events, characters, camera angles and other aspects of the film that the women

associated with deeply felt moments. In their journals, the women each explored between four and five deeply felt moments in relation to their teaching experience in the isolated Indigenous community.

Asking the women to write journals and to discuss them the following day with the group enabled me to take a close look at “the textual acts and speech events it (the film) activates and sets in motion” (Felman, 1985, p. 31-32). By counting the frequency of the facets of the film signaled by the women, I found that there were four aspects about which three or more women wrote:

- the fence
- the character of A. O. Neville
- specific lines spoken by Neville
- the bird

I took the position that the fact that the above facets of the film were signaled repeatedly, by at least three women, gives those aspects a significance that required attention. My initial exploration focused on how the women used the specific elements to make sense of their northern teaching experience. Three major issues or themes arose: perceptions of community divisions and membership, views of the teacher role, and beliefs around potential. I then explored if, and how, these themes arose for *all* the participants, not only those who had signaled the theme through their work with the film.

The more I explored the group's rich work with the themes, the more evident it became that the themes connect in important ways to the construction of the white women teachers' identities. Further, it appeared that the three themes could be directly linked to process of identity formation, as defined by Hollway (1989)¹⁷. The table that follows indicates the links between the three themes and the process of identity formation.

Table Three: Connecting Deeply Felt Moments with Identity Formation

	Deeply Felt Moments		
	The Fence	Neville	The Spirit Bird
Issues/themes arising - initiated by the exploration of deeply felt moments	• Communities • Relationships • Membership • Belonging	• Teacher role, values and beliefs • Curriculum • Teacher actions	• Student Potential • Teacher Potential • Inner and Outer Guidance
Elements related to identity formation that are raised through the women's explorations	Intersubjectivity (relationships, individuals and communities in interactions) Power relations (between individuals and communities)	Competing discourses in education (competing beliefs, values, ways to understand teacher role and curriculum) Power relations (as individuals struggle to position themselves as teachers)	Desire: hopes, expectations, visions, fears (Teacher hopes for themselves and their students, fantasies of what they will be like as teachers, and how they will be viewed as teachers)
	Identity Formation		
Connection to the process of identity formation , informed by (Hollway, 1989)	Identity formation is worked out in the intersubjective space between individuals, as they position themselves through the continuous renegotiation of power relations and the differentiated discourses that are then available to them. The white women teachers bring to the intersubjective space, a dream, a fantasy of who they will be as a teacher.		

As the table on the previous page demonstrates, the three themes were not simply significant elements of the narrative of the film that resonated for the women; the explorations the women made of their experiences extended far beyond the film sequences. The focuses of the women's explorations, clearly evident in the representations of the women, could be directly linked to the process of identity formation. This played a role in my decision to use the themes to structure the thesis.

It was also clear that the themes could be readily explored using the conceptual framework of the study. For example the women's work with the fence could be examined with reference to the notion of culturalism and the two-race binary (McConaghy, 1998a, 2000a) and the phenomenon of "othering" (Attwood, 1992). Equally, the women's work with teacher role could be explored through the notion of how competing discourses operate (Althusser, 1971/2001; Flax, 1990; Foucault, 1997; Haug, 1983; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). Further, teacher role could be understood in light of competing discourses in Indigenous education (McConaghy, 2000a) and colonial positioning (Harper, 2000a). Additionally, a psychoanalytic understanding of projective identification (Robertson, 2004) applied to the women's writing and utterances around teacher role could provide insight into how identification operates in the construction of teacher identity. Equally, the notion of intersubjectivity (Hollway, 1989) could provide insight into the way in which power relations (Foucault, 1997) influence the women's understanding of their

role. It was also clear that the psychoanalytic concepts of identification and transference (Britzman & Pitt, 1996; Hollway, 1998; Robertson, 1994, 2004) were tools that would be essential in exploring how the women appear to understand their own potential and the potential of their students.

All of the above reflections rendered the three themes important enough to be used in the overall structure of the thesis. The chapter headings, therefore, signal the three themes, as well as the element of the film that originally resulted in deeply felt moments:

- The Perception of Two Realities: The Rabbit Proof Fence
- Respectable, Responsible, Just Doing a Job: A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of the Aborigines
- Teachers, Students, and the Potential: The Spirit Bird.

Inserted into the three chapters are the monologues that were written by each of the participants in the second phase of the research. This allows for a deeper exploration of how perceptions of community divisions and membership, views of the teacher role, and beliefs around potential contribute to the construction of the white women teacher's identity. The seventh monologue is treated separately in a subsequent chapter in order to demonstrate how all of the above elements contribute to identity formation for one white, woman teacher working in the isolated Indigenous school. This provides the reader with an exploration

of the layered, contradictory and evolving process of identity construction.

At this point I want to flag a few significant issues. First of all, the monologues the women submitted are their representations of the significance of the experience of teaching in the isolated Indigenous community. The monologues are treated as neither transparent narratives, nor absolute truths of lived experience, but representations of a desired, cohesive self. Each text is a snapshot of “the struggle for identity and for remaking memory” (Richardson, 2000, 929). This stance supposes that through the writing process, each woman has constructed a representation that captures the significance of the experience, and that captures an image of a desired self.

I want to return briefly to the purpose and importance of asking the women to write the monologues. In the initial phase of the research the women had an opportunity to discuss the journal entries they had written following the viewing of the film; in the process of the group discussion they were engaged in collective meaning-making about the shared experience of working in one, specific, isolated Indigenous school. During the group discussion some of the women’s ideas and beliefs were confirmed, while others were challenged.

Ellis and Bochner (2000), write, “At stake in our narrative attempts to achieve a coherent sense of ourselves are the very integrity and intelligibility of our selfhood, which rest so tenderly and fallibly on the

story we use to link birth to life to death” (p. 746). Thus, one purpose of asking the women to do some additional writing about their isolated teaching experience was to create conditions through which they might restore coherence to the way in which they understand the experience.

Therefore, at the end of the group discussion, I asked the women to take time in the months that followed to reflect on a significant moment in teaching in the isolated indigenous school, or the significance of the teaching experience. Following Richardson (2000) who deploys “writing as a method of inquiry”, I was interested in engaging the participants in the process of creating what is referred to as an “evocative representation”. Richardson writes,

Evocative writing touches us where we live, in our bodies. Through it we can experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation. Trying out evocative forms, we relate differently to our material, we know it differently. We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and so on; we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves, our doubts and uncertainties (2000, p. 931).

The type of evocative writing that I felt would be most appropriate to the research is the monologue.¹⁸

The second issue that needs to be flagged at this point relates to the stance I am taking as a researcher and the lens used in this research. First of all, I have stated that the monologues are not transparent narratives, and are simply representations of temporarily fixed positions that the women hold, which can be explored using an interpretive lens. I would suggest that the act of working with the texts,

of sifting and filtering through the language, of bumping the monologues up against other data, might give the reader the impression that my goal is to reveal a static identity for each woman, one that is “more” transparent than what is represented by the women’s original texts. *This is not my intention.* My purpose in exploring each monologue is not to construct a more detailed, fixed profile of each woman; my purpose is to pinpoint conflicting and contradictory ways in which participants represent meaning (Hollway, 1989) and to attempt to understand the psychological and social uses that the women make of the different meanings. This process sheds light on how fragile and temporary the fixings are, and allows us to consider the range of subject positions that can be held by each of the women. Britzman (1995) explores the difficulties around a study such as this.

In poststructural versions, subjects may well be the tellers of experience; but every telling is constrained, partial and determined by the discourses and histories that prefigure, even as they might promise representation. To fashion narration with the imperatives of poststructuralism means that the researcher must become overconcerned with experience as a discourse and with competing discourses of experience that structure any narrative. (p. 232)

Britzman continues,

In poststructuralist narratives, subjects cannot be uncoupled from the conscious and unconscious discourses that fashion how subjects become recognized and misrecognized...The point is that if discourses construct and incite the subject and produce contradictory investments, pleasures and knowledge, they can also be employed to deconstruct the kinds of naturalization that push one to take up the impossible moral imperatives of policing categories, insuring boundaries, and attempting to live the promise of a noncontradictory, transcendental self. (1995, p. 235)

I quote at length from Britzman's work, because it underlines a notion that is essential to understanding the intention of this study, and my purpose in exploring the women's monologues, in particular. My intention is not to capture the "reality" of the experience of the white women participants; it is to explore the formation of these women's identity in the specific setting, using a non-unitary understanding of identity.

It may be that the participants were, as Britzman describes, "deeply invested in the humanistic notion of an essential self" (1995, p. 236). It may be that by using a poststructural or psychoanalytic lens, I am using language and concepts that appear inaccessible. Perhaps in doing so, I draw attention to conflicting ways of giving meaning that the participants may not have expected. Given, however, my intent and my conceptual framework, there is, as Britzman explains, a "point of no return, of having to abandon the impossible desire to portray the study's subjects [sic] as they would portray themselves" (1995, p. 233).

The third issue to which I would like to call attention is related to psychoanalytic theory and my own practices of reading and writing. As I read, my own internal conflicts help to structure what I notice in a text, and how I make meaning of what I read; this is the foundation of a psychoanalytic theory of reading. Additionally, the unconscious workings of my own identificatory practices can never be fully knowable, so while I attempt to write an interpretation, I am self-consciously working with the

notion that “no subject, male or female, could be author, fully self-identified, fully aware or self-consciously intending what she writes” (Clough, 1998, p. xvii). To these issues, Hunt (1989) adds that, “perceptual defenses may be instituted to distance the researcher from data which arouses anxiety as a result of its link to conflictual past memories” (p. 58). These are aspects of the psychoanalytic view of the research process of which I am acutely aware; thus I noted, interrogated and wrote about the subtle emotional shifts I experienced as I worked with the women’s writing.

The issue described in the last paragraph is the reason that I wanted to include the monologues in their entirety; I believe that each text serves as a point of departure, from which the reader could begin to witness how each teacher’s account of herself and her experience is complex and contradictory. I have also quoted at length from the other data sources to support the points I want to make.

It is important to note that since I have inserted each monologue strategically into one of the three upcoming chapters, my focus is linked most directly to the theme of the chapter. As a result the exploration of each monologue is by no means exhaustive.

CHAPTER 5

The Perception of Two Realities:

The Rabbit Proof Fence

Three of the seven women in this study chose to connect their teaching in the north to a deeply felt moment experienced in relation to the rabbit proof fence after which the film is named. The women's work with the notion of the fence, and the division it evokes for them, can be linked to a perception that all of the women hold. They appear to believe that there are significant differences and a clear delineation between the white and Naskapi communities. In this chapter I demonstrate that the perception of differences and divisions, and the way in which the "others" are constructed, have serious consequences for the women and for the Naskapi community.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the women's work around the perception of a division between the white and Naskapi communities. This is followed with an exploration of the monologue written by Brenda, which demonstrates how the perception of the differences contributes to her beliefs about her abilities. The subsequent section investigates how the differences are constructed and looks at the notion of the invisibility of whiteness and the impact of these phenomena on the Naskapi community members. The exploration of Ann's

monologue, which follows, demonstrates the impact that divisions within the white community contribute to her experience. The subsequent section focuses on a third monologue, written by Marie, whose experience as a member of the white community presents an important contrast to that of Ann. This completes the chapter's exploration of the consequences of the search for affinity and affiliation in a context where the communities are defined with broad and sweeping strokes and where they may be constructed using colonial discourses.

The Rabbit Proof Fence

The memoir from which the screenplay originated is entitled *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*, and that is exactly what the young Aboriginal girls depicted in the film did in order to return home. They followed the fence, which stretches from the north to the south of Australia, effectively cutting it into sections. The fence was built after the turn of the century in order to control animal movement across the continent. In the film, it provides a link for the girls with their mother; this is a point the director effectively made through editing sequences of the girls' discovery of the fence with shots of the mother standing with hands on it over a thousand kilometers away. It is this sequence that the women associated with a deeply felt moment. The director's choice of shots and angles evokes the mother-child connection both physically and symbolically, since the fathers of the 'half-caste' children were white men who had been working on the installation of the fence.

The participants, however, appear to have responded differently to the filmmaker's construction of images. They see the fence as divisive. One connects the fence with "entrapment, and isolation, segregation" (LG 535). Another drew a direct link to the community in which the women taught, "There's a fence there. It's them, it's us" (AG 805). In the same participant's journal, she wrote about the way some teachers would attempt to cross the gulf between "us" and "them" through hunting and fishing. "I guess it was a way to cross the fence, a fence many whites seemed to want to absolutely cross: to be popular with aboriginals since popularity and power were close cousins over there" (AJ 3).

The notion of an "us" and a "them" and additional examples that follow suggest that the women employ the notion of culturalism and a two-race binary (McConaghy, 1998a) in constructing their understanding of Naskapi people. The way in which the categories of "us" and "them" are constructed is explored below.

The construction of the categories of "us" and "them" can be explained by the notion that understanding of oneself is contingent upon how one perceives "others". This is a notion that can be found in writing around feminist research issues and postcolonial theorizing, as well as psychoanalytic writing. Fine (1994), writing from the stance of a qualitative researcher, writes that this phenomenon exists because "the Self constructs as the Other is invented" (p. 72). Attwood (1992), using a postcolonial lens, explains how the production of "others" occurs; the self

(or self as member of a group) is constructed in reference to “others” who are characterized by features that are “outside and opposite”. The result is the creation of two interdependent categories, referred to as binary oppositions. Thus, it might be suggested that the “us” and “them” perceived by the women in the study are interdependent, despite appearing to the women to be two categories that are bound, fixed and independent.

Another aspect of the phenomenon is the way in which the construction of selves and others appears to be fixed (Fine, 1992; Reinharz, 1992). “A picture of a homogeneous culturally dominant group is pitted against a picture of an equally homogeneous group of outsiders on the periphery...The image of overlapping, conflicting, decentralized circles of ethnic (gendered, etc.) identities is never considered” (Denzin, personal communication, 1992, cited in Fine, 1994, p. 79). Such a message, however subtle, confirms a colonial view of, “not only cultural difference, but also cultural superiority” (Ware, 1992, 14).

Evidence of the women’s use of the two-race binary can be found in the data. Before further exploration, however, I want to signal another association made by two participants. They link the fence with infrastructural features of the area: one associates it with the rail line that connects the isolated north with a community further south that has road access. Another connects it with the road that runs between

what remains of the mining town and the reserve on which the school is located.

The location and relationship of the former mining town and the reserve require a description. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Naskapi people settled in the newly constructed mining town in the 1950s. They lived on a small tract of land, approximately five kilometers from the town, thus, were without services. They were moved to a fully-serviced reserve built on the outskirts of the mining town within two decades. They shared that reserve with another Indigenous band until the early 1980s when they moved into their own community, which they chose to locate over ten kilometers from their former reserve and the town.

The population of the Indigenous band has grown dramatically, with a significant portion of the population school-aged, or in the infant to pre-school age group. The school, which opened in 1985, has undergone one extension, and talk has begun regarding a second addition to the building. Meanwhile, houses are built each summer, but there is still a list of Naskapi people waiting to secure their own home.

The transient teachers are housed in single-family homes or semi-detached units in what remains of the original mining town. The school board secured the houses during the years following the mining company's withdrawal from the community. Thus the teachers do not live on the reserve; this is an element that renders concrete the notion

that cultures are bound, fixed and distinct. The significance of this is described by one of the participants, “The fact that we didn’t live there [on the reserve], was a huge barrier. You know, geographically - imposed and there was no way, there was no way (emphatic) through that barrier....But you know, going home at the end of the day, like the kids used to make jokes about it in class. And there was truth behind their jokes. Here I am walking into class doing plays, like, *Teach me the ways of the Sacred Circle*, (laughter) you know and *April Raintree*, and who the hell am I trying to teach them, about what they’re supposed to be” (GI 352). Here, the woman’s belief that she can use the writings of Indigenous playwrights and authors to “teach them about what they’re supposed to be” becomes, she feels, a joke for students, who she imagines must know that she has no claim to knowledge of or membership in their world. This is underlined for her, by the daily departure from the reserve.

There has been, over the years, talk of providing housing on the reserve for the transient teachers; however two major issues frame the discussion. On the one hand, housing for some of the community members is still unresolved, and remains a priority. Additionally, when the discussion was first raised with the transient teachers in the late 1980s, they had mixed feelings about living on the reserve, feelings that are still present. The women discussed the notion of living on the reserve (G 1001 – 1015):

“I wouldn’t expect to be part of that, I’m not part of the community but I choose that. I don’t want to be part of the community. I’m not Naskapi. And I just do my own thing” (H).

“ But I wrote in my journal, too, how I really, really wish that the teachers could have lived [on the reserve], because there, too...” (L).

“Ohhhh noooo” (quietly) (H).

“So did I” (G).

“Oh yeah, I know it’s sort of weird to have people just waltz into your house, and stuff, but you never really feel that you’re, part of the community, or part of the, whatever, if you’re going home every day, down the road. And you only go there on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. And Saturday Sunday you’re living somewhere else. You know, it’s, there’s not...” (L).

“And be driven insane by all the partying?” (H).

“I know I know...yeah” (L).

“It was two realities, but, I don’t know if I would be able to live in, fulltime in their reality”(M).

The notion that there are two distinct realities, cultures that are incompatible (McConaghy, 1998a, 2000a) is one that all the women endorse. The discussion above raises the question of how the women are able to know what life would be like on the reserve without having lived there. Significantly the women’s perceptions of “constant partying” or “waltzing” in and out of houses can be understood to be examples of

characteristics that are perceived as “outside and opposite” of the experience of the white women (Attwood, 1992). It is important to add that notions of “constant partying” and people “waltzing” into your house are quite a contrast to the image given by one participant who spent time on the reserve. She describes shared coffee and bingos, sleepovers and meals and quiet mornings before people would begin to move around. (AJ; AI).

The daily movement between these two perceived realities is another feature that requires mention. Teachers were bused to and from the reserve each day as a service to which they were eligible. This was a by-product of the fact that the company that held the contract to transport the pre-school and kindergarten children each day around the reserve, actually parked and serviced the bus in Ridgeville each evening. The vehicle, therefore, had to be driven out to the reserve each day. During the 1980s and up until the mid to late 1990s, few transient teachers drove their own vehicles down the graded, gravel road to the reserve. They would arrive almost entirely en masse in the morning, on the bus, and make a group exodus in the late afternoon. Joining the transient teachers on the bus were any Naskapi teachers who, for one reason or another, lived in Ridgeville or on the other reserve, which serves the second Indigenous group in the region.

On dry and windy spring and fall days, the bus would raise a cloud of iron-stained dust as it left the reserve. For those left behind to watch

such departures, the bus would quickly disappear from sight, obscured by the plume of dust that appeared to spew from the back of the vehicle.

“There again is the separation,” one participant writes, “Living in town but working on the reserve. Two different worlds it would seem but only miles apart” (LJ 12). Another woman said, “I’ve heard someone saying sometimes, “We’re not good enough for you, that’s why you don’t live on the reserve” (MG 1073). This is an issue that is picked up later by another participant who commented, “I always found, that, you know, that getting on that bus at the end of the day was sending that message, and those kids were right, that’s what we were saying to them, you know, that’s what we were saying to them. This is not good enough for me to live here. And, I, I didn’t believe that, but -- I felt that that was what was being said. And I think, I think, that’s one of, one of the barriers that goes up, and that’s a very hard barrier to go down” (GG 1193). The notion that there is even a perception of being “not good enough”, or the impression that such a message is communicated through actions, underlines that culturalism and the two-race binary can be associated with an interdependent and often asymmetrical relationship. Attwood (1992) explains, “This interdependence is usually hierarchical, with one category prior, visible and superordinate, the other secondary, often invisible and subordinate” (Attwood, 1992, p. iii). In the relationship between the Naskapi community and the white teachers above, the

construction of the differences does not result in equal but different; the result is that *different* might mean not as “good” as, or not good enough.

The shared busing experience underlined that the road, while linking the two communities, served to separate them. One participant made the following connection through writing about a deeply felt moment around the fence:

“And, ah, I was also thinking about that fence. And that fence to me, was like that road, and at the end, at the end of that road, there is sort of a curve in the road right before you go into the reserve. Every day, at that curve, we’d hit the curve, and my stomach would flip, every single day. I said in my journal, that I thought, part of it was just being a first year teacher and being terrified of teaching, (laughter). But I think there was much more to it. I think, I think, I think I was not able to really put it into words, but it was that feeling that I knew that it was some kind of betrayal of these people, that I had no business there. And that was -- a little hard” (GG 1127).

The question of belonging had been raised in another participant’s journal. She wrote, “Since I’ve been away on maternity leave, some students and parents have asked when I’ll be back to work. So at least some people like me. Perhaps I expect too much (BJ 27). She then closed her journal with the following question, “Is it important to be a part of the community [?]” She then wrote a note of apology for the tone of the journal, which she found to be surprisingly negative. She returned to

the above question and added the following insertion, which was linked with an arrow to her closing words. Insertion: “Everyone wants to belong to something. Isn’t that why people join cults. If you don’t have a place in a community then are you relevant? Do you/Should you be there” (BJ 29).

The last few lines of this segment raise serious questions. For example, What does it mean to have a place in a community? Who decides if you have a place? How can you tell? And, if we perceive people may not have a “place” because of racial or ethnic differences, does that suggest that people should only be in communities where they do not differ racially or ethnically?

For one woman the fence was symbolic of divisions that she felt within the school, itself. “I do not recall seeing a fence between ME and the reserve: I was a White-away-from-home who was there to teach. However, many times some out-of-province teachers would complain about having to use French on the phone when ordering some parts for example: Fucking French, God dam Frenchies who don’t speak a word of English etc. I remember feeling at the lowest level: They would not/dare not criticize Aboriginals that way but French bashing was all right. I recall thinking so that’s how it feels to be on the other side of the fence: trampled on, no remorse. I do remember these people making fun of Natives “dans leur dos” (behind their back) but rarely in their face. So I started fencing up my life: hang out with anything but white teachers

that I trusted less and less. (I apologize for that selfish story)” (AJ 3). This segment underlines, once again, the asymmetrical relationships of power (Attwood, 1992) between two groups, in which one can “trample” the other. While the participant experiences it due to linguistic differences, she views it as representative of the asymmetry that exists between the white and Naskapi people.

The situation to which the woman referred was also raised in the group discussion, in which she once again uses the metaphor of the fence. She said, “I think I had it rough compared to others. I think it was much easier on others. They were friends and colleagues and I was not -- comfortable in that, and so I started putting up a fence. And no, I did not hang out -- . Screw you. It was really bad. I had lunch in my office” (AG 833).

One of the women who was at the school at the same time responded. “And not to minimize -- you -- but there was another staff member that was ostracized after the stability” (JG 835). The “stability” to which she referred, is a period when there was very little turnover of the white, transient teachers. They remained in the community for up to a decade or more. She lists the names of the people, explaining that this was “all” she heard on arrival. “But all these names, I’d heard how wonderful -- how wonderful things were, and, and, and, and, then how things were starting to get not so nice, people were getting ostracized. So this wonderful little close knit community that you guys remember, and -

- I think we were okay when you (another teacher) were there, because that was my first year, but it was really, it was really starting to fall apart after that, because you didn't have, from what I understand, because I wasn't there --. You didn't have [names the white principal] encouraging this....you know, bringing people together, and so what you had, you had these little factions" (JG 843 - 847).

"The lethal ones were white" (AG 869), claims one woman. There is agreement from another woman who worked at the school at the same time. The speaker continues, "Feeding off each other, and I've seen teachers being chewed away. One, that, whose sexuality didn't fit the pattern that was considered nice or acceptable, of course. He was just - I don't know how he did it. He did his full year and said, Thank you, good bye, but he was teased he was..." The other teacher completes the thought, "Harassed!" she says emphatically. (A & J G 871 - 875).

In the above passages, the fences and divisions exist not only between the town and the reserve, between the white community and the Naskapi community, but also between members of the white community, itself. In the examples above, differences in primary language or sexual orientation are marked with "fences" that are constructed in anger and aggression. Britzman (1998) explains the phenomenon these participants are describing, the existence of factions and aggression within a community. She does so through a psychoanalytic exploration of psychic investments of members of a group who seek to distinguish themselves

from others. In the case of loss of solidarity within a group, the breakdown happens “where differences within the community are felt as a blow to the community’s narcissism. This is the case when differences, such as homosexuality, become constituted as a failure to adhere to group loyalty, or a problem of outside influence or recruitment, or are unacknowledged because such individuals are viewed as spoiling a community’s reputation” (Britzman, 1998, p. 112). Such may be the cases of exclusion, described by the women above, of the individuals whose primary language or sexual orientation were seen to be different.

One of the women mentioned in the previous section describes ‘fencing’ herself off from the other white teachers in response to their hostility, choosing instead to forge connections on the reserve. She appeared to identify with the Naskapi, and claimed that the exclusion she felt mirrored theirs. She completed her journal with these words, “Maybe the reserve offered the relief I needed. Maybe that is why I “got busy” with dances, bingos, bake sales. Frustrating at times but never “conniving”/sneaky people that would use any mistakes I would make as a weapon. By spending so much time at school I become a co-worker of the custodians. We could chat, talk and laugh. When I left for good, I was given gifts (and told about them by a white teacher who implied “he had to “ and “it was cheap”). As I was packing my “office,” the custodian came at 8:00 am at school. He smelled like alcohol a mile away. He just said: You’re leaving for real?” “And I said “yes”. He gave me an old brown

bag and said: "That's for you." It was one of those "painted mirror" usually made in jail. "A prison craft specialty". I have kept the mirror -- and the bag. He was the last proof that, I do not know how to say it. He appeased my wounds as I left" (AJ 28) The woman's exclusion from the group within the school has left a significant scar, one appeased by the gestures of the custodian.

I want to return to my initial comment in this section, where I suggest that the women have not engaged with the film director's depiction of the mother-child bond in relation to the fence. I want to explore this in light of some of the above quotes, for example, where one participant acknowledges the difficult feeling of having "no business there", another struggles with the notion of relevance and belonging, and another is wounded by exclusion. Using a psychoanalytic framework to explore what has been said, it can be suggested that the women's apparent refusal to explore the mother-child bond as they work with the notion of the fence may be a latent acting out of the desire for connection. Thus, instead of exploring the director's depiction of the mother-child bond, they ignore it; yet, they work richly and associatively with the fence. It is a symbol that resonates powerfully for them as they make connections to their experiences of loneliness and exclusion. They explore the broad strokes of divisions within the communities, however, beyond the preoccupation with division, is the painful notion of personal failures to connect.

Psychoanalytic theory presumes that our original, early relationships with parents, and “infantile strategies of attempting to rescue or secure the love one wants from another do not go away but instead are elaborated throughout a life” (Britzman, 1998, p. 34). Thus, it may be suggested that the stories of the women’s painful struggles to forge a connection with the Naskapi community, or to be considered a member of the white community, may be read as their experiences of “wanting to have the love and knowledge of another and wanting to be the knowledge and love for the other” (Britzman, 1998, p. 35). This is most poignantly evident in one woman’s journal where she wrote, “So at least some people like me.” The impact of difficulties she faces in trying to connect is also evident in her disclosure in the group discussion, “I’ve been there seven years, married into the community, and I don’t have connections there. And, and this is something I’m finding hard -- because I don’t know if it’s me (breaking down) or something else. But I have no connections there (crying)” (BG 971).

Brenda, the woman who made the above disclosure in the group discussion, is the author of the first monologue, which is inserted below. It is introduced at this point to illustrate the impact of longing, belonging and perceptions of community on the identity construction of a teacher.

Brenda

Brenda arrived in the community with one year of previous experience, having taught in a remote town that serves a population of

Cree and non-Indigenous students. Her monologue is unique, among the texts written by the women, because it makes no reference to Ridgville, Broad Lake Reserve, nor to the cultural background of the students.

Brenda's Monologue:

Note: The original monologue was hand written. The double underscore on the word, "good" was made by the writer. The insertion was made using an arrow, and was not in parentheses.

Before I was accepted at teacher's college, someone suggested I could always go through the Montessori program. I informed that person that I didn't want to teach kids who had the privilege of going to private school but rather I wanted to teach somewhere that good teachers are really needed, and so here I am.

After teaching for a few years I came to the conclusion that life altering moments are not going to happen in the one year I have students. Rather I have to look at the small moments where the light goes on in a student's head and he finally understands a concept after 5 months of working on it. Or for the one day when a challenged student is able to remain in class and do some of the same work the rest of the students are doing.

Both of these examples can happen one day and vanish the next and that is very frustrating. I often question myself on how I might have been able to change/maintain situations.

My teaching experience has proven to me that 1. no two days are ever the same, 2. my level of enthusiasm will affect my students' level of enthusiasm. 3. Sometimes your best is not good enough and requires even more effort.

When I do have those moments when positive things happen, I feel rewarded that I have chosen the right job for me. I just wish those moments would be more frequent.

Did I make any big impact on the students I have taught over the years? I don't know, I like to think that I did but how will one ever really know.

I have been frustrated by my level of commitment to the students while other teachers have only done exactly what is required of them. I know being overly committed have given me lots of extra work but has also brought extra rewards for me too. Next year, I'm thinking of only doing the minimum too (insertion: due to family obligation) but I don't know how long I would be able to keep it up before I would give in.

Overall, I really enjoyed it, some days I love it, some days I hate it, but love and hate do go hand in hand don't they.

I don't know if this is what you were looking for when you were asking for this. It's difficult to explain the whole teaching experience because it is all over the place - joy, sorrow, frustration, anger. I know that I will laugh at least once every day and that is what keeps me going. I also know that kids are kids, no matter where you teach. (Some of) our kids may have problems but you will find that anywhere. I wouldn't change my decision to teach at all, if anything I wish I had done it sooner.

Exploration of Brenda's Monologue

I want to underline, once again, that my intention in exploring the monologues is *not* to construct a more detailed, fixed profile of each woman; my purpose is to pinpoint conflicting and contradictory ways in which participants represent meaning (Hollway 1989) and to attempt to understand the psychological and social uses that the women make of the different meanings. Further, my intention is to explore the uses of the representations in relation to the specific theme identified in the chapter; in this chapter it is the role of perceptions of community and membership on the identity construction of a white woman teacher.

It is impossible to discern where Brenda has been teaching through reading her monologue. This is an important issue that needs to

be explored. The instructions for the task asked that the participants write about a significant moment, or the significance of having taught in an isolated, Indigenous community. Brenda received the instructions and asked for further clarifications, as well; yet, the isolation and the specific population of the school and community are completely absent. She explains the outcome as follows, “I guess when I talked to you it needed to be a specific teaching experience or whatever, but I couldn’t pinpoint it to an experience. To me the whole thing is so, it’s all interconnected, good bad and otherwise, like -- . If you wanted to talk to me about a Naskapi experience I could give you a wonderful one and I would be specific and everything, but when it came to teaching experience, it was just so all over, I mean” (BI 89).

In the above interview excerpt, Brenda differentiates between, on the one hand, the ‘interconnected’ experiences of teaching (good, bad and otherwise), and, on the other hand, the “Naskapi experience”. She does not connect the two. Separation of the school and the community is also evident in Brenda’s journal where she writes, “Lately I have felt so disconnected to the place *not the school* but the place” (BJ 31) (my italics). So while the school is located on the reserve, and is staffed by a significant percentage of Naskapi people, and is filled with students from the community, Brenda’s reflection on teaching is completely decontextualized. What function might such a representation serve in the construction of a white woman teacher’s identity?

It may be that the separation of the teaching experience from its context serves two purposes. On the one hand, it could be an indication of the discursive position that Brenda takes regarding education: it is *the great equalizer*, a value-neutral system that can be transplanted from one place to another, a fixed structure that leads to economic and social freedom. This is exemplified in the interview, for example, where Brenda says, “freedom, freedom is an education. If you have an education you have economic freedom, you have social freedom. You have that possibility” (BG 1282).

On the other hand, it may be that Brenda’s representation of teaching outside of its context is related to the construction of her sense of self. More explicitly, through the monologue Brenda acknowledges the general highs and lows of teaching; she does so without addressing two issues that, overall, appear to be significant concerns for her in her other spoken and written representations.

- The first issue is the difficulty she has had connecting with the Naskapi community;
- The second issue is how the student’s performance and lack of interest in education challenge her self-representations as a “good” teacher.

In the journal, group session and interview, Brenda speaks and writes at length about being isolated from the community; she also calls into question her ability to have an impact on the lives of the Naskapi

students. The monologue, however, makes no mention of the community and omits the possibility that she will *not* have made an impact on her students. Yet the yearning to have an impact, to go the extra mile, and to standout are woven throughout Brenda's journal, monologue and interview; these are issues to which I will return following a discussion of Brenda's struggles to connect to the community and her beliefs about "good" teaching.

In Brenda's journal and interview and in the group discussion, a major theme that emerges is her struggle to feel a sense of belonging on the reserve. In the group discussion, as indicated previously, she broke down while speaking about this. It is a painful issue, augmented by the fact that she feels moving away might be the only option, "It ways [sic] heavy on me to think I am abandoning [my husband's] roots and [my child's] birthplace (BJ 31).

At one point in her journal she questions whether a person is relevant if she does not have a place in a community (BJ 27). Yet, in the self-representations made in the monologue, Brenda is clear about her role and relevance as a teacher, which we might say represents her role and relevance in the school.

Brenda is, however, troubled by the notion that the students do not achieve their potential, and appear to her to be unable to see the value of education. "I, I feel that -- I feel that the kids don't achieve -- half of their potential --. If you have an education you have economic

freedom, you have social freedom, you have that possibility, and they don't see that there are possibilities" (BG 1282). She is unable to explain why students are not achieving their potential. She says, "And I don't know if we can say (altering tone), Oh, it's all the student's fault, 'cause they don't do good work, they don't show up at school, dadada, I don't know if it's the parents, I don't know if it's the teachers, but they, they have -- I see, I feel that there's so much potential in that school that's -- potential that's going nowhere. Potential that is wasted. I just feel that there could be so much more to (pause), I don't know how to get it done - - or how you would get it done... but, there's just -- there's so much that could be done with that community, that -- I don't think -- is going to happen in [my child's] life time." (BG 1282).

Amid Brenda's concerns is a key statement: "I don't know how to get it done or how you would get it done." Brenda's discouragement that potential is not fulfilled is matched by her feelings of discouragement and powerlessness over the situation. This is also expressed in the journal, where she writes, "The amount of change/encouragement I can make happen is so small if at all. It is discouraging to try to do anything" (BJ 23). Further, in the group discussion she extends those thoughts, "When I started writing, it was like -- What the hell am I doing there? (laughter) You know, and, and ah -- I'm never going to make an impact. And maybe the system's wrong, maybe the kids are wrong, maybe the

teachers are wrong, maybe --. I don't know what's wrong, but there's something wrong" (BG 725).

The thought that "something is wrong", and that maybe the "teachers are wrong" might be difficult to digest, particularly since Brenda has indicated she does not know what to do to change the situation. To state that she does not know what to do challenges Brenda's hopes, her desire to believe in herself, and her desire to be the good teacher, as expressed in the monologue. Additionally, Brenda's representations indicate the degree to which she is troubled by the difficulties she has faced in gaining membership in the Naskapi community, despite her marriage and despite being the mother of a Naskapi child. Thus, she appears to be struggling with the pain of rejection as well as the pain of the struggle to secure a sense of herself as the "good" teacher she wishes to be.

It is possible to identify her desire to confirm her belief in herself in the introduction to the monologue, where she indicates that the reason she has ended up in the specific community is that she believes she is good. This is a word she underscores twice, to emphasize her conviction. She repeats this in the interview, "I always wanted to teach somewhere -- where like a really good teacher, or someone more exciting, although I wouldn't say I'm that exciting but, more interesting, was. I could be more interesting than other teachers....My idea was to work someplace where the kids really needed someone good. (she lowers her voice), I like to

think I'm good" (BI 29-30) She also makes her conviction clear elsewhere in the interview, "It pissed me off that I had to go through all the trouble of going to university to get a paper that says I could teach, and I know that's maybe very arrogant, but I just knew (emphatic) that I could teach" (BI 101). Thus, Brenda came to teaching, and to the community, with a firm conviction that she was able to teach, and to be good at it.

In the monologue, however, Brenda names three things she has learned through teaching, one of which is that, "Sometimes your best is not good enough and requires even more effort" (BM 4). Brenda appears torn by the idea that it is possible to do your best, and that it will not be enough; yet she sees other teachers who she feels do not even try. This runs counter to the discourse of individualism, industry, volition and success with which she was raised. "I always, you know, was kind of brought up with the idea that -- as long as you do your best, you know -- and ...it did surprise me because you do your best and it's still not good enough. But on the other hand, I (pause) I feel that there are so many teachers out there, not just here, that everywhere, that I can't even imagine that they're doing their best, you know" (BI 177). The observation about other teachers is troubling, as she writes in the monologue. "I have been frustrated by my level of commitment to the students while other teachers have only done exactly what is required of them" (BM 7).

This paints a troubled picture for Brenda. On the one hand, she believes herself to be a good teacher, whose qualities surpass any training that might be necessary; further, she is self-described as “overly committed” and engages in extra work, yet, potential in the students remains unrealized and she does not know what to do about it. In the representations, it is possible to locate a range of reasons Brenda offers to explain the problem, all are reasons that are outside of her control: lack of role models in the community, lack of commitment in the students, lack of commitment in the community members, few opportunities to see the benefits of education, and little choice and variety in the options available to students.

There is one further comment made by Brenda in the interview that sheds light on her perception of the question of unfulfilled potential. In the excerpt, Brenda is looking at long-term possibilities for education in the community, “You know if we get them to graduate secondary five, um -- a lot of them are happy with that. And I know that’s also a cultural thing, that maybe the next generation, will, that maybe CEGEP will be acceptable, then maybe the next generation, that maybe you know, something further” (BI 274). The comments suggest that there is an evolutionary process, such as described by Emberly (2001) that must take place, in order for potential to be realized by Naskapi people. The process would include changes in commitment and modeling in the

community. As for the role of teachers, and teaching, in this process - they are not discussed.

This brings us back to the issue of the psychological and social uses of representations. There is the question of the way in which the experience of teaching might be decontextualized from its location in the Naskapi community, and the way in which this representation is significantly different from other self-representations made.

I would like to suggest that the monologue reveals Brenda's struggle to be the teacher she desires, in a context where she is unable to secure membership, and where even her best efforts as a teacher appear not to be enough. In the first paragraph of the monologue, Brenda states that she wanted to "teach somewhere that good teachers are really needed," (BM 1). This may shed light on the struggle she is facing, as a white woman teacher in the north. The word *needed* in this case is a representation not only that Brenda's skills would be useful in the setting, but also that Brenda as a person is welcomed and thus that she is able to feel the '*need* for her' expressed by the community she serves.

Despite these struggles, Brenda is able to "keep going", by focusing on the positive. In the monologue she writes, "When I do have those moments when positive things happen, I feel rewarded that I have chosen the right job for me. I just wish those moments would be more frequent" (BM 5). Significantly, those positive moments do not lead her to believe that she is in the right place, even if she is in "the right job." It is

therefore possible to understand why she feels she needs to move elsewhere, despite her connection to the community through marriage and parenting.

Us and Them: Constructing Selves and Others

In the previous section, the perception of a division between the two communities is highlighted. The perceived division hinges on a perception of differences between the Naskapi and white communities, and the associated notion that there is an “us” and a “them.” The following section details the women’s explorations of the perceived differences.

In the group discussion, the participants try to explain why and how differences are recognized and how identification is formed. One sees it as linked to upbringing; another links it to the process of identifying with a group. One explains, “It’s just the way people are raised, and, and, and whatever area they are raised, they, they are raised with these ideals, that, if you live in Mozambique, are different from the way you live, if you are raised in Quebec City. So it’s, it’s hard to judge, but, in each thinking, they’re still correct, like they think they’re still correct” (BG 587). Another responds with, “I think you’re talking about Tribalism. You identify with a group, and by identifying, by identifying, part of that human process is to automatically, be cautious or threatened by the other group. And so, whichever group that you’re identifying with,

you're constantly against someone else, unless, unless, you know, some, devastating thing happens to the planet to unite everybody, you're going to constantly have this...this sort of tribal warfare in the modern world. (GG 593 – 597). Here the participant describes that identification necessarily enters you into a situation of power relations, which implies resistance and struggle. What the women are attempting to name is the process of othering, defined by Attwood (1992) and Fine (1994).

The women explore the process of identifying “others” from the perspective and distance of national identities and global events, rather than individuals in interaction. Religious and language differences among communities are suggested as fixed characteristics that serve to divide people. Similarly, the women signal wars and other international struggles such as land expropriation as examples of what one names “the human process” of establishing and acting on those differences.

This raises the question of how the women's construction of two categories, “us and them”, to distinguish the Naskapi from themselves, can be witnessed in power relations between the two groups. I want to return to Foucault's writing on power relations, briefly, to launch the question of whether the school setting has an impact on the possibility of significant shifts in those relations. Foucault writes that “[w]hat characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited, and there are strongholds that are very, very difficult to suppress

because they have been institutionalized in courts, codes and so on. All this means that the strategic relations of people are made rigid” (1997, p. 169). Is it possible that such is the case in this specific school? Would it be possible in this school setting to identify the postcolonial phenomenon of shifting power relations and emerging identities, described by McConaghy (1998b), or does the institutionalization of the relationships, teacher- student, teacher-community, limit the possibility of those shifts? These are questions I will return to later in the thesis.

While the ways the women engage personally and daily in the construction of Naskapis “as other” is significant with respect to the possibilities for the Naskapi students and community members, I want to underline that the women’s construction of Naskapi is an integral part of their construction of their own identities. Thus, the process of “othering” has consequences for both the Naskapi people and the women themselves. In the section that follows I demonstrate how this can be identified through the women’s utterances and writing.

I will begin with a summary of the features of the Naskapi people that the women perceive to be “outside and opposite” of their own experience. They were not asked to name such features, the descriptions are simply woven through the women’s speech and writing. The features are often noted as points of contrast for the women’s experiences in communities further south, or in contrast to their experiences growing up, or in contrast to other non-Indigenous people.

The most commonly noted “difference” is the connection of the people to the land, and the practices of camping, hunting and fishing associated with that connection. One woman has noted the spiritual nature of the relationship to the land, which she also characterizes as superstitious. There is the language spoken, and some of the food eaten. There are the perceived differences in communication style, for example, unexpected silences, situational avoidance of eye contact, and the differences between the ways students interact with male and female teachers. There is the practice of walking into homes without knocking or waiting to be told to enter. There is the notion that no matter what you do, or how you behave, the Naskapi community will welcome you if you are one of its own.

It is important to understand that this list represents an overview of the comments of the seven women, whose views of the differences differ in both subtle and explicit ways. For example, one teacher spoke of family violence and alcoholism as a community characteristic, while another framed her observation about the same phenomenon to reflect the fact that she could not understand how on the reserve, people ‘in pain’ would continue to hurt themselves, through practices such as alcohol abuse. Other comments made by the same woman took an angle not taken by the other participants. She mentioned, for example, the Naskapi people’s compassion for other’s grief and loss; the respect accorded to elders; and the “lethal sense of humour”.

One of the facets of the creation of “others”, according to postcolonial theory, is their construction as a homogenous group (Fine, 1994). While each woman’s perception may differ significantly from another’s, the women use the features in reference to the whole group. Thus, for example, “*the Naskapi*” are perceived as being connected to the land, regardless of individuals’ personal practices; similarly, the notion that “*the Naskapi*” are respectful of elders again refers to the group as a whole. It might also be claimed that the act of using an article such as “the” in reference to people who are “Naskapi” reduces them, through language, to the status of object.

One of the participants struggles with the notion that there *are* specific, collective features, feeling that they do not describe everyone. Her response, however, is to divide the community members with one broad stroke, between two sets of previously named characteristics, which she categorizes under two headings: “negative” and “positive”. These characteristics are “outside and opposite” her experience. She said, “I think there are more umm, -- I think, in some ways there is a more traditional, -- I think there’s kind of two communities. There’s a community, or a group of people that live or try to live a more traditional life or who are able to go on the land, like [Brian]. I, and then there’s a group of people who, that you know indulge in whatever extra curricular activities, legal, illegal, and, and when they go on the land they require a generator and lights and a TV and a Nintendo and, you know, and I’m

not sure that they always meet. But with regards feeling connected, those two intermingle.... I want to be a part of the community that lives healthy and has good values and lives off the land, and all the positive aspects. -- Maybe you have to take the negative with the positive. I have a hard time with that. But maybe that's how it has to be" (BI 327 – 331).

Overall, the phenomenon of knowing the Naskapi, of "naming and knowing" their defining features, and in so doing, creating a homogenous whole does not seem problematic for the women. There is one participant, however, who in the course of the first ten hours of research activities makes an observation related to the phenomenon. In reflecting on her teaching experience, she writes, "I arrived wanting to assimilate and grew to accept the reality that I was not at home there. My feelings about Indigenous people were really affected by this process. In the arctic [names communities] I experienced them as individual people like me with the same conflicts and emotional experiences, but in [the reserve] I had such a difficulty connecting with the individuals that I did see on a daily basis that there was not enough to relate to...They become 'the Naskapi' as opposed to [Thomas] or [John] or [Jane] or [Susan]" (GJ 9). The participant's observation is significant: if individuals are seen to be part of a homogenous whole, then they may not be understood to have unique histories, interests and potential. Further, if postcolonial discourses are at work, then the common characteristics Naskapi share

would contrast with those of the women. These common characteristics, therefore, may be constructed as deficits, failings and weaknesses.

The above participant picks up the thread the following day in the group session, and demonstrates the personal impact of the phenomenon. “You know, I have memories of certain kids.... you know, but they’re just flashes. Whereas, I haven’t talked to the people I’ve met in [the arctic] for a long time, but, but I remember, you know (pause), connecting with them, you know, in, in the kind of conflicts that we had in our own lives you know, emotionally, and just, you know, I missed (emphatic) those people, where as I don’t really miss, the collective group of people that I met up there [reserve], because I don’t have a connection. And that makes me sad; that was unfortunate; that was not the dream” (GG 1193).

The participant’s dream was to assimilate, to blend in, to fit into a life that she had imagined; this became less and less possible with her growing sense that Naskapi people were a collective, homogenous group from which she was separate, and with whom she was unable to connect. In her monologue she wrote, “I wanted to live another life than the one I had been living. I longed to chase the caribou, ride a ski-doo along the ridges and through the bush and smell like the spruce boughs I had slept on that night” (GM 1). The participant’s dream did not come to fruition. This is an issue that I will return to later in the thesis, but first I will address the barriers to connections.

The above participant names “a cultural silence” that was one of the barriers. In speaking about the “cultural silence” and the possibility of whether it would be overcome had the teachers lived on the reserve, the conversation takes a turn, without pause, to this participant’s racial identity, “I think it [cultural silence] would still exist, but I think it would have been easier to find some kind of connection. I remember when I was student teaching, in history class. Maybe in the textbook it used the word, Indian, and I don’t remember if I said it, or just thought it (pause) and [the student] could see it on my face, and he leaned over and said (she lowers her voice), “It’s okay miss. You can call us Indians.” (laughter) So that sort of stands out” (GI 368 – 372).

“ Tell me, what were you thinking at that moment?” I asked.

There was a long pause, and she continued,” I was thinking how very white I was. (laughter) I was -- , I had never felt more white. You know, like when you live in [a suburb of Montreal], you don’t even realize -- you’re white, until you go there and suddenly, you’re the white girl. And ah -- yeah, I was very, very white” (GI 368 – 373).

In the section that follows, I explore the women’s work with whiteness, the possibility that, “You don’t even realize you’re white,” and the implications of this in the construction of the women’s identity.

The Invisibility of Whiteness

The phenomenon of not recognizing your own whiteness, suggested in the above segment, is well documented. It is evident in what Rodriguez

(2000) refers to as “color blind discourse”. An example would be the description of “ ‘racial, ethnic communities’ as synonym for ‘communities of color’ ” (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 1). In this case, race is understood by those who are white, to refer to others. This may, in fact, have been evident in the questionnaires filled out by the white, women participants in the research. They responded to the idea that the research would investigate their experience as *white*, women teachers, yet in answer to the question, “Of which, if any, racial or ethnic group would you describe yourself as being a member?”, three of the seven women entered the words, “none” or the space was left blank. It is possible that for these women, “white” was not a racial category, as Frankenberg (1997) describes.

Whiteness remains invisible through the construction of other categories (Dyer, 1988), which are described in contrast to a norm – whiteness - that remains unnamed. An example would be the way in which an athlete, who is not perceived to be white, is named as such: the *black* hockey player. The whiteness of the other hockey players remains the unmarked norm.

An example of whiteness as the unmarked norm is evident as one participant discusses her teacher training experience; she struggles to name what she perceives as the norm. She notes that there was a lack of preparation to work in a multicultural setting; instead she feels she was trained for: “the middle class” or “the majority of people in Canada”. She

continued to strive to find the descriptors she needed, “I think basically the expectation was, okay, you guys are going to graduate and you’re going to teach in schools that are -- um -- , pretty status quo, and by status quo I just mean like -- , normal isn’t the right word either. Umm - - but pretty mainstream” (ZI 88). Whiteness remained beyond the conscious grasp of this woman, instead it is covered by: the middle class, the majority, the status quo, normal, and mainstream.

Naming that which is invisible was also an issue when I arrived to teach in the same northern area, fifteen years before the above-mentioned woman. At the time, the Naskapi students attended the school that had been constructed to accommodate the children of the mining company employees. The students were segregated; the division was made between the “town classes” and the “Naskapi classes”; town was the word that was designated for that which was *not* Naskapi, thus whiteness was unmarked.

There are two issues at work in naming and marking the racial identities of the white, women teachers; both of which are significant to the research. On the one hand, the women’s whiteness may be suppressed or ignored, and whiteness may be an unnamed norm; on the other hand that phenomenon intersects with the phenomenon of the creation of “others”. For example, the women make repeated references to the teachers as a collective group, in contrast to the Naskapi “people” and “community”, however for many years the staff of the school has

included Naskapi women teachers. This raises an important question: Into which category or classification created by the white women do Naskapi women teachers fit? Attwood's (1992) notion of the hierarchical interdependence of the two categories, with "one category prior, visible and superordinate, the other secondary, often invisible and subordinate" (p. iii), sheds light on the case of Naskapi women teachers. In the participants' speech and writing, Naskapi women teachers are in some cases invisible, or are excluded from the discussion of "teachers"; this is because they are placed into the category of "other" in contrast to the unmarked whiteness of the teachers. This is the case in the following segment:

One participant begins, "I was just going to say another thing about, ah, the lunches in the staff room -- and everything -- . When I started there, the new wing wasn't there, the elementary school, so it was much smaller, we only had that one little, tiny staff room and everybody squeezed in there and everything and then..." Another woman replies, "But the Natives didn't have lunch there" (L & M Group 853 – 855). Other participants who were also teaching at the same time concur, without discussion of how it is that the women teachers who are Naskapi were invisible and excluded.

This is also evident in the passages where some of the women, notably those who worked in the community in the early 1990s, contrast the warmth of membership in the "teacher community" with lack of

connection with the Naskapi community. The reference, without being explicit, excludes Naskapi teachers and refers to the unmarked, unnamed, white transient teachers living in the town. It is also apparent in the discussion around the “loss of stability” attributed to the departure of long-term teachers. The long-term teachers in question are white transients, and there is no mention of the remaining long-term Naskapi teachers, four of whom have taught in the community for between twenty and thirty years.

A participant, who worked at the school more recently than the group who worked there in the early 1990s, comments on her perception of the current situation. She is referring to the Naskapi teachers when she says, “Well now they eat in the school, but they don’t eat in the staff room. They eat in the classroom. So there’s, you have that division. You have -- and, and it used to be only [Joan] because she came from town, but now you have a lot of them staying for lunch, but they’re all eating in [her] classroom. All the Naskapis eat together” (BG 861). The Naskapi women teachers in this case are perceived as a homogeneous group, “All the Naskapis eat together”. In this case “the Naskapis” may or may not include all the other Naskapi staff who work in the school, for example, the secretary, the community liaison worker, the teacher’s aides, the librarian, the curriculum project technicians, and the custodians.

Over the course of the years since the opening of the school in 1985, elementary level positions have increasingly been secured by

Naskapi women. In recent years, white women have held only two of the ten possible Elementary level positions. The participant, whose observations are included in the previous paragraph, finds it difficult to find membership within the elementary teachers. She struggles to say what she perceives as the defining difference, leaving thoughts unvoiced, until finally explaining it racially. "I find, I don't know, and I don't know where you guys taught in that school, but -- , I find that there's a difference, and maybe I'm wrong, but -- I find that there's a difference between -- like there's a good close working relationship. But then there's, with the teachers there, but then there's the high school teachers, and then there's the elementary teachers, and there's a real -- a real difference in the Elementary because so many of the staff in the Elementary, like there's only two white teachers in the elementary (BG 801).

In the above passage the woman stumbles through naming and avoiding naming what she perceives to be behind the 'difference' among Elementary teachers, a difference that interferes with her ability to be part of the group. What she means by difference is initially unclear; however, eventually she defines how she is racially different. In the next passage, she continues, this time avoiding naming the other group racially, using instead the qualifier "local" to refer to Naskapi teachers. It is possible that at the root of her discomfort is her desire for camaraderie, her desire to belong, which is not met, due to what she

perceives as the fixed characteristic of racial difference. “And, and there’s such a difference in, um, there’s such a difference in the rapport, I think, in the Elementary. Like you have, you have the local teachers who are together, who have lunch together, and then -- you have the high school teachers who are all (emphatic) having lunch together. You know, like, I don’t know. Like, I find that there’s a difference in the, com...what’s the word, -- camaraderie, like in between that. And that’s something that I find really -- difficult.” (BG 801).

Among the women, some employ the discourse of “race as biologically determined” to understand their whiteness. They see it as a permanent, natural characteristic, based on commonly accepted physical features. As one woman commented, “We all got, “You’re white”. Thank you, I know that... Yes, from here to there and it will never change” (AG 1209). Another noted, “I look white to many people who don’t know about or think to look for features of blackness in me. My Dad, who’s a Black man from Jamaica, is paler than someone born into a family of “pure” unmixed African descent [sic]” (ZJ 34). She continued, later in her journal, “Before I went into [the school] to teach, I was aware that I was both white and black. My blackness however is a bloodline more than it is something visible—I was raised largely in a very similar. I have come to understand that my experiences as a child and youth were different than my darker-skinned cousins and others who are visibly minorities as a result... My whiteness blended in, ~~it was a par~~ For the most part, it

meant I could be a member of the invisible majority” (ZJ 38). She notes that her whiteness “blended” in; however, the way she describes her experience the whiteness did not “blend in” to her; rather she blended into the white community; thus her blackness, her black bloodline, as she refers to it, is not visible; it is biologically understood.

Understanding whiteness as biologically determined is, according to Alcoff (1996), the legacy of natural history techniques and the Western preoccupation with classification and categorization applied to humans. The distinguishing characteristics are understood to be visible and physical, however, as Alcoff suggests, “the apparent obviousness of racial difference – the emphasis on hair type, nose, shape and skin colour – is *produced* obviousness” (1996, p. 6). Here Alcoff makes reference to the notion that race is socially constructed. This aligns with the notion that whiteness can be defined as a location of advantage, a way of looking at others and society, and that it is a set of practices that are performed (Dyer, 1988; Frankenberg, 1993; Frankenberg, 1993; Fuller, 2000; Levine-Rasky, 2002; Supriya, 1999).

As Roman and Stanley (1997) point out in their study of youth in discussion around race, individuals often use conflicting discourses in explaining their understanding of race, racism and nationalism. They write that the youth’s understandings are constructions that are informed by common and popular discourses as well as their own experiences of difference and belonging. This complexity is evident in the

following excerpt where one participant is describing a colleague in reference to his practices and behaviors, as well as through observable features. “[He] Is Native, but not from there, and but, I don’t even know, I know he’s Native -- but I don’t think of him that way” (BI 299). I ask for an explanation, and she replies, “Well, because he’s not from Broad Lake Reserve, so number one, he’s so on the ball... [He] is from outside, but he looks white and he acts like I would expect a principal from down south to act. You know, not that I’m sure they all do” (BI 303 – 307).

The woman explains why she does not think of the principal as an Indigenous person. She employs both the discourse of biologically determined racial identity (he looks white) and the discourse of socially constructed identity (like...a principal from down south...act[s]).

Later in the interview, the same participant uses the discourse of race as a social construction to explain why one Naskapi woman teacher might be excluded on the reserve. She explains that this has also been a point of discussion among some of the transient teachers, “Perhaps she lives, and this is going to come out wrong, but in the style of a white person. Do you know what I mean? Like every summer she’s gone and she’s still friendly with [two former transient teachers], and she’s gone to visit them, you know. That, you know, [one transient teacher] often said, she [Naskapi teacher] would like to be white or lives like a white, or whatever, and always hung around with the white teachers and stuff” (BI 335). Another teacher refers to a commonly used expression to describe

the phenomenon of Indigenous people living or behaving in ways thought to typify white people, “ I was told that “Us Indians we have the apple syndrome” “Red outside, white inside” (AJ 23). In these cases, the women associate whiteness with behaviors that, when observed in Indigenous people, are seen to diminish “how” Indigenous a person is.

The notion that some behaviors are *white* or that there are characteristics that go along with whiteness, is an issue for the white women as well as their Indigenous counterparts. There are facets of the perceived white identity and the white experience that the white women would like to refuse. For example, three make mention of history: “Occasionally I would feel guilty for what my ancestors had done, but then I would ask myself, why should we live in the past, we can’t change it, we should move on. In short, sometimes I felt uncomfortable being “white” (MJ9). Another claims, “I don’t feel guilty. Like when I encounter a Native person I don’t cringe. (Change in tone): I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m white. (laughter). But I don’t, I try not to treat them any differently than anybody else that I would see on the street, and you know, that kind of thing. But I’m not proud of the way the white people talk about them. I’m not proud of our – white legacy” (LI 344). The third describes her beliefs before the teaching experience, “I was definitely on the side of the Natives and they could do no wrong. And they were victims and, you know, it was us, we were at fault and sort of had to pay, you know, for our – for the crimes, ‘of the fathers’ (laughter)” (GI 340).

The three women mentioned above struggle to position themselves in relation to the discursive construction of the “white legacy”. Their hesitation to use the word “our”, for example, “our (pause), the crimes”, “our (pause) white legacy” demonstrates that they are wrestling with the idea of ownership and implication. Similarly the first woman’s comment that looking backward does not help you move forward, helps her to disassociate herself from the past.

The current role of white transients on the reserve and in the community is another area that provokes some concern in a fourth participant. She explained, “Students were saying, um, Sec. V. were saying, there’s no jobs out there, and I said, look at all the white people and go for their jobs. They’re surrounded. You go to the nurse. She’s probably white. The doctor’s definitely white. The -- wherever there’s a big decision, it’s white. They have power... they all have jobs, they all have power, they all have money” (AI 252). In this case, the teacher notes that jobs, power and money are what “they” have. In an effort to distance herself from those that hold the money, power and jobs, the woman has not included herself in that group. She has also not included teaching in the list of jobs held by “all the white people”, although teachers hold a sizable percentage of the few permanent jobs on the reserve.

Having one of those permanent jobs also guarantees the women incomes that far exceed what most of the few employed people on the reserve would earn. This is a facet of the job that the same woman seeks

to deny, and does so by disassociation in the following segment, where she distances herself from the “staff”. In this case “staff” can be read as the unmarked white teaching staff. “You know they had, I found the staff, it was important they had everything. Four wheelers, the fishing rods, the pickup trucks, the this, the that. I’ve never been attracted to that. And it’s not because I’m up north I’m going to flash around money” (A I 252). While she may not flash around the money, she still is in possession of it.

Another woman notes the preoccupation the students had with the teachers’ earnings, “They’d say things like, “you’re only here for the money” (ZI 80)¹⁹. The women appeared to enjoy a story one woman told about responding to the money issue with the students. She began, “Well, you’re here for the money. The fourth time I got that question, I took my pay stub, and drew it on the board. And I said, this is money, and they said, “Ohhh (emphatic)...my god, you’re rich.”

The participants laughed at that point, and she continued, “Wait -- Federal tax, income tax, the bloody miscellaneous; ...And at the end, there was silence. I said, ‘This is what I get’. And these kids were, “OH, my god, my father makes more and he’s on welfare.” Well that’s it, any other questions? -- . I wasn’t too aggressive. It was a bit of a joke. And I said, ‘So don’t -- I don’t want to hear that money thing. You all know how much I make now, and I have loans to pay back, too. So that shut them up. But I dealt with that very honestly” (AG 1209-1213). The need to

respond to the students' challenge about money is one that underlines the participant's need to distance herself from the image of the wealthy white. Perhaps she does so because it is part of the job-money-power quotient, and the power is something she seeks to refuse.

Another aspect of the construction of whiteness which some of the women refuse is the notion that the white people "know everything". The woman who used those two words did so with derision, preferring instead to inverse the relationship, yet in doing so, describes the existing imbalance of power, "I was a terrible student learning many things with very patient and understanding Naskapi teachers. I was often called "White woman" in those situations. Maybe for once, they had the upper hand and they did not feel threatened (AM21). So while she constructs herself as the awkward student in contrast to the knowledgeable Naskapi, rendered the authority (teacher), she acknowledges that this was a temporary – for once - reversal in the relationship.

Another woman also wishes to refuse the role of the white person who "knows everything". She writes, "I hope to God no one ever saw me as one of those pushy, invasive, I-know-better-than-you-white people, types -- but who knows. I hope I never forced my opinions on the students or tried to make them think like me" (LJ 12).

Another invokes "unearthly powers" for what appears to be another reason: "And I pray to God that I did not try to "go native" (AM 23). She elaborates in her journal, "To go native" I guess: fish far, hunt far and BE

GOOD at it. I find it odd and bizarre to want to please so badly (AJ 3).

While the participant suggests that this is a characteristic of wanting to please, I believe it is an aspect of the “knows everything” phenomenon. In this case, “going native” would be indicative of mastering aspects of the “other’s” cultural repertoire, and in doing so rendering oneself even more powerful. This, in fact is something the same participant alludes to in the following sequence, “[A transient teacher] once told me that she’s better in the bush than a lot of Natives. That’s something that I would never dare to admit. -- You’re white, you’ll always be white. -- Keep that in mind, it’s the advice I’d give to anyone” (AI 537-545). The issue is not that the transient might not be better, what concerns the woman is that it should not be acknowledged, rather it should be hidden or refused.

Overall, five of the women make reference to being troubled by facets of whiteness: for example, the white role in the past of Indigenous people; images associated with jobs, power and money; and images associated with “knowing everything”. Through their self-representations, which can be understood as moments in the process of identity construction, they seek to distance themselves from these aspects. They depict themselves, instead, as looking to the future, not backward; as not treating Indigenous people differently (or at least trying); as not having excessive wealth, nor knowledge, and as not being among the group of people holding significant jobs, therefore power.

Significantly, the woman who is most preoccupied with distancing herself from the job-money-power-knowledge element of white identity is the woman who felt the most cut off from the white, transient teaching community. Instead, she forged a connection with members of the Naskapi community and is explicit about the “wound” that was part of “the white horror story” she experienced. Perceiving rejection by the white teachers, choosing to “fence” herself off in response to being fenced off by the others, she appears to be seeking to minimize and refuse aspects of white identity. Thus, she aligns and seeks connection with the Naskapi community, and in so doing, crosses the fence. This was manifested most visibly in her relationship with a Naskapi man, a first for the white women teachers in the community. On this point, she declared, “And oh (emphatic) my god, I made history” (AI 457).

At the other end of the spectrum is the one participant who is explicit about *not* wanting to be part of the Naskapi community. In the group session she states, “I’m not part of the community but I choose that. I don’t want to be part of the community. I’m not Naskapi. And I just do my own thing” (HG 1001). As an interesting contrast to the woman above, this participant readily acknowledges that the only reason she teaches is for the money (HI 41), which permits her to live where she chooses. She also describes, unselfconsciously, that as a teacher she is required to be an all-knowing person who tells people what to do (HI 77). While she claims she does not enjoy doing so, and struggles with the

power that she believes teachers must hold, she does not deny her active participation in such a role.

In the first section of this chapter the women's work around the perception of a division between the white and Naskapi communities is highlighted; the exploration of Brenda's monologue demonstrates how the perception of the differences between the two communities has a significant impact on her beliefs about her abilities. The subsequent investigation of how the differences are constructed and the notion of the invisibility of whiteness demonstrate the impact of these phenomena on the Naskapi community members: the Naskapi people are repeatedly constructed as an undifferentiated, homogenous group. Further, Naskapi women teachers are caught between the two categories of Naskapi and white, and thus, disappear. The exploration of the monologue that follows, written by Ann, demonstrates the impact of divisions within the white community on one woman's experience. Once again, the process is intended to help the reader understand the conflicting ways through which individuals attribute meaning to an experience. Once again, I am taking that position that the monologue, through the writer's work to capture the meaning of an experience, allows us to take a close look at how identity is constructed.

Ann

Ann arrived in the community with previous experience as a teacher. She had worked in the south as well as for one year in another isolated Indigenous community in the north. In her previous isolated Indigenous teaching experience, she had been told, “You’re not at home, don’t try to change them” (AI 171). This was something that stayed with her, “I kept it. I’m not at home, I’m not going to change them. They’re not going to change me, either...I know I recognize the Naskapi culture, it’s a different culture, and all, I can see it” (AI 171).

Ann believes that learning will be meaningful to the students, if it has some impact in their future. Ann’s understanding of culture is incorporated into her vision of how to make the learning meaningful. “My language, their vision” (AM 11) is how she explains it in her monologue. For Ann the activities she uses in class focus on bridging the gap between northern life and life in the south. Ann’s monologue gives detailed descriptions of specific learning activities developed for the Naskapi students, however the importance of the monologue lies not in the pedagogy, nor in what is said, but rather what remains unsaid.

Ann’s Monologue:

When I first got to Broad Lake Reserve, [the principal] told me: “I want one thing from you: love these kids.” I really took it to heart and often think about it. It was not difficult: the kids were great and

I did not really have a programme to teach. French as a Third language does not exist. I did not have books or exercise books, I had bits and pieces. I used a French as a Second Language Programme and adapted it: the Grade 8 would have the Grade 7 expectations, etc. I really felt I was teaching a Third language because I found that the Second language was a bit shaky in the younger grades. I liked the fact that I could do whatever I wanted to do: one vast field, no restrictions...but lots of photocopying ahead...A white (ha ha) page. It was tons of work because I was teaching Grade 4 and up (8 groups) "visiting classrooms" so my stay in those classrooms was short, therefore I did not teach the "tough" groups (I can not recall any tonight) for more than one period. Thus, the academic aspect was great.

I like the fact that they were children. Giggly, easily bored and chatty, oh they were chatty and quick to laugh. In Grade 4 I had bought old and wild clothing. They did not study (mea culpa, I never gave a detention for "not studying", I instead tried to have it done in class or after school with juice-and-cookies-paid-by-the-Band-Council). So, when I thought that we had seen enough of the clothing vocabulary, one student would secretly dress up and the one who could describe in French the clothing and colour would dress up next. I remember the sound of those vocabulary sheets flipping and those little fingers looking for words. They were so easy to teach. They were their age: young, silly and they were children. Again, I was there for a short while. Maybe they were not so cute on a Friday afternoon before Goose Break, last period...I do not recall any students that I did not really, really like. Here in the South, yes there are students that...well I wish I was not teaching. It is brutally honest on my part but it is a fact. The difference is that here in the South, there are students that I am highly uncomfortable with: violent or very odd. In the North I never feared them. I remember getting mad once in class: everybody laughed, [Jonathan] imitated me and begged me to do it again. He was not sarcastic or mean: I found myself laughing too. Every time I say in the South that I taught Aboriginal students I felt an immediate respect: "Oh it must have been hard..." And I always say that no, it was pleasant and easy. Teaching in the South is much, much harder.

In my first year in Broad Lake Reserve, I remember a student big strong in Sec 3 that hated French. After 2 weeks he yelled in

class: "Miss I hate French and I hate you." The whole class went silent and watched me with high interest. I felt like a porn movie: everybody was finally, totally interested by me. My too-quick reaction was to mumble a "Noooooooooooo" and I pretended to cry, looking up at the ceiling and asking by hand gesture: Why me, oh why me? The whole class laughed but I immediately felt bad for the student: Did I just crushed (sic) his feelings? His self-esteem? As everybody laughed, his cousin yelled back: "That's a good one Miss". After class I explained to my victim that by no mean did I try to hurt him and I went on and on. He stopped, looked at me, laughed and said, "Yep. But it was a good one Miss." Only in Broad Lake. As I write I wonder if you did not get complaints from students and you never told me. What if I was the shame of the school and was never told? Was I too stupid to see I was a failure?

I often think of your comments that discreetly implied I was using too many lists, that there were too many maybe, you never know, vocabulary sheets. As the years went by I think the lists decreased a lot...On my second year I was given a counselor-for-girls job. A Broad Lake creation. Yes I did have confidence from students and I tried my best to help them. Yes, I did get heavy cases but I swore that I would never talk about it and would like to keep my word. I know that this paper is confidential but even if I were to use one of the "lesser" situation, I would still betray that students who maybe even forgot about it. I never told anyone and never will. Please do not take it personally: I totally trust you. Anyway, I had come to realize that students were badly prepared to live down South after they graduated. So, in my Sec. V class, I decided that some of my French lessons would be on living in the South. I had students looking for an apartment (I had bought newspapers). Students were in shock to discover that some adds were: "3 ½ proper, eclaire, chauffe, planchers bois franc. "Clean? You mean some are dirty? Some have no light? No heat? And the hardwood floors had them puzzled: They all wanted carpet. For the first time in my life I discovered my language and their vision, their reasoning. I also made them made a budget (based on the Band Council allowance for students) and bought furniture with IKEA catalogues I had ordered for them. No one bought curtains, pots or pans or utensils. I also had to explain that a twin bed was for one person, not two. I wanted them to be ready for the South with its

bills, deadlines and madness. There again, I was a happy teacher: I felt I was maybe, useful that maybe, this would really help them in the future. Small details to you but such joyful moments to me. Little tiny memories that when lined up, made my stay so pleasant. The year after I got a phone call from [one of the students].

- Miss, I did your trick!

- My what?

- Your trick, you know the 21/2, the 31/2 Remember you taught us? It's true. That's how you find an apartment down here.

I was surprised that he would call me to say that and the "it's true" part had me wonder... then he told me about his life. A few months after he was dead. To this day I wonder if he called for that or maybe he wanted to talk and I was just too dumb not to see it. I often think about it.

As I look back, I have about students and the reserve nothing but pleasant memories. But as I stayed, the closer the reserve became. Tragedy would strike and I would know the person or a relative. I was asked more and more, to translate a letter, a note, or help write a eulogy. I had to translate a suicide note. In order to respect the style, THE SOUL, I translated it in English in the same choppy, sad and simple way. I was criticized about that unusual translation by White staff members and I could not explain my decision. Maybe it was a bad call on my part.

I was asked to live on the reserve by a couple of friends of mine. I think I know why the reserve was fine by me: I am a smoker. When I went out for a "pit stop", 99% of the time it was with a Naskapi. And smokers around the world talk to each other. We are an ostracized minority these days. We stick together. Yes, I frequented a Naskapi but I do not think it made me more accepted. My first friends were Naskapi. They had a wonderful lethal sense of humour, which I appreciated and I like them the way I like other people. I had my friends and my not-so-good-an-acquaintance. I guess I was lucky (but not the only one) to go camping, to go to people's cabin, to do a sweat lodge, to play Bingo on the Reserve or just hang out for coffee or sleep over. I was more often on the Reserve than "they" were at my place. I did not realize that till today. The only times where I felt different were when they would speak in Naskapi: it was pretty lonely then but many would translate and keep-me-posted as the

conversation went. NO< SORRY< CORRECTION. I was totally different. I went fishing and caught my student, a tree and the bridge. I still cannot play Bingo alone: it is too fast for me. Do not leave me alone in the bush: I have zero survival skills (I was even told that the way I walk in the bush, would not allow me to survive). My Naskapi was bad and minimal. I brought my nightgown on my first camping trip (how was I supposed to know?) I was a terrible basketball player and endured numerous jokes on my lack of skills from students even though I played only once "in public". I did not have a truck on my first years and drove [an] old "Jimmy-truck-with-a-Saran-Wrap-window" the year after that the students laughed at. A student told me in front of the whole class that her grandmother had told her to tell me that when I go to the washroom in the bush, that I should go really far from the road. I still shiver at that thought. All those situations but for the last one brought teasing and joking and laughter on both sides. Maybe in those moments I was no longer a White teacher who knows and owns everything. I was a terrible student learning many things with very patient and understanding Naskapi teachers. I was often called "White woman" in those situations. Maybe for once, they had the upper hand and they did not feel threatened. They landed a dumb one. And I was.

I did get busy on the reserve: fundraising, organizing trips, doing Bingo, video nights, dances, tournaments, bake sales etc. I enjoyed doing those. I never got a thank you and I did not expect it or demand it. However, I have to confess, and this is confidential. On my second year, I did not pay for the snow removal service: it was too much. I paid the snow-truck guy once \$20.00 so he would open my driveway. After that, it was always open. I did not say anything, thinking it was a nice mistake. The year after, my driveway was still open and I had no idea who did it. I moved into a different house. My driveway was still being open. One day my driveway was huge: the job done was great: not a spec of snow! That night at the legion, this guy at the bar said to me: "So, how do you like your driveway?" I looked at him: I did not know him. I explained to him that it was great but that actually I never asked nor paid for the service and that...he took his beer and said: "I know. But you are nice." and walked away. My driveway was cleaned for the rest of my stay in Ridgeville. I still do not know his name. Stories like that down South are not very common.

In the North they are possible. I think of it as a thank you. I never felt used, either. I lent money twice in 4 years. I was not a super-white that says yes out of her heart because she feels-sorry-for-the-Indians. I did not give rides right and left. Did not buy beer for anyone. One student was with me at [the convenience store] and I said hello to the "drunks" outside. That student looked at me and said that I was talking to anyone. I replied to her that they were people and that yes, I spoke to everyone.

Students knew somehow that I was leaving. On my last day I had no choice but to say farewell to each class, holding back tears. I was just another white taking off after a while. Another one leaving. To my surprise, a shy and quiet student in Grade 6 cried and asked me if I would come back. I honestly told her that it was a possibility. I was not sure to never come back. But another student turned to her and said: Whites never come back.

Exploration of Ann's Monologue

In her explanation of how she arrived at the finished monologue, Ann makes a statement about her choices. "What is significant with me is what is synonymous with um (pause) positive, somehow" (MI 27). The word, "somehow" trails behind, and with it, the aspects of the northern experience that I suspect she would prefer to leave behind. She attempts to make a joke of this, "Um I could recite the white horror story -- so -- whoa, I'm being recorded (laughter) so I concentrated on the positive stuff" (AI 27). The contrast between the "white horror story" and the "positive stuff" needs attention.

The monologue describes a series of, as Ann explains, "Little tiny memories that when lined up, made my stay so pleasant" (AM 11). Near the beginning of the text she explains the pleasure of being able to plan without restrictions, and notes that this aspect, along with the students

themselves, resulted in what she describes as an ideal situation, “It was not difficult: the kids were great... the academic aspect was great” (AM 5). She explains her reaction when now faced with people’s discovery that she worked up north, “ ‘Oh (emphatic) it must have been hard...’ And I always say that no, it was pleasant and easy” (AM 7). Here, given the opportunity to characterize the difficulties of the experience, she makes a point to “always” describe it as “pleasant and easy.” Thus, she makes a disavowal of the negativity of the experience.

Following an introduction, Ann continues to name the “memories”, this time moving onto facets that demonstrate her ability as a teacher. For example, she was able to use humour to diffuse difficult situations with difficult students at school, and she had the student’s confidence when she became the counselor for the girls. She gives an example of a lesson she had taught that students were able to make use of while living in the city. All of the memories construct an image of a highly skilled and creative teacher.

Ann moves on to the social facet of the experience, explaining that her first friends were Naskapi and that despite not knowing the language, she enjoyed laughter, teasing and companionship on the reserve. This is an issue that is also evident in the interview, where Ann explains the ease with which she made friends with Naskapi staff members and community members (AI 497). She lists the activities they would have done together, “to go camping, to go to people’s cabin, to do

a sweat lodge, to play Bingo on the Reserve or just hang out for coffee or sleep over” (AM 21). She includes the point that she was asked by friends to live on the reserve, and makes mention that she was also accepted by the Montagnais; this she demonstrates with an anecdote about having years of anonymous snow clearing, because she was told she was considered to be “nice”.

The importance of membership and acceptance, and of highlighting the aspects of the experience that show mutual appreciation are cornerstones of the monologue. Thus the last paragraph requires a closer look. It reads, “On my last day I had no choice but to say farewell to each class, holding back tears. I was just another white taking off after a while. Another one leaving. To my surprise, a shy and quiet student in Grade 6 cried and asked me if I would come back. I honestly told her that it was a possibility. I was not sure to never come back. But another student turned to her and said: Whites never come back” (AM25).

It might be claimed that the last paragraph shows Ann’s ambivalence about being, “Just another white taking off after a while. Another one leaving”. The self-representations in the monologue build an image of someone who was *not* “just another white”. Ann has connected with the community in a way that few other white teachers had; she had detailed this in the monologue. She makes the point of naming the only other white woman teacher who “was very comfortable on the reserve” (AI 521) during the four years Ann worked there. She is aware that this level

of comfort sets her apart, and that her self-representation shows her to be unique, yet she hesitates to answer her own rhetorical question, “Why (emphatic) did I connect, when others didn’t?” (AI 533).

It might be possible to suggest that Ann’s interest in the community is an indication that she has taken up the position of Lady Traveler (Harper, 2000a). For example, in the interview, Ann, who has worked in Europe, speaks of her thirst to discover other locations, “London, the Middle East or Asia. It’s itching me” (AI 260). Ann’s distancing from the white community might be explained by Harper’s suggestion that Lady Travelers must keep their distance from their own group. Harper writes, “if she is seen as too much the outsider, too white, it would be difficult for her to investigate and experience the other” (2000a, p. 133). On this notion, Ann makes a point in her journal of underlining that being the outsider was not an issue. She consciously appears to set herself apart from the other white teachers. “ ‘Being different’ never bothered me so I ended up dating a Native person. It was gossip galore for the reserve and the whites. I could not care less” (AM 23). She follows up on this in the interview; she made the point of telling me that the students never used this personal information against her. When I asked her if she knew why, her reply focused on how dating a Naskapi man set her apart. “I don’t know, but I was the first one, and oh (emphatic) my god, I made history -- I don’t know. I don’t know” (AI 457).

While Harper's (2000a) notion of the Lady Traveler seems pertinent, Ann's identification with the position is only partial; her creative and dynamic work as a teacher and the care with which she acted far surpass the role of investigator suggested by descriptions of the Lady Traveler. Further, Ann's experience unfolded in a way that prevented her from being both an insider and an outsider, as is suggested by Harper (2000a). This aspect of Ann's experience, her difficulty being both inside and outside the white community, is picked up the section that follows.

In the group session, the other participants had spoken at length about the rift between them and the Naskapi community members. One explains that she did not visit Naskapi homes for fear of being a voyeur. Others explain that they have maintained no connections with community members after their departure. Even the woman who has married a member of the community describes feeling isolated and disconnected. Yet, Ann has many stories of being connected.

In the monologue, Ann writes, "As I look back, I have about students and the reserve nothing but pleasant memories" (MM 19). The monologue is an effort to describe only those pleasant memories. Significantly, and in contrast to the "pleasant memories" depicted, there are several important elements of working in the isolated, Indigenous community have that been almost entirely omitted from the monologue. These are, notably, life in the school and relationships with white

colleagues. These are facets of the experience that Ann makes detailed mention of in her journal, in the interview and in the group discussion, but they receive little or no mention in the monologue.

The omitted aspects, school life and staff relations, are parts of the “white horror story” (AI 27), to which Ann alludes in the interview. The difficulties around these aspects make themselves heard, briefly, in the monologue, where Ann explains colleagues’ reactions to her efforts to translate a suicide note from French for a relative of the individual who had taken his life. She writes, “In order to respect the style, THE SOUL, I translated it in English in the same choppy, sad and simple way. I was criticized about that unusual translation by White staff members and I could not explain my decision”(AM 19). Her use of capital letters for the words, THE SOUL, answers for us, why she translated it as she did.

In the monologue, in reference to the translation, she writes, “Maybe it was a bad call on my part.” I asked her about that line. She speaks about it in the interview; it was a moment that was quite emotional for her. Despite her claim *in the monologue* that the way she translated it might have been “a bad call”, she is firm about the choice she made *in the interview*. “I couldn’t. I could not -- I feel like crying. It was choppy French. I still have it if you want to see it, one day. It was choppy. It was sad. And I thought, the guy is dead, I have no right to -- soften out the wrinkles...To make it look better. It was beautiful, what he was saying, and -- I couldn’t -- I -- . To this day, I would do the same

thing, and it wasn't to make him look bad. It's just the way it was written. "Je t'embrasse fort, fort" is hard to translate...And it was just so sad...It's what he said last, and this is what you're going to read. I'm not going to make him, make it nicer (emphasis), or whiter (emphasis, voice cracking)" (AI 137 – 151).

The last two sentences in the above passage from the interview shift from an explanation of the events, to a direct response to the white staff members to whom (in the monologue) Ann states she was unable to give an explanation for her translation. While the passage in the monologue appears to focus on a sad event on the reserve, it is the troubling issue of Ann's relationship with the white staff members that makes itself heard through the anecdote.

In the journal Ann had hinted at what drew her focus (in her monologue) to the students and the reserve. "Maybe the reserve offered the relief I needed. Maybe that is why I "got busy" with dances, bingos, bake sales. Frustrating at times but never "conniving"/sneaky people that would use any mistakes I would make as a weapon" (AJ 28). The rejection that Ann felt is clear in the journal, "I was an outcast in that school as the years went by ...A vast majority (at the end of my stay) was out-to-kill. No jokes or laughter if not on someone's misfortune. That is my perspective. They probably have wonderful memories: they were among colleagues who were friends" (AJ 28). The last two sentences underline how Ann felt she was not considered a colleague, nor a friend.

Thus she was not an insider. The words “they probably have wonderful memories” imply that Ann’s memories of her experience with her colleagues have not been wonderful.

In her journal she explains how the isolation began, when the linguistic and cultural group to which she claims membership was repeatedly the object of scorn. “I remember feeling at the lowest level: They would not/dare not criticize Aboriginals that way but bashing [my people] was alright. I recall thinking so that’s how it feels to be on the other side of the fence: trampled on, no remorse...So I started fencing up my life: hang out with anything but white teachers that I trusted less and less. (I apologize for that selfish story)” (AJ 3). In fencing up her life, Ann began identifying with those she saw on the “other” side of the fence.

Ann’s apology at the end of the entry in the last paragraph is a rhetorical strategy that repeats itself elsewhere in the monologue, where she appears to doubt her judgment. The most significant example is in reference to her work with students where she writes, “Was I too stupid to see I was a failure?” (AM 9). The significance of this comment is that all Ann’s representations of classroom interactions underline that she did *not* believe herself to be a “failure” as a teacher, thus the difficulties she faced in the school were not related to her professional ability, but to other facets of who she was.

In the group discussion Ann mentions the group dynamics during her years at the school; another participant, who worked there at the

same time, confirmed some of what Ann said, which was, “The lethal ones were white....feeding off each other, and I’ve seen teachers being chewed away.....that wouldn’t happened down south. But up north, go for it, have fun -- .And there’s another teacher, she said, “Oh up there, people watch you walk, and they’re just waiting for you to fall. They know the hole is there” (AG 869 – 877).

The language Ann uses paints a harsh picture of the white staff members: conniving, sneaky, out to kill, lethal, chewing away and feeding off each other. She draws attention to the way in which aggressivity, envy, hostility and hate can be part of group dynamics (Britzman, 1998). It is no surprise that Ann describes feeling injured as she explains in the last paragraph in her journal. In the excerpt, she describes that she has received an unexpected gift upon departure. Of the person who gave it to her, she writes, “He appeased my wounds as I left” (AJ 28).

The anecdote from which this was taken deserves a closer look. She writes, “By spending so much time at school I become a co-worker of the custodians. We could chat, talk and laugh. When I left for good, I was given gifts (and told about them by a white teacher who implied “he had to” and “it was cheap”. As I was packing my “office,” the custodian came at 8:00 am at school. He smelled like alcohol a mile away. He just said: You’re leaving for real?” “And I said “yes”. He gave me an old brown bag and said: “That’s for you.” It was one of those “painted mirror”

usually made in jail. “A prison craft specialty.” I have kept the mirror...and the bag. He was the last proof that, I do not know how to say it. He appeased my wounds as I left” (AJ 28).

With this anecdote, Ann represents her ability to befriend others, and to be non-judgmental regardless of other’s habits and history. This representation is set against that of the white staff member whose comments diminish both Ann and the person who gave her the gift. While clearly Ann does not want to identify with the white staff members’ behavior, the wound she feels is a result of having felt excluded from the white teaching community. While it appears she wishes to create an image of a happy social life on the reserve and satisfying teaching experiences, she nonetheless felt compelled to leave, if not driven to leave. In the interview she mentions an episode with one of the white staff members. She explains, “At one point he played a song for me, and it was, “Hey little girl why don’t you get out of this town, hey little girl no one wants you around” (AI 223). This episode underlines the extent to which the hostility toward Ann was openly expressed.

Ann left the community, despite the richness of her classroom life and despite Naskapi friends who did “want her around”. The data suggests that the experience of being aggressively rejected by her colleagues remains the most defining feature of the experience. This rendered life in the north unbearable for her. In the interview she explains, “I couldn’t go on like that” (AI 373).

Ann's experience raises the issue of how relationships in the workplace have an impact on one's professional identity and the way we find meaning in our work. While the reserve provided some relief and comfort for Ann, the overall size of the northern community and the fact that it is isolated meant that there was no escaping the white teaching community of which she had been told she was not a part. In describing her life now, where she currently teaches in the city, she explains that she does not socialize with other teachers and that she chooses not to live in the district in which the school is located.

The cases of Ann and Brenda demonstrate that community, and the social and psychological dynamics of the context in which teachers find themselves, will play significant roles in the negotiation of their professional identity. Further, the experiences of the two women demonstrate that the way these dynamics influence an individual's experience will differ dramatically. Brenda attempts unsuccessfully to find an opening in the fence that she believes divides the white and Naskapi communities. She struggles with the thought that her only option may be to leave the community for a different place where she would be needed as a teacher. Ann, on the other hand, is fenced off from the white community, yet finds welcome in the Naskapi community, having crossed that fence with apparent ease. Welcome in the Naskapi community, however, is not enough, perhaps because the exclusionary practices of the white community prevent Ann from receiving any

acknowledgement or support from her colleagues despite her skilled practice as a teacher. The situation becomes too painful for Ann to bear and leaving the north becomes the only option. Thus, issues of community, relationships, membership and belonging significantly influence how Ann and Brenda construct their professional identity. Further community, relationship, membership and belonging appear to prevent them from realizing their dreams as teachers.

The monologue that follows, written by Marie, presents the case of a woman whose experience in the north, and experience of “community”, contrasts sharply with those of Brenda and Ann.

Marie

The circumstances under which Marie arrived in the north were unlike those of all the other women in this study. Marie had not gone through teacher training, had no desire to teach, but agreed to move north to fill a position on short notice. She did not have much time to think through the decision, but decided she had nothing to lose. She recalls reacting as follows, “When I landed and took a look around --, I thought what am I doing here? Put my luggage back on the plane -- I’m leaving” (MI 159).

Marie's Monologue

Note: Ellipses used by the writer have been retained and do not indicate that sections of the text have been removed.

Ridgeville ... a place filled with contradictions. Incredible scenery, a sense of freedom, tranquility, and of the infinite, but at the same time, it's a place of suffering, helplessness, and decadence.

I was 22 years old, almost 23, when I left for Ridgeville. I came from a francophone background, with a terrible French accent when I spoke English. I was hired as a French second language teacher at the secondary level. Me, with no qualifications, in a Native school, in an isolated environment in which the culture was foreign to me. I had no idea that I would find myself flung into an adventure that would change the course of my life.

Indeed, as a recreation technician, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do in life, and oddly, I didn't aspire to becoming a teacher. Today, I am proud to work as a special education teacher. The children I work with are different in that they have special needs, but they remain nonetheless children.

I left for Ridgeville with the idea that I would revolutionize the world, that I would enable Native children to discover another reality, and that, in a way, I would save them. Was I ever surprised! Rather, it's those kids who saved me... Thanks to this experience, I discovered qualities that were hidden in me, and whose existence I never suspected. I discovered that I had great inner strength and that this strength could help me get to where I wanted to go.

In my first year of teaching, I worked so hard to try to be a teacher, worthy of that name. How many walls I had to break through to try to create a relationship based on trust with my students! And all the while, harbouring the feeling that I wasn't qualified - and therefore incompetent - and fearing that I would be discovered and lose all credibility. The dread haunted me for a long time.

I also continued to feel isolated, as I had the impression I had been parachuted into another world. I fell ill very easily because I worked long hours, and I would allow myself almost no time to rest.

As the days and months and years passed, I developed relationships with my colleagues. Slowly, I began to feel better,

thanks to their support, their encouragement and their advice. I felt more at ease, and consequently, less isolated. These people became, for me, as important as my family.

I became a teacher as I was given the opportunity (and I believe it was a good opportunity) to develop my competencies directly in the classroom while taking correspondence courses. In any case, today I'm fully aware that even if I had been "legally qualified," I don't think I would have been better prepared for what I was about to experience. Perhaps I would have felt safer with a diploma in my back pocket, because I might have allowed myself to rely on my knowledge.

The decision to work with special needs children came after my experience working with Native children. I knew that I wanted to continue to teach when I returned to the South, but I also wanted to be better prepared for it.

In Ridgeville, I had the impression that I lacked resources to respond to the needs of students who I now realize were children with special needs or with specific learning disabilities. But at the time, I believed I was incompetent because I lacked confidence in myself and in my knowledge.

My teaching style today is no different from the one I had in Ridgeville, in that I aim to establish a relationship with my students that is based on trust and mutual appreciation. As much as possible, I try to respect the learning style and pace of my students all the while diversifying my teaching in order to better respond to their needs. And above all, I aim to respect their cultural differences, and their personal values and beliefs.

Teaching in the South is not really different. We are confronted with the same problems, of drugs, alcohol, sexual abuse, physical and verbal violence, lack of parental support... There are as many cultural differences in schools in the South as there were in the school where I taught in Ridgeville. In my opinion, the only difference between the North and the South is the physical isolation. In the South, we do not have more resources to respond to the needs of the children, and in addition, there is too often a lack of support from our colleagues. I believed that everything would be different in the South, that teaching would be easier, more rewarding. In a word, I thought that everything would be great, but I realize now that's not the case... One day a person I admire tremendously told me "if you

'touch' a child in your day, then you've accomplished something." And so, each day, I tell myself that I'll try to "touch" one child, and tomorrow it'll be two, and so on.

The days, the months, and the years passed. One fine day, it was decided that we would leave, that we would return to the South. What joy!!! The whole family then moved to Montreal. It was as traumatizing to return to Montreal as it had been to leave for Ridgeville. The first months, I was filled with a sense of great joy, but slowly I became more and more depressed. I felt more isolated in a big city than when I lived in Ridgeville. I didn't see my friends anymore; I didn't know anyone. I had lost my identity and had even less of a social status. I felt as though I was nobody. I went back to school to obtain a B.A. in special needs education.

Today, I'm building a new life in a quiet corner of the Eastern Townships but... my thoughts often fly towards Ridgeville, and it's as though I have left part of myself there!

I became the teacher that I am today thanks to my experience and to the opportunity that I had to meet marvellous people who do exceptional work, who practically give themselves body and soul to offer a quality education to Native children, but also to offer assistance to the new kid on the block! These people have become, for me, role models.

For me, Ridgeville was an enriching experience as much on a personal level as a professional one. I'm not saying that it was easy and without obstacles... I'm not saying that I never wanted to throw up my hands and leave... I'm not saying it was always joyful and happy... I'm not saying it was easy to accept and respect the values of another culture... I'm not saying that I never felt alone... I'm not saying that I never felt fear, sadness and helplessness... I'm not saying that... On the other hand, I'm saying that for me, at the time in my life at which I lived it, this experience helped me grow, and above all, it helped me become who I am today.

Exploration of Marie's Monologue

Marie appears to have used the monologue to describe the impact that the northern experience has had on her life. Her text describes the

movement from being and feeling unqualified; to recognizing personal ability, developing competency and gaining membership in the teacher community; and then moves on to the decision to become legally certified, and the impact of the return south on her self-perception.

In the interview Marie explains that she felt she had to include all these aspects of the experience. “I couldn’t take just one part. Because, for me -- it was the point, if you will, that triggered the rest, I think” (MI 45). The “rest”, in this case, refers to the meaning she found for herself, the identity she would construct through the experience of being up north.

The offer to teach had coincided with a time in her life when she was not only lacking direction, but was also feeling hopeless. She explains, “You know my life made no sense. I wanted to commit, commit suicide, and all that, and I didn’t know what to do with my life, and blablablablabla” (MI 53). She was leaving what she describes as a “catastrophe” at home, but in making the decision to do so, changed what she feels was the course of her life. “I left, I wasn’t a teacher. It’s not something I considered doing with my life. Okay, -- from that, it’s like I discovered a career. Because, when I left I wasn’t thinking about what I would do. From the moment I got the offer, I felt confused -- . So, when I left, it helped me to discover something different, it gave me some kind of meaning” (MI 53).

While she claims in the monologue, “It’s those kids who saved me” (MM 4), she made a decision to save herself. She says, “I will always remember the first day of school, when I arrived. [The principal] gave me the programs, and said, ”You’re going to swim or you’re going to sink -- And I thought, ‘Oh [hell]!’ That sticks with me, and I thought, No, no -- I’m not going to sink, I have to swim. And then I started” (MI 169 - 174). The metaphor “sink or swim” would carry weight for someone already feeling she was unable to stay afloat in her life in the city.

In moving north to work in an isolated, Indigenous community, Marie found herself to be not only culturally different from the Naskapi, but also a Francophone in contrast to the other white teachers, who were Anglophones from Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Most significantly, however, was her perception that she was not a teacher, but was masquerading as one. “You’re young, you’re new, but you’re not ...” (MI 165). The sentence is left incomplete, instead, she explains, “Even though you know you’ve been hired, you know you don’t necessarily have everything needed to do the job” (MI 165).

Without having gone through formal training, and having taken little time to reflect on the decision to teach and what that might entail, Marie was faced with the question of what it means to be a teacher and whether one can teach, but not *be* a legally qualified teacher. Her words, “but you’re not....” signal her understanding that she was not a teacher. In her monologue, she writes, “In my first year of teaching, I worked so

hard to try to be a teacher worthy of that name” (MM 5). Marie draws on four key sources in her construction of the role of ‘worthy’ teacher. She draws on her own experience as a student, on a past relationship with a teacher, on her observations of the teachers in the school in the isolated, Indigenous community and on training she engaged in through correspondence.

One of the significant influences in Marie’s construction of a teacher identity is her own experience in school, which had been largely negative, “My primary years were hell. Pure hell” (MI 113), she explained. Secondary school was equally difficult, and she suggests this had an impact on both her inability to imagine herself as a teacher, yet her ability to relate to students. “I was in the PC [discipline problem] class for a year, for behavior troubles. I was followed by a psychologist. (laughter). On some level, I just didn’t see myself as a teacher. On the other hand, now, I think to myself, you know, I can understand the kids I work with, because I can look back on what I had to deal with. It’s true that I didn’t have to cope with a dysfunctional family, and all that. But still I can understand that school -- they don’t like school, and why they don’t like school. I can understand” (MI 113). Thus, she explains, “Whenever I am teaching, I think to myself, I’ve been there too. I can reflect back on the negative experiences. And I don’t want the students to experience that” (MI 113).

Marie's construction is also based on the quality of the relationship between student and teacher. In reference to the first year, she writes, "How many walls I had to break through to try to create a relationship based on trust with my students!" (MM 5) When I asked her in the interview about teachers in her own past, she refers to a woman she "found to be special". "I can't remember her name -- but I have it because she wrote, she wrote me a note. When I graduated from Secondary V, she wrote me a note, and I kept it. Oh yes" (MI 250). I asked her why she kept the note and she replied, "Because -- I found, I found her to be special -- I fooled around a lot in her course, but I didn't disturb the class, and I wasn't impolite, but I was fooling around all the time. And she said, 'You know, Marie, I know you're able to do this.' And, one day, I said to her, 'Why haven't you sent me to the principal?' 'Why should I send you to the principal?' I fooled around, but I did all my work -- She said, 'You're not really disturbing others, it's doesn't bother me, so why' - - in the end, I know you have the potential, when you know how to discover it, you'll be fine --. That has always stuck with me. I'm not sure why. She was special, that woman" (MI 250 – 254). What is significant is the teacher's demonstration of belief in Marie's ability to discover and develop her potential, and the importance Marie places on this. Thus, while the teacher is described as "special", she in fact had made Marie feel special.

The acceptance Marie experienced through the way in which the teacher related to her influences the way in which she seeks to relate to her own students. The teacher is a model on which Marie draws as she constructs her own professional identity. This is evident in the monologue where she describes the way she began to teach up north, and the way in which she continues to teach. She writes, “I aim to establish a relationship with my students that is based on trust and mutual appreciation. As much as possible, I try to respect the learning style and pace of my students all the while diversifying my teaching in order to better respond to their needs. And above all, I aim to respect their cultural differences, and their personal values and beliefs” (MM 11).

The third significant influence discernable in Marie’s construction of a ‘worthy’ teacher is the group of colleagues with whom she found herself up north. She explains that when she arrived, she noticed the teachers around her had a rhythm. She watched the way people did things, she explains, “And I thought about the way I was, what should I do, how am I going to do it? How should I answer questions, trying to be nice all the time (laughter)” (MI 165). She adds, “I learned things, I spoke with others, I got help” (MI 189). She drew on the support, encouragement and advice of her colleagues (MM 7), while modeling herself after them.

The team of teachers on who Marie modeled herself appeared to exemplify characteristics similar to those that she pinpoints in the

teacher from her past. “We all respected each other, each in their own way, for each other, despite the differences...we didn’t focus on the negative, I think we focused on the positive... We were together at school, and but we were together outside of school, too. So it was like, you know, this person did this, but -- she also has such and such quality -- I think, anyway, in general, that’s what it was. We all came from different backgrounds, we all came with -- different baggage....We wouldn’t leave anyone behind, even if we liked them less, we wouldn’t leave them, you know ...We would help each other. It was just done” (MI 406).

Significantly, in describing the group as socializing outside of school, we can identify the models that Marie chose were the white teachers. This is a point I will return to.

In the first year, Marie focused her attention on the construction of her professional identity through fostering the types of relationships with students and teachers described above; yet without the formal qualification, she still felt unworthy. She describes all her efforts, but adds that she was, “All the while, harbouring the feeling that I wasn’t qualified and therefore incompetent and fearing that I would be discovered and lose all credibility. This dread haunted me for a long time” (MM 5).

This notion, that qualifications *make* the teacher, was the fourth facet of Marie’s version of the “worthy” teacher. She explains, “What I was afraid of, was that the students, because you know, they test you,

you know. And I thought, what if they find out I'm, I'm not qualified -- it would come back and hit me over and over in the face. Any mistake I make will be, "It's because you're not qualified. Because you -- , so I was always fearful of that, with the students, with the principal, and with the other teachers" (MI 182). Thus, she engaged in correspondence courses.

At this point, Marie believes that training would not have prepared her for what she faced, "I'm fully aware that even if I had been 'legally qualified,' I don't think I would have been better prepared for what I was about to experience" (MM 8). She feels, "that part of teaching is good sense" and adds, "I think there are things we do instinctively that are good, because in teaching you are constantly making decisions...and you have to make good decisions and I don't think university can teach you that. I think you have it, or you don't, on some level...There are teachers who are teachers, and then there are teachers who are trained" (MI 206, 210, 212).

Marie's experience in the north gave her the sense that she is a teacher – *who is a teacher*, not someone who is simply *trained*. This was underlined when she completed her studies, after leaving the community. She discovered, "There were things that I was doing, that I didn't know were the right things to do -- When I was doing my degree, it confirmed the things I have been doing" (MI 186).

The "qualifications" aspect of what it means to be "worthy" of the name, teacher, was raised three times for Marie. Originally, she sought

the courses to help her deal with the feelings of being inadequately prepared, and the dread of being found out. After several years of work in the school, the Director of Instructional Services for the school board raised the issue with her as well. He was concerned because she was unable to secure permanent employment without the qualifications. It was, however, the return to the south that underlined the significant place that qualifications would hold in the construction of Marie's identity. She writes, "It was as traumatizing to return to [the city] as it had been to leave for [the north]. The first months, I was filled with a sense of great joy, but slowly I became more and more depressed. I felt more isolated in a big city than when I lived in [the north]. I didn't see my friends anymore; I didn't know anyone. I had lost my identity and had even less of a social status. I felt as though I was nobody. I went back to school to obtain a B.A. in special needs education" (MM 13).

Marie's juxtaposition of her statement that she felt as though she was "nobody" followed by her statement that she went to school to obtain an undergraduate degree underlines the significant place that teaching and the status of teacher had filled in her sense of self-worth while up north. This is demonstrated in the interview as well, where she explains what happened when she returned to the city. "I couldn't teach, I couldn't -- I had to get certified, I had to, had to start over. All the teachers I knew, that I knew, they had their diploma -- I couldn't even get UI [Unemployment Insurance]. I was entitled to nothing. I was

nothing. I could do nothing. So that was rough, socially. I had no job, I was only a mother. I had two kids, and that's all. (laughter). I had no career, I had nothing" (MI 415). She goes on to say, "It was like I had no identity" (MI 419). In contrast, she now writes, "Today, I am proud to work as a special education teacher" (MM 3). Outside of the north, without a teaching diploma, without employment as a teacher, she was: entitled to nothing, could do nothing, had nothing, *was* nothing. The teacher role was so significant in the construction of her identity, that being unable to teach stripped her of identity, "It was like I had no identity" (MM 3).

Early in the monologue, Marie credits teaching in the north with the discovery that she "had great inner strength" that would help her get to where she wanted to go. Unlike Ann, whose departure was influenced by her feelings that she could no longer go on, and unlike Brenda, who feels leaving is the only option, Marie says, "When I left, it was like I had to tear myself away" (MI 406).

In the community of teachers, Marie finds role models and answers to questions she feels unable to answer. She credits relationships in the school with helping her learn "how to be a teacher" (MI 398). In beginning to teach without a personal investment in the normative discourses of teacher role and education, Marie was able to begin to construct a professional identity through observation, identification, reflection, discussion and through seeking official sanction.

Significantly, while both Marie and another participant, Guinevere, worked in the school at the same time, and thus experienced similar events, their use of those events in the construction of their professional identity differs significantly. For example, in Guinevere's monologue, explored later in the thesis, mention is made of a fire that was set in the school; Guinevere feels that this is a representation of the Indigenous community's rejection of her and other white teachers. She uses the event to confirm that she is not welcome. She mentions the meeting of the teachers that followed and positions herself as an observer to "their suffering" but does not count herself among the teachers, and is equally unable to see their "hope" and "strength" as hers. Marie, on the other hand, makes no mention of the fire, nor of the phenomenon of feeling unwelcome in the reserve. The reserve served as a backdrop to the school terrain in which Marie negotiated her professional identity. Her identity was constructed through relationships with colleagues whose "hope" and "strength" had been evident at the time of the fire. The "hope" and "strength" she seeks, she sees in the teachers with whom she identifies; it is mirrored back to her and incorporated into her own identity construction.

In this case, the importance of the intersubjective space of Marie's relationship with the white teachers far outweighs that of her relationship with the Indigenous community, of which *no mention is made*. In fact, if we return to Marie's monologue, she does not name or

mention the reserve. Instead, she makes repeated reference to Ridgeville; this underlines the importance Marie places on relationships with the white teachers who lived in the town. She arrived in the north seeking some kind of meaning for her life. She found a group with whom she was able to identify, “marvellous people who do exceptional work, who practically give themselves body and soul to offer a quality education to Native children, but also to offer assistance to the new kid on the block!” (MM 15).

Marie also, however, identifies with the students. In her relationships with them, she positions herself as caregiver and nurturer, thus, it may be suggested, in loving them, Marie comes to love herself. Through identification, I would suggest, Marie constructs herself and in the process is saved. Thus, through the experience of teaching in the isolated Indigenous community, the dreams of Brenda and Ann suffered staggering blows, while Marie discovered a dream.

What is not evident in the monologue is how Marie currently experiences her role as a teacher. In the interview and group discussion, however, she indicates that she has had difficulty recapturing what she found in Ridgeville and Broad Lake in her current assignment to several schools. She explained, “There, you had people to help you, you could talk, you could you know -- where as now, it’s not like that. In schools, where I am now, you’re often alone to deal with things -- so that’s what makes it more difficult. It’s about the same problems you have, you

know. You still have drugs, you still have alcohol, you still have violence, you still -- All that is all there, but you are alone to deal with it" (MG 785). She is left with a feeling that she explains in the monologue, "My thoughts often fly towards Ridgeville, and it's as though I have left part of myself there!" (MM 14). In the interview she added, "It's like I feel like I'm searching all the time -- always searching for something, but what it is, I don't know. Now, now it isn't as bad, because we're happy, but, in the area of work, I'm not satisfied. I'm just not satisfied, I've even thought about quitting teaching. Things aren't going well. I know people that should give up, they're everywhere" (MI 447). Significantly, Marie juxtaposed her thoughts about quitting with her comment that some people should give up teaching. This last thought echoes her impression that she *is* a teacher and is not simply trained for the job. Marie misses the experience of working with colleagues through whom she fixed an aspect of her professional identity – the community of "devoted, exceptional" white teachers. It can be suggested that the self-representation that Marie makes with the monologue allows her to recapture the sense of joy, of being a member of such a community. Without it, for Marie, the function of teacher is one that she is not sure she wants to now continue.

Marie's case raises some interesting questions. On the one hand, Marie's utterances and writing demonstrate the impact and power of being a member of a "community" as understood by theorists. Such an

understanding describes the characteristics of a community as “interaction and participation, interdependence, shared interests and beliefs, concern for individual and minority views, and meaningful relationships” (Westheimer, 1998, p. 12). Certainly what Marie experienced, particularly the affirmation and identification that brought meaning to her life, can be understood as the benefits that are associated with membership in a community (Westheimer, 1998). Yet, the community in question appears to be the white teaching community.

What does the absence of the Naskapi community from Marie’s story tell us? Is it possible to determine how Marie constructed the Naskapi community or her students? These questions are not easy to answer. Significantly it was Marie who pointed out to the other participants that the Naskapi teachers were not part of the “everyone ate together” equation. Perhaps more importantly, Marie discursively constructs the role of the teacher as facilitator in a student-centered classroom where individual differences and voices are respected. She identified with her Naskapi students and is the one participant who suggested that the challenges that adolescents face, whether living in the north or south, are similar. Are these images enough to suggest that we need not question further the absence of the Naskapi community from Marie’s monologue? It is difficult to say.

What can be said is that Marie worked in the school at the same time as two other participants, Guinevere and Linda, whose monologues

are explored in subsequent chapters. These teachers' representations of their relationship with the white teaching community demonstrate that the experience and perceptions of life as member of a specific community, at a specific period in time, are unique to the individuals involved. Such is also the case of Brenda and Ann, whose representations of their experience of the white teaching community, in the same time period, contrast sharply.

Fenced in, fenced off: Concluding comments on identity construction in relation to others.

In the movie, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, the fence paradoxically represents both the capacity to divide and control movement, as well as the possibility of a lifeline. Thus, fences put in place by one can be used by another for alternate purposes. The fences that exist for the women in the study appear, for the most part, to signify not simply barriers between people, but the result of perceived differences that are seen to be irreconcilable. These are the perceived cultural differences between the white and Naskapi people. Yet there is the case of one woman who, like Molly in the movie, uses fences for her own safety and survival. She chose to fence herself off from other white teachers to protect herself from their intolerance.

In each of the above cases, it can be claimed that the women's construction of, and relationship with, the Naskapi and white

communities had an impact on how they constructed their professional identity. The experiences of Brenda, Ann and Marie highlight the significance of intersubjective relations in identity construction (Hollway, 1989). The fact that each of the women's cases is so specific and different, demonstrates the notion that meaning is negotiated in the space between two: an individual and an other (one or more). The women's representations demonstrate that the meaning is never simply determined by the intention of an individual. While each of the women arrived in the community with a unique history and desires, the meaning each made of the experience was accomplished in negotiation with others.

For Brenda, a meaning that she makes of the experience is her perception that she is unable to gain acceptance in the Naskapi community. Following Hollway (1989) it is possible to say that the meaning is influenced by Brenda's own history, and that of the community and individuals within it. It is also influenced by the way in which she constructs the Naskapi community as outside, opposite and distinct from her experience. Further, the meaning Brenda makes is influenced by her discursive construction of education and the teacher role, as well as the discursive positioning of members of the Naskapi community, and the effects of power relations between them. Finally, it is possible to suggest that Brenda's perception is influenced by her desire to be the good teacher, who is needed.

Similarly, for Ann, her decision to fence herself off is influenced by the same factors: the histories of the individuals, the way in which each constructs the other, the discursive positions taken up, and what she seeks from the relationship, consciously and unconsciously.

Significantly both Brenda and Ann experience the shifting pull and push of power relations, whereas for Marie, power relations are not an influencing factor and resistance does not appear to play a role. Marie positions herself as novice in relation to the experts and thus one is not seeking to change or influence the other, nor resist such efforts. Thus, while Marie does not see herself as a teacher, she does not see a fence between herself and the white teaching community to which she was seeking membership.

I would like to suggest that the perception of a fence between groups or communities is the result of the intersection of the discursive construction of communities AND power relations at work between them. Fences are crossed, or disappear, when power relations do not play a role in the negotiation of meaning between two. Such is the case for Ann who claimed that she did not see a fence between herself and the reserve, yet suggested that the other white teachers did. Ultimately, the fence most significant for Ann was the one she saw between herself and the other white teachers.

The fences contribute to the women's perception that they can or cannot continue to work in the community. Ann felt she could not go on

teaching and Brenda feels she must leave, yet Marie had to tear herself away. The experiences of these three women can be used to illustrate the consequences of the search for affinity and affiliation on the construction of teacher identity. Significantly the search takes place in a context where the communities are defined with broad and sweeping strokes, where fences may be built between communities, and where those communities may be constructed using colonial discourses. In the upcoming chapter, the work of the teacher in the Naskapi community is explored. It is addressed, first of all, through a look at the women's deeply felt moments around the character and lines of A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of the Aborigines.

CHAPTER 6

Respectable, Responsible, Just Doing a Job:

A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of the Aborigines

In the group discussion, the character of A.O. Neville and lines he spoke were not signaled until the discussion was well underway. I discovered later in the women's journals, however, that six of the seven women had connected a deeply felt moment to Neville or lines spoken by his character in the film. Neville, and what he said, in fact, are the aspects of the film that generated more journal writing than any other element. Yet, as indicated above, in the group discussion Neville appeared to be initially overlooked. I was curious about what this omission might mean, particularly since the later discussion around Neville demonstrated that the participants were troubled by the role he played in the girls' lives.

The film reviews describe the portrayal of Neville as follows, "The film's most potent image is A.O. Neville (Kenneth Branagh), who bears the Orwellian title of Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Western Australia. He is charged with enforcing the national policy of removing, relocating and retraining children who constitute, in his words, 'an unwanted third race'.... Neville is played to cruel perfection by Branagh.... He's seen at the start of the film calmly explaining the merits of the program, using terms and reasoning that would have done the

Third Reich proud, 'In spite of himself, the native must be helped,' Neville says" (Howell, P., 2003, p. 2).

Given the description of the role of Neville, as played by Branagh, it should not be a surprise that one participant wrote in her journal, "I didn't like Neville". It is the follow – up to these words that is significant. She writes "I worried, as I watched, am I doing the same thing but less consciously? Food for thought"(ZJ 60). This is the point where the participant ended her journal, with the incomplete sentence: "Food for thought". These are words that hang on the edge of a traumatic perception – the possibility that the participant might have behaved as Neville had, thus enacting the same values and beliefs. This possibility was "food for thought" for other participants as well.

For another woman, Neville raises the troubling idea that she has not "helped" the students. She connects deeply felt moments around Neville with the question of whether she may in fact, have made things worse for them. She writes, "Not that I'm in any position of high bureaucracy, like Neville, but I wonder often if I'm helping anybody when I'm teaching at [the school]. I look at all the principals and teachers I've known through the years I've been at the school (on and off) and I wonder if our efforts have been misguided through the years, if we've made things better or worse for the students we've known. I really don't know" (HJ 13).

A third participant was more emphatic in the group discussion. Her volume had risen and her pace had increased, when she stated, “I had an active role in betraying the kids. Walking in there everyday, telling them, I have something to offer you. And, it reminded me very much of, of, there’s a couple of scenes in the movie, where, where, even when Neville said something like, we have to lead them to it, you know, I was, I was (emphatic) I was that guy, in many ways, you know” (GG 564).

The comment, despite the force with which it was delivered, appeared to not generate a reaction from the other women. Her comment posed a direct challenge to them: Were they “that guy”? She felt she was, and emphatically repeated so, three times. This is “food for thought” that might be unbearable for the other women. This may be why the conversation, at this point, moved quickly to curriculum choices and the needs of the students, a conversational turn that creates a space between the women’s perceptions of Neville’s characteristics, and their own, and turns their attention outward. Billig (2001) describes this as a “topic shift,” a rhetorical strategy that permits avoidance of “dangerous questions”. *Am I that guy?* is a dangerous question that might seriously destabilize a woman struggling to find meaning in her work as a teacher.

The notion that Neville is respected by a significant part of the population, that he maintains a powerful position for a lengthy period of time, and that he is convinced he is fulfilling an important and helpful role, is troubling to the women. Despite the respect that he appeared to

be accorded, the women use the following words in reference to him: his actions are “wrong,” his ideas “twisted,” and his dealings with the Aborigines “horrible.” He represents, for them, the exercise of colonial authority and the careful use of “cultural, economic, linguistic, administrative, judicial and popular processes” to dominate and oppress Aboriginal people (McConaghy, 2000b, p. 13). Thus, the question, “Am I that guy?” is troubling.

The women’s connection of Neville and his lines with deeply felt moments during the viewing signals that unconscious dynamics are taking place. The language they use in their speech and writing permits us to better understand what is happening. The psychoanalytic construct of “projective identification” can be used to explore the women’s writing and utterances as they respond to the specific sequences of the film that focus on the character of Neville or lines spoken by him.

Robertson (2004) writes, “Projection signals that a process of psychic change is happening. It is a dynamic of thought shaping itself, as the mind tries to overcome anxiety by ridding itself of danger (by expelling it outwards). In the process of expelling the feeling outward, however, thought is in fact made thinkable, representable to the self.... In projective identification, part of the self is expelled from inner mental space and attributed to an object” (Footnote 11, n.p.).

It can be suggested that for the women, the possibility that they are like Neville, whose actions and beliefs appear to repel them, is a

dangerous thought that raises their anxiety. Their thinking around the character of Neville demonstrates the way in which they struggle to make this thought manageable. They struggle to make sense of their own similar actions and beliefs; as a result they project the repellent characteristics outward. Yet, perhaps because of having identified with him, they appear to be compelled to find an explanation for his behavior. One participant writes, “Today, we look at Neville’s actions and automatically accuse him of being a racist, misguided horrible person. But for 25 years, in his society, he was a respected, responsible administrator doing his job. Which makes me wonder about people in power today, in our government and educational system. Are they like Neville, convinced that what they do is for the good of those who they are trying to help” (HJ 5).

While this participant approaches the idea that current government and the education system may be misguided, she maintains her distance from them both, referring to them as “they.” Despite the fact that she is part of the education system, delivering a government curriculum, she disassociates herself from them. Arguably, such action assists her in defending herself against knowledge that would be painful for her to bear – that she is complicit in a misguided process.

The topic of Neville’s intentions had also come up in the group discussion. Again, the women appear to be struggling to make manageable the notion that being well intentioned can have negative

consequences, and may later be recognized as being reprehensible. The conversation unfolded: (Group 218 – 221)

H: Yeah. I can't decide if he was evil, or totally believed in that crap...or just evil in itself. It worked out bad no matter how you slice and dice it.

B: Yeah, I mean, you're right, that what he did was evil, but, I never got the impression that... like in watching that movie, and again it's a movie, but in watching that movie, I'm thinking, he, he doesn't come across as evil, he comes across as really convinced he's doing the right (emphatic) thing. And, and what he's what, he was doing is wrong, I agree (emphatic), but you, never comes across, like, in thinking, "Oh he's bad," not the way, well, I guess, not the way that it's in your face, or and other things you would read or see on, in movies, like, I don't know, like...

H: But, looking back, I mean, if we had lived in those times, we probably would have agreed with him.

Four participants agree with this statement, that they would have agreed with Neville had they lived in his times. Thus, his actions are explained within the logic of history, a history that was 'then' but not 'now'. The conversation continues with another topic shift; the women do not explore what this recognition means in terms of their current actions. Instead, the lens shifts away from the women, through reference to the colonizing role of the British Empire, which again elicits participant

consensus. So while Neville's values are seen as "wrong", and his ideas as "twisted" and his actions as "horrible", five participants confirm that they would have probably agreed with him, had they lived in his times. There was, however, no exploration of what this might mean with respect to their current or recent role as white women teachers on a reserve.

At this point in the discussion, the women begin to expand their discussion of how it is that Neville could have behaved as he did, and believed what he did. Factors outside of Neville are suggested as the source of his behavior: historical patterns, the period in which he lived, the values of his culture, the beliefs of the time. He is now seen to be simply an agent of the times, and not of his own desire or volition.

(Group 223 – 234):

A: All throughout history, the English have been going around doing this kind of thing.

H: Yeah, exactly...

A: And he was just sort of continuing, you know, his cultural values.

B: Right, but I guess I guess, what I'm saying, but when you look at him in the movie, and maybe it's only me, but...

H: No...

B: But you don't, you see other movies and, and you see this guy, he's got these policies (emphatic) and he's nasty (emphatic) and he's mean (emphatic) and he's cruel (emphatic) and he's violent (emphatic).

But he didn't have any of that. He just had these ideas that were really twisted. He wasn't a violent man, according...

H: How do we know he wasn't violent?

B: No, but the way he's portrayed, is what I'm saying, and and so

H: But they portrayed him that way.

B: But that, I'm just, that's all I can go on.

H: Exactly.

B: That's what I'm just saying, that I find that we all have these reactions but it, it, it comes, it, I don't know, I just find, I don't know, there's other movies that you watch and then all of a sudden the guy is violent (emphasis), and hostile (emphasis), and all of, it's all in your face all at one, whereas his ideas are so wrong and yet he doesn't look to be, a nasty (emphasis) man, I don't know what a nasty man looks like but like the Sheriff of Nottingham, you know, he was nasty looking. I don't know.

Attempts to completely exonerate Neville are challenged by one woman who questions another's readiness to indicate that he is not violent. This raises the question of how violence can be defined and identified, and whether it is possible to draw a clear line between good and evil, between misguided intentions and ill will. This is troubling for women whose self-representations are filled with images of women with the best of intentions. This is highlighted by their reaction to Neville's words (Group 145 – 147), which I will contrast with the words they use to describe their own role:

One of the first troubling lines was: “When he said they needed help, at the beginning, and when...” (M).

“And at the very, very end, when he says, ‘We’re constantly battling against the...’ Whatever, I forget what he calls, the uphill battle...if only they could understand what *we* (emphatic) are trying to do for *them* (emphatic)” (L).

“They need to be protected against themselves” (G).

The women react strongly to the image that Neville’s words create: that of a collective group of Aboriginal people with a deficit, needing help, unable to even understand what help they need. Outside intervention is essential – and requires a massive effort, as the struggle is “an uphill battle.” These words are representative of the discourse of pastoral welfarism and Indigenous incapacity (McConaghy, 2000a), which are the foundation of Neville’s work and the policies he enforced. They are offensive to the women and cause them to bristle. Yet, as the following section demonstrates, the women’s reaction is more than a simple reaction to another’s beliefs, which are found to be offensive. It is arguable that the depth of their distaste is a sign of the unconscious at work.

Three of the women describe their perceived role when they arrived up north as that of “helping”. While providing help can easily be considered a part of the normative discourse around teachers and their role, the women have explained why Naskapi students need help. They

refer the students as a collective whole, brushing all with the following descriptors: They are seen to be “undervalued or ignored” at home; their self-esteem is seen to be poor; things need to be made better, for them; “they are limited in their exposure to leadership.”

For one woman, the teaching role was a “rescue” role, with its aim to “help them out of a terrible situation we’ve got them into, that they’ve got themselves into”. In this case she is referring to the collective group of Indigenous people, and their current political and social situation, for which she suggests “we” are responsible.

Another participant explains that the students need someone trustworthy, who will listen, because, it is felt, they may have serious psychological difficulties, for example eating disorders or suicidal tendencies, with which they will need to be helped. Further, they need to be given some hope, as if hope is not present in their lives. Still another teacher notes the need to ensure that the students not be taken advantage of. Finally, two teachers describe that they were on a “mission”, when describing their role.

Thus, like Neville and his characterization of Aborigines, the women have described the students as requiring assistance that the students themselves, or the community, are unable to provide. The women, as knowing and caring outsiders, are able to see the deficit and their role is to fix the “problem.” While the women see Neville’s language, behavior, actions and ideas as problematic, it appears that they are

unaware of their similar discursive framing of the teacher role in connection with Naskapi students. If we use the notion of projective identification to explain their perceptions, we can say that the women remain unaware of the similarities because there is a likelihood that this troubling perception has been projected or expelled outward onto Neville. Thus, the women would perceive the troubling characteristics and beliefs as Neville's alone, and therefore, maintain a manageable self-representation.

The women also work with the difficult notion that the best of intentions can later be perceived as destructive; so they attempt to neutralize Neville, by rendering him as a product of his times, an agent of the state simply carrying out his task. This, I would suggest, is also projective identification at work, where the women recognize their own good intentions, but are unable to accept the possibility that they too will later be reviled.

The one participant, however, who has stated emphatically that she "was that guy," meaning Neville, is prepared to digest the difficult notion, and does so through a somewhat painful writing process. She had written the following in her journal. I have retained the words she crossed out, her self-corrections, and the awkward wording: "Ridgeville filled me up and gave me a new life, but was also emotionally devastating in its betrayal of my ~~self~~ dreams and perhaps ~~myself~~ my own betrayal of her [sic] people * OUCH." (GJ 11).

Working with the ideas around Neville and his beliefs and values have rendered (with painful clarity) how her experience of teaching in an isolated Indigenous school challenged her perception of the self, of who she would be, and of her desired professional identity. This participant and the other women began work in the community with investments in fantasies around teaching. These fantasies provide them with images of what they wish they would be *like* as a teacher, and how they would be *viewed* as a teacher. For the participants in this research, this includes to: be good, be needed, be in control, be passionate, be energetic, be cool, be memorable, be bold, be skilled, be caring, be able to stand out and earn the respect of peers.

The women attempt to enact these fantasies as they live out the role and function of a teacher in the classroom in their relationships with students. The two monologues that follow give us insight into two very different experiences of the actual role and function of a teacher in the isolated Indigenous school.

Zoë

The following monologue was written by a woman who arrived in the north for her first teaching experience. While she stayed in the community for only two years, she moved further north where she has continued to teach for last six years.

Zoë's Monologue (Self titled - **Playing With Words**)

Note: Ellipses used by the writer have been retained and do not indicate that sections of the text have been removed. A minor omission indicated with brackets is intended to ensure the writer's anonymity:

Hi there. I'm Zoë. What does that tell you? Not much. [...]. One of my roles in life is that of talker. I have a lot more roles, the composite of which make me...Zoë. For the moment, the most important role I play is that of teacher.

Over the last year and a bit I've been doing some course work. I was starting to lag and felt I needed a boost. I realized I had become complacent. I was teaching to get by and not giving much of myself to it. One day, I was surfing the Internet and came across a Literacy Education program. I read the description and thought to myself..."Hey, this might give me the kick in the pants I need."

When I graduated from teachers' college, I thought I would always be passionate about teaching. I looked forward to getting my hands dirty, delving into issues, trying new things, challenging my students. I think of myself as a pretty high-energy person and I thought this energy would be well used in my classroom. The reality of it was that after only six years of teaching, I had begun to dry up.

In this course work I'm doing, I have had to do a lot of reflecting. One thing I have realized is that I gave a lot more of myself to my teaching in the earliest years than in the more recent ones. When I think about it all, one of the things I am most proud of is the creation of the Meawata Drama Club in my first year teaching.

We didn't start out as a club. In fact, the members and I started out as students and teacher. I was their Moral and Religious Education (MRE) teacher. I struggled at first with that class. What am I talking about? I struggled with all the classes I had. Other than 16 weeks of practicum experience and one day of substitute teaching, I was pretty much a rookie when I arrived in Ridgeville, the

neighbouring community Broad Lake Reserve, where I spent my first couple of years as a teacher.

All the students from that MRE class were girls in Secondary III and IV, Quebec's equivalent to Grades Nine and Ten. Now, it's funny to imagine that I felt intimidated by these girls and my male students when I first got to [the school]. It makes sense, though. Not only was this my first year teaching, I was totally out of my realm in another way. Having lived in Western Quebec and Eastern Ontario almost all of my life, suddenly I found myself teaching in a Northern Naskapi community.

Before I could get anywhere with teaching, I had to go through an initiation phase. (They should make this explicitly clear in teachers' college!) Not only was I being initiated as a first year teacher, I was also an outsider culturally. The boys, [two] especially, were seemingly more concerned about this than the girls.

However, I am getting off track. I wanted to tell you about our Meawata Drama Club. Other than MRE, I taught English language arts to Secondary III, IV, and V. It must have been for this reason that I received information on [an] Annual Drama Festival, in Quebec City. Now, I can't believe I thought this was possible...but I broached the idea to my MRE girls in December... "Hey, you gals want to write a play and perform it in Quebec City in April?"

Had I just left it at, "Do you want to write a play?" I don't imagine the level of enthusiasm would have been all that great. It was the second part, the thing about going to Quebec City to perform it, that sparked interest. Pretty much everyone in the high school side of [the school] loved to travel South.

So, it was established, in order to get a trip South, we would write and perform a play. No worries...except, what would we write about? During the short time I had taught at [the school], I had begun to feel that students had mixed feelings about being Naskapi and living in [the reserve]. Often times the negative feelings seemed to ring out more strongly than the positive. When we began the exercise of

writing our play, I asked the girls to list as many positive things as they could about being Naskapi. Together, they came up with over 60 things. We got started writing our play keeping these things in mind but we got stuck. Then the Grade 10 history textbook caught my eye. I asked the girls (they were becoming "the girls" instead of "the students", eventually they became "my girls") to find some information on the Naskapi in their textbook. The word was mentioned not once. Here were these girls living in Quebec, their people had more history in the province than the people who wrote the textbook and yet they were completely absent from it. Imagine! We went with this as the foundation of our play.

I don't know how much impact this play ultimately had on the girls' lives but it did have a forceful one on me. Even though I have left the community, I still use the play with students in my current school, in Iqaluit. I'm proud of that achievement. I am proud of [one student] who barely spoke English to me or in front of her peers in school yet she got up and performed in front of 200 or more strangers. I am proud that we worked through the kinks and brought it together. When I revisit the play, I see areas that could continue to be worked on but overall, I think it was quite an achievement. I think it served the girls on some level. It taught some unknown history to [southern high school] students. The whole process taught me a lot of things, one thing in particular...where there is a will, there really is a way. There were days when I wanted to give up. I didn't feel the girls were going to follow through. In the end, we got it together and made it to Quebec to perform our play. We got a standing ovation at the end...the only group to receive one. On top of that, CBC Radio interviewed us after we were finished. Apparently a lot of people back home in [the reserve] listened to us on the radio.

Looking back now, I realize it was pretty bold of me, a first year teacher, to expect that this whole thing would come together. The next year, due to cutbacks, DramaFest was cancelled. I haven't tried anything like it since; although, I'm hoping to make another attempt at such an endeavour this year. Cross your fingers for me!

Exploration of Zoë's Monologue

Zoë's monologue describes an event that she feels is one of the most significant accomplishments of her teaching career, which began eight years ago. This gives her some discomfort. In the interview she explains, "To this day, I don't feel that I've accomplished anything as -- um -- significant -- as that particular event in my whole teaching career - - which is pathetic" (ZI 8). She begins the monologue with an explanation of the passion she felt as a newly graduated teacher and her more recent feelings about beginning to "dry up". She ends the monologue with a statement about her hopes to try an endeavor like the play once again, which she feels would go hand in hand with restoring her passion.

Zoë arrived in the north brimming over with enthusiasm, "I looked forward to getting my hands dirty, delving into issues, trying new things, challenging my students" (ZM 8). In her journal she explains her state of mind, as she began her teaching career, "I don't think I ever questioned whether I could 'do this'. I had no real understanding of or practice with bringing students' cultures into the classroom/curriculum/my teaching....I think I expected to walk into the school and everything would fall into place" (ZJ 6).

In the group discussion she entertained the other women with her description of what she chose to teach upon arrival. "I started off, with my, you know, September 1st, or whatever it was, and I thought, ah ha (emphatic), Lord of the Flies. Whoa, yeah! (emphatic enthusiasm).

There's enough texts; I did it. (emphasis on I). I loved it (emphasis on I). Let's do, Lord of the Flies!" (ZG 1161). The participants all laughed, and another explained that she, too, had chosen the same novel. In her journal, Zoë describes how the choice she made was based on one of her initial strategies, "I relied on what I did know or what I was comfortable with or what I had enjoyed as a student, for example: "Lord of the Flies" (ZJ 16).

In the following passage from her journal we see how Zoë as a young teacher was torn between two competing discourses around education, "I had been taught "Lord of the Flies" when I was in Grade 11 and so I thought my Naskapi Grade 11's should learn it too. There was so (emphatic) much resistance. It was clear these kids were not enjoying English. I could have plugged through. I could have beaten out the potential for pleasure for that class, the possibility for a positive rapport between myself and the Grades 10 & 11 students or I could change paths... In the end, I decided to change course and explore possibilities further" (ZJ 22). The journal passage shows that one of her points of reference for decision making in teaching is linked to the officially sanctioned literary canon of southern Canada, which she felt her students should "learn, too" just as she had. On the other hand, she wants her students to enjoy English class and she wants to develop a positive rapport. As she feels these goals are in competition, she decides to change course and proceeds with what she describes as "trial and

error" (ZJ 26). She writes, "My students were my novice-teacher-self's guinea pigs" (ZJ 26).

She describes the shift away from *Lord of the Flies* in the group discussion. "And, I came in one day and said, 'We're not finishing this book!'" (emphatic)". The other participants laughed as she continued, "And we didn't, and I threw it out. Well I didn't throw it out, but I just -- but so, so then, I swung the, totally the opposite direction. Okay Native content (emphatic) -- whoop (sound effect) ...And they were like, 'Miss (change in tone), enough already, like give me a break' --. And so I think --, as a teacher, probably, and, and I was a first year teacher, on top of it, so you're coming in there, and you're just not prepared. You don't know -- and I don't know how you can be prepared, going into that situation" (ZG 1175 – 1183). While she shifts from one type of curriculum to another in an effort to raise student interest and develop rapport, her focus is nonetheless, still on the content rather than the world in which it is grounded. The students react with equal displeasure causing her to feel unexpectedly unprepared, feelings that even now, as she spoke in the group discussion, are difficult for her to bring to words.

In the journal, she makes the retrospective observation that her most successful experiences in the classroom focus on processes that elicit student response. She writes, "I think I began to understand that student input is invaluable. When I stop and think about the activities I did, the ones that seemed to be the most successful were the ones where

the students guided themselves. Poetry montage - responding to music, social issues discussion and writing were among things that worked. Using pictures, clips from movies, games, etc. seemed to elicit more responses” (ZJ 26).

It was Zoë’s interest in making the learning relevant that she indicates is the foundations for the playwriting and performance described in her monologue. The other, less acknowledged influence is Zoë’s dream of doing things that will leave a last impression. I will begin with the issue of relevance in teaching.

Zoë was faced with teaching Moral and Religious Education; feeling unequipped to teach religion, she looked for another way to meet the course requirements. “That was where the struggle started and then - - I sort of -- didn’t quite know -- I mean the curriculum was there and everything but I wanted it -- this whole issue of relevance -- and everything, eventually when we got to the play, it was great because that just, it just flowed” (ZI 48).

The play focuses on several issues related to cultural conflict. A new teacher discovers that her students’ cultural practices conflict with her aims. Together the teacher and students explore the fact that the Naskapi are omitted from the history text used in Quebec schools. Finally, in the second half of the play the teacher learns about Naskapi history while camping with the students.

In the interview, Zoë describes the play's meaningfulness, "It was kind of, a little bit autobiographical -- . It wasn't really, because I wasn't the history teacher, or anything, but on the other hand, it was in that some of the conflicts, I guess, or things the teacher comes to understand is, are things that I was coming to understand in that first year of teaching" (ZI 12). In this case, Zoë and the new teacher depicted in the play come to appreciate the importance of understanding and acknowledging the interests and background of the students, and incorporating those ideas into teaching. "There's significance in that we were talking about something that was pertinent to both of us, both the girls and to myself" (ZI 12). She believes it was meaningful for her as a new teacher – learning about the community; she suggests it was pertinent for the students because of its Naskapi content.

Significantly, however, in the interview and the monologue, Zoë appears to have difficulty measuring the play's meaningfulness to the students. This is an issue to which I will return after a look at Zoë's understanding of its importance to her.

Zoë explains that the process had a "forceful" impact on her (ZM 24). The description that follows her statement about impact allows us to understand what she means by that. In this case, the impact on Zoë is reflected in the pride she felt for what she feels was accomplished. She states she is proud she is able to use the play in other schools; she is "proud of [a student] who barely spoke English to [her] or in front of her

peers in school yet she got up and performed in front of 200 or more strangers” (ZM 24); she is proud that they followed through on the process, despite fears that the students would not. She notes, also, the importance of the lesson the play taught the southern audience, the standing ovation that only they received, and the radio interview that followed the performance.

It is clear that carrying the play to performance was gratifying for Zoë, for the ripples it caused within her, and outside of the community itself. This is directly related to Zoë’s dream – her image of the teacher she will be. “I want to be one of those cool and really interesting teachers. That the kids will remember (pause) not because I want the self-glory or anything, but I just want, I want umm, the things that they learn in my classroom to stay with them forever and ever and ever (Laughter). Or (pause) for them to be able to draw upon it, if necessary” (ZI 56). Zoë is careful to insert that she does not want self-glory and that what she teaches would be of use to students. Significantly, seeking glory is not consistent with the normative discourse that creates images of modest, helpful and caring teachers. Thus, the desire for recognition needs to be refused.

This issue comes up in Zoë’s journal, where she is writing about teacher motivation, “I think sometimes, maybe a lot of times actually; teachers really need to look at what they’re doing honestly (Zoe’s underscore). They need to understand their motivations for doing things.

Teacher's pride, teacher's reputations, and philanthropy (ie. Saving student's soles [sic] for their own sakes) are often not the right reasons to be doing something" (ZJ 22). Significantly, pride is the word that Zoë uses to describe her feelings about the play described in the monologue.

Zoë's struggle to manage her desire for acknowledgement is also evident in the interview, where I asked her to explain the above journal entry. She wants to indicate that self-gratification has its role in doing a job well, but has difficulty explaining the connection. "I guess there's, well I guess there has to be some form of selfishness about the teaching, or self-gratification, because, you know -- in that -- you want to do a job well -- and it's going to make you feel good if you are going to do a job well -- but when you, when you are looking at doing your job well -- some people would argue that, okay" (ZI 125). Zoë goes on to give the example of a colleague at her current school; she is disturbed that he had the respect of the rest of the school while in her estimation he was a poor teacher. In the space between Zoë's perception of her colleague and her own self perception is the troubling thought that this colleague not only has the respect of his peers, but that his motivation is "to make everybody else look at us and say wow!" (ZI 129). The use of the word "us" is significant in that it hints at Zoë's struggle to acknowledge the dream of "self-glory", while seeing it as a characteristic that needs to be rejected.

This is perhaps a reason why Zoë seeks to underline that the play was meaningful for her students. She has difficulty, however, pinpointing its significance to them. “I don’t know how much impact this play ultimately had on the girls’ lives”, she writes at one point in the monologue. She picked this point up later in the same paragraph, “I think it served the girls on some level” (ZM 24). In the interview she says, “I --, I would --, I don’t know if it will stick with them as much as it did with me. I hope, I hope, that for somebody like [E-----], that she, in twenty years time, can think back to herself, and say “HA! I did that.” You know I mean, like for the ones who were so quiet. I --, I -- , I -- , it would be nice too if they would -- , remember -- the content of the play as well, because I think the content -- , was important” (ZI 60).

Unable to pinpoint the specific impact on the students who participated, Zoë is left with the hope that it served them in some way, an example of which she provides with her suggestion that an extremely quiet girl would have felt that performing publicly was an accomplishment, and that this would stick with her for years.

The significance to Zoë of the participation of the quiet student goes beyond student accomplishment, however; it is directly linked to Zoë’s own sense of accomplishment and ability, as this interview excerpt demonstrates, “I was told by more than one person that [that girl] wouldn’t do it, right. I mean the expectation that [those girls] especially, I mean they barely spoke. So I (pause) was just told they wouldn’t do it,

and I was thinking, Damn It! They will. I don't know, I don't know if I was like ridiculously naïve and overly positive, or if I knew that they could do it, I'm not sure. But, but they did it and in that way I was bold. It was bold -- that I -- I guess I've said it, I came in there and I expected it to happen, kind of thing. (ZI 16).

The last words of that statement are significant when juxtaposed with the comments by Zoë's colleagues, who told her that the students would *not* do what she had envisioned. Their comments presented a direct challenge to Zoë and to her sense that she could "do this". She had, after all, arrived in the community as a novice with an unchallenged belief that she could teach, and a dream to have a significant impact in doing so. We can picture her, struggling with student resistance to her initial efforts, then faced with colleagues who suggested what she hoped for was impossible. Seeing the play through to performance provided her with the recognition she sought, and restored her belief that accomplishments as a teacher were within her reach. This is underlined in the monologue where she explains, "The whole process taught me a lot of things, one thing in particular...where there is a will, there really is a way" (ZM 24). In this case, Zoë sees the successful production of the play as due to her capacity to hope and to believe.

It is possible to suggest that the monologue serves Zoë, because through it, she creates a self-representation in which she is able to take credit for being a bold and innovative teacher, building on the fabric of

students' lives and worlds and self-knowledge, involving students in decision making, and giving them the opportunity to experience a new and challenging situation. What may also be felt in the representation are the subtle workings of Zoë's desire and her wish to be remembered as someone who acted as an inspiring guide.

The pedagogical elements mentioned above appear to be ones that she would be able to reproduce as a teacher, elsewhere. Yet she feels she has not recaptured what she accomplished since that point; she considers that to be "pathetic."

For Zoë, the play left her with the impression that it is the most significant event in her life as a teacher, even if she is unable to claim with certainty that it changed the lives of her students. It remains a point of reference for her, in the construction of her current professional identity, one that makes her current efforts seem pathetic to her. Significantly the word pathetic is lexically rooted in the notion of suffering, so while the monologue casts the play as a bold and innovative pedagogical accomplishment revealing her pleasurable investments in the fantasy of recognition, Zoe's use of the word pathetic reveals her pain in never again having been able to recapture the sublime feelings of that drama and that teaching experience.

Hope

The monologue that follows is written by a woman who became a teacher after living for almost two decades in the north. Hope saw teaching as a means to remain in the area when there was no longer funding for the scientific research station she operated on behalf of one of the province's universities. In the interview she tells me, "I thought I'd do fieldwork for the rest of my life" (HI 861). As that did not turn out to be the case, and because she did not want to leave the north, she turned to teaching as an alternate source of income. She began doing substitution work, and moved on to short term replacements contracts. Eventually she moved south for two years, during which time she became trained.

Hope's Monologue: Self-titled "Missss, Missss, why do we have to do thisss?"

Friday morning, 8:27. The homeroom bell goes. Actually, its not a bell but part of a silly song, one that I should be able to identify. But I am too lazy to find out what it is. No, not lazy. I just don't care enough to inquire what the little ditty is. I hate that bell. I hate all the bells that structure my work life. Homeroom bell. First period bell. Recess bell. End of recess bell. Lunch bell (actually that one I like). Afternoon homeroom bell. And so on. Who ever decided that learning requires all those bells? Ring. Ring. Start the learning process!! Reminds me of a horse race. Too bad there's not a winner every time.

Kids slowly straggle in with bed-head and bleary eyed. They grunt as I greet them. I feel like grunting back. But it's not professional! Harry Wong says on his videotape (Classroom Management - a gem that Dave, our Director of Educational Services, left for us and encouraged our principal to make us watch) that we as

teachers should always start out the day right by cheerfully greeting our students at the door, to set the right tone.

I don't want to set a tone. I'm barely alive. A morning person I'm not. I'm as bleary-eyed as my students. My hair sticks out no matter how much I comb it and my head is stuffed up like a football. Last night, I tossed and coughed most of the night, plugged up with phlegm. My head hurts. I'm definitely not in the mood to deal with students today.

Bell rings. Period 1. We usually do English first period. I usually like the first period. My students are usually docile as they're still asleep. We can get through the first period without too much yelling and screaming. Except for today. My problem student, Jordan, walks in just as the period starts. I had him 3 years ago when I was doing Sec. 2. Almost drove me crazy that year, bouncing off the walls, always fighting with me. Now he's seventeen years old and calmer but he still reads at a Grade 3 level and has absolutely no interest in learning. He just comes to school for the social aspect of his life. Both his mother and stepfather drink a lot. Life at home must be hell. Going to school has to be better than staying at home. His older brother dropped out years ago. Jordan keeps hanging in there. I don't know whether to admire him for his perseverance or wish that he'd drop out. Guess it depends on the day I'm having. He sits down, drops his head on his arms. But not before I get a good look at his face. There's a huge cut over one eye. The skin around the eye itself is starting to turn blue. Scratches galore over his face. I look at his hands. The knuckles are scraped and bloody. He's got dirty gauze wound over one hand. It's obvious he's been in a fight. He looks unkempt. I know from previous experience when I've been near him, helping with schoolwork, that he'll smell bad, a mixture of B.O. and old alcohol. I sigh. I feel bad for him. Unfortunately, the feeling doesn't last too long.

"All right, guys. Remember that mid-term exams are just around the corner. We'll do them after Christmas. Don't forget you need to have read your 4 Accelerated Readers by mid-January. And now, get out your novels. Today, we're reading Chapter 4 of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*." I say in the perkier tone I can muster. The rumbles start. They're starting to wake up.

"Why do we have to read this stupid book?" This comes from James, Mr. Stringbean himself. The kid is way too tall and gangly.

He's repeating Sec. 3 because he managed to skip most of last year. This year he managed to miss all of first term and only came back to school because he ended up in court. The judge must have been in a bad mood, or so he figures.

"Its booooring!" Anthony has woken up. I listen to his whiny, arrogant voice, thinking for the umpteenth time that I really don't like the kid. He's got a permanent smirk stamped on his face, elevating smirking to an art. He's usually the first kid in line to cast negative vibes on any activity that I suggest. I don't think I've ever heard him say a kind word to anyone. Nor have I seen any acts of kindness towards other kids, which I glimpse from the other kids once every while. Idly, I wonder how his parents, who seem to be really gentle people, managed to deal with him. Is he like that at home? Or does he put on the smirk especially for me at school?

"Who wants to read about stupid black kids? I don't like black kids." This muttering comes from Isaac, my other problem student. I doubt if he knows any black kids. I think he said the same thing when we had to write some letters to some German kids who wanted penpals. He doesn't know any German kids either. He also reads at a Grade 3 level but normally he's a pretty easy-going kid, going along with things even though I know he doesn't understand most of what's going on. Now they're all rumbling about how stupid the book is. No one takes out his or her novels. Except for Veronica, who failed last year. Her parents were pretty pissed and have her on a tight leash this year. She's become the model student, when she manages to attend classes.

"Misssss, why do we have to do this?" One by one they start whining at me. I try to coax them into getting out their books out to read. Usually this works. But not today.

"Fucking stupid book!" Jordan has woken up from his hibernation state. He sneers, tossing the book across the table, where it slides off and hits the floor.

"PICK UP THE BOOK!" My temper finally wakes me up. Most of the time, I can laugh things off. I find that if I make a joke out of things, I can gloss over prickly situations with the kids. But not today.

"NO! YOU CAN'T MAKE ME!" Jordan sits there, scowling, arms crossed in a defensive posture, daring me to do something. His refusal

causes Anthony to snicker. The other kids start to laugh. They smell blood and are like sharks, circling, waiting to attack.

"Why do you always make us do stupid things?" Anthony taunts, trying to cause an escalation in the confrontation between JG and me. It's a tactic that he's very good at. I lose it. I can feel the outburst coming on, like a runaway train. There's no stopping it.

"Why do we have to do this? WHY ? WHY?" I hear myself shrieking, my voice pitched, my blood pressure rising. "I don't know why we do these stupid things! Do you think I like torturing you guys, making you read and write? NO! If you think its torture for you, its double torture for me! Do you think I like getting up this early to go to school? Well, I don't. It's not me who decided to start school early. I hate getting up early myself. Why don't you go and whine to the school board and the MEQ. They're the ones who refuse to change this outdated school system that was set up when we were once an agricultural society. It isn't me!" "And I'm not the one who set up these factory-farm-type schools when the industrial revolution heated up and it wasn't me who rounded up all teenage hooligans, forcing them to attend school until they graduated or dropped out. It wasn't me. I wasn't even alive then. It was the government that didn't want teenagers running around, getting into mischief, causing vandalism and mayhem." "And it's too bad that the government and society hasn't figured out that factory schools don't work for a lot of students who end up dropping out in frustration. After having been made to feel like an idiot because they couldn't seem to learn what was expected. And even in those kids who somehow manage to learn to play the school game, they don't encourage independent thinking or learning." "No, most school don't encourage students to think for themselves. If you did start to think you might start wondering why schools encourage everyone to head for CEGEP and then University. The motto is: Get a good education so that you can get a good job.

They don't happen to mention you need a good job so that you can make lots of money and buy lots of useless objects you don't need so we can keep our capitalistic society going!" "Well, as you can see, there are so many good jobs in [the reserve]. You can become a teacher, a nurse, a social worker, a doctor, lawyer or Indian chief. There are about 30 good jobs here in [the reserve]. So 30 of you can have the good jobs and then the rest can do all the crummy ones.

Which don't really require college or University education. I mean, look at all your parents and other relatives. The working ones anyway. They're all somehow employed, making good money, buying shiny trucks, skidoos, plasma 48 inch TVs and DVD players. And all without a high school diploma! " "So, I don't know why we have to read Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. We just do. So stop your whining, open your books to page 108 and start READING!" Exhausted, I drop into my chair. What would Harry Wong think of my professionalism now? I think I failed the "Use humour" requirement for being a teacher. I glare at them, daring them to not open their books. They all sit there staring at me. My verbal diarrhea seems to have tied up their tongues. I feel horrible, sick that I allowed myself to yell at them like that. How am I supposed to go on and pretend like my petty ranting didn't happen. This was not a "learning moment". Harry Wong would not approve. We all sit quietly, the silence stretching out forever. Finally, the scraping of a chair as someone pushes his seat back.

"So," Jordan asks nonchalantly as he leans over the desk and picks up his book. "Everything you said... is that going to be on the exam in January?"

The bell rings. End of Period 1. Everyone starts to move at once. Picking up their bags, they push back chairs, talking all at once, emptying the classroom. Jordan and Anthony walk out together, Anthony snickering as they leave. I remain sitting, motionless, thinking for the zillionth time that I'm just not teacher material, that I'm a failure as a teacher, that there's got to be an easier way to make a living, that there's got to be another way of teaching. I just don't know how to go about it. Agghhhhh! Students start filing in for the next English class. Period 2 is just about to begin.

" Missss, what are we going to do today?" Daniel starts the class off with his usual whiny salutation. 'Why can't we have free time?"

"We're going to do some reading and then we're going to do some writing. And then if we have some time, we'll do some nuclear physics. " I fire back.

Fifty-five more minutes left till the next bell.

Exploration of Hope's Monologue

There are several key issues in the monologue that need to be addressed. First of all, Hope feels that she and the students are both victims of the education system, which she represents in the interview and monologue as inflexible, monolithic and antiquated. She believes that teachers have a role as professionals in that system, and thus she feels she has no choice but to behave a certain way. However, not only is she a victim of the system, she is also faced with a battle with the students.

In the note accompanying the monologue, Hope begins by writing that she is unsure why she had written what she had. She mentioned, however, that she is “pissed off” and this might be what she would say when she, “blow[s] up”. In the note, she writes, “I wonder how they would take it if I told them that school really sucks and that all the stuff you're forced to learn in high school really isn't important later on in life. That you don't use it and I wonder why we're tortured with it. Sigh. But as a teacher you can't tell them those things. It's not professional. I can picture them all listening to my blow up and then just ignoring it, like they usually ignore everything else I say because they don't think its [sic] important. Anyway, I think that's what I was thinking of and why I wrote it” (HM 2).

In exploring the other women's monologues, my tactic was to juxtapose different data sources to try to tease out the contradictions in

how the women represent their experience. My purpose was to pinpoint and clarify what was significant and what lies behind the significance of the experience of teaching in the isolated Indigenous community, and what other positions are held. The question of how to address Hope's monologue is one that I found difficult, largely because of the intensity of the anger depicted and the way in which the monologue differed significantly in tone from the other women's writing.

While in the other women's self-representations they appear to be wrestling the positive from their experience, for Hope meaning is found in angrily "talking-back" in response to feelings of powerlessness and failure. Yet in the fantasy sequence, despite the angry explosion – there is no relief in revealing all to the students: education remains a futile exercise, Hope remains a "failure as a teacher" and her students are unable to grasp the significance of what she wanted to express. The question is, Is this the meaning that Hope seeks to affirm through the monologue? Why would an image of futile anger be one that Hope finds meaningful?

I have known Hope for over two decades, worked side by side with her, asked for and received her help on many occasions. In the early 1990s, when she was still engaged in scientific studies, she accompanied me, when Linda and I took the class we shared out for a week of winter camping. Hope brought scientific equipment and demonstrated a range of snow survey tasks. She guided the students through the process,

watching as they made snow cores and then explained the purpose as they sifted the crystals. She helped us understand how and why snow shelters are built, and was on her knees beside the students making the quinzee and igloo. I was impressed with the way in which she balanced modeling, explanations, questions and guidance. The whole experience was a highlight for me that year, largely because of how much I learned at her side. She behaved with the students in a way that I wanted to emulate. The representation she makes in the monologue, however, is one that contrasts sharply with the skilled facilitator that I had witnessed. How this self-representation serves Hope, how it is a representation of a desired self, is a complex knot to untie.

Hope and I have debated educational issues over the years; she calls me the optimist and herself the cynical pessimist. She brought this stance to this research process. She questioned the notion of deeply felt moments, she avoided answering questions in the interview, and seemed withdrawn in the group discussion. Yet she wrote at length in her journal, and her monologue is one of the longest texts submitted. And despite calling herself the pessimist, I have watched over the years as she committed herself, over and over, to the students and the community. She has participated in leadership of Brownies and Girlguides, has assisted with organization of the graduation ceremonies and dinner, has fundraised tirelessly for the yearbook team, and assisted with student

exchanges. This, however, is information to which I am privy because of my long relationship with the school and community.

Hope presents a range of contradictions. She likes to speak of herself as the pessimist; her monologue, which she described as cynically humorous, demonstrates her desire to expose the failings of formal education and the hopelessness associated with teaching. Yet, in her actions she repeatedly demonstrates hopefulness.

The role of hope or hopelessness as facets of professional identity are ones I believe need to be addressed, particularly in light of the context in which Hope is teaching. My intention, therefore, is to explore Hope's monologue by foregrounding her struggle with the possibility of hope, and by considering how such struggles might have an impact on the possibilities for students.

I will begin with a segment that is found one third of the way through the interview, where Hope had been talking about holding one of the few permanent jobs in the community. She tells me that she'll be replaced in five years by one of her former students. The segment is significant because it demonstrates both a connection between student and teacher, a whisper of hope for the student -- held under restraint -- followed by discouragement, in the guise of humour. Hope begins by naming the student and goes on, "I sort of like her. She calls once in a while and she called to wish me a new year, Happy New Year. And we stayed on the phone like for about two hours. She was telling me she's

going out to school in Montreal, at ah Vanier...She told me what she wants to do; she wants to be a teacher. And she says Elementary school. I'm going, 'Why do you want to be a teacher (emphatic)?' and she's like, 'Oh come on Miss, it's not that bad, little kids, I won't teach high school.' (laughter) I don't know, I kind of hope she makes it...Yeah (pause) But anyway (laughter), I was trying to convince her, 'Isn't there anything else you want to do, [Mary]? There must be something else you've wanted to do.' (Continuing in pitch of the student's voice) 'I've always wanted to teach. Okay...' (HI 304-312).

Hope explains that she “kind of like[s]” the student and “sort of hope[s]” she is successful, yet in her anecdote, she had explained she spent two hours on the phone catching up with the student and discussing her aspirations. What does this say about the relationship between thought and affect? The time spent on the phone suggests that an important relationship exists between the two people, yet this is one that Hope refuses, later in the interview, when she is speaking about teacher impact. I ask her about her relationship with the student. She tells me, “[It’s] too presumptuous to say I had an impact on [her] -- I think being the person she is --, (audible sigh) she probably -- she’ll do whatever she will do, whether I’m there or not, you know?” (HI 753). Here we see both the desire to have an impact, and the fear of not being able to control the way in which human relations unfold. There is also the issue of the restraint that Hope imposes linguistically on “liking” and

“hoping”, which I take to be a signal of the unconscious at work. In the initial excerpt of the interview, she states she “sort of” likes and “sort of” hopes. I would like to suggest that the emotional investment involved with “liking” and “hoping” is troubling to Hope.

In the first phase of the research, Hope had resisted the notion that she experienced deeply felt moments during the viewing of the film. During the group discussion, when asked if she had any of these moments, she left the question unanswered, explaining instead that plot devices, camera angles and other techniques manipulated viewers. While other participants volunteered what they had noted, she remained silent.

She had, in fact, written in her journal that she had *no* deeply felt moments during the viewing. Despite this, she did note specific lines and sequences from the film and then explored them by connecting them to her teaching experience, just as the instructions had explained. Further, in the notes she took while viewing, she used language that indicated that she was conscious of moments in the film that stood out, and was registering the feelings she experienced. The notes included the words: “brutal scene...evil words...feel sorry for...I loved it when...”.

The first paragraph in the journal might shed some light on Hope’s resistance to acknowledging deeply felt moments. The paragraph is significant because of the way she has juxtaposed three ideas: the denial of deeply felt moments; a reference to a section of the film to which the other women responded strongly, some of them by crying; and a

statement where she explains why she has not reacted emotionally. She writes, “I can’t say I had any deeply felt moments as I watched Rabbit Proof Fence. Nor did I feel teary eyed at the end, feeling sorry for poor Molly and the hell her life became because of some misguided Australian bureaucracy. I guess I’ve heard it too many times, stories like hers, from my parents and their friends who’s [sic] lives were ruined by other misguided idiots who caused wars” (HJ 3).

I believe that Hope’s specific reference to this sequence of the film, and her statement that she did not become teary eyed is significant. I think it may be an indication that the emotional reaction of the other participants (their crying) prompted a moment that was deeply felt for Hope. She follows the statement with a reference to a lesson learned in her own home: that lives, including those of her parents, are ruined by misguided others. We might say that Hope suggests indirectly that the inevitability of ruined lives makes an emotional reaction pointless. Significantly, Hope’s monologue fantasy is also about being caught in a misguided bureaucracy, an educational bureaucracy, which she wants to expose, by revealing this “dangerous” and “subversive” view to her students.

Hope indicates that her perceptions have been shaped by her parents’ experience of the trauma of war. Significantly Hope appears to seek confirmation that lives are ruined; this is evident in her reaction to the end of the film. In the group discussion she says, “And I was

thinking, this is heading for a Walt Disney ending movie, and it was, until the end when they put, you know, Molly's life was ruined, again (pause) and that sort of made up for it" (HG 418). This sentiment, the logic of ruined lives, also appears in her notes in her journal where she wrote, "But the epilogue made it alright. Their lives were screwed up badly".

In the monologue, Hope refers to the situation of one of her "problem students". At seventeen years of age, and reading at a Grade 3 level he has taken three years to move from the eight to the ninth grade. She writes that his parents are alcoholics and she knows that he, too, drinks. She writes, "Life at home must be hell. Going to school has to be better than staying at home -- I sigh. I feel bad for him. Unfortunately, the feeling doesn't last too long" (HM 14). This student's life corresponds to Hope's expectations that lives can be ruined. Once again, an emotional reaction is restrained, with her comments, "Unfortunately the feeling doesn't last long."

It is this student, likely unable to read a novel, whose gesture of discarding the book prompts Hope's explosive outburst in the monologue. She loses her temper when he refuses to pick up the book and challenges her with "'NO! YOU CAN'T MAKE ME!" (HM 28). He is right, and Hope is unable to change the course of events. She explodes with a tirade in which the government, the ministry of education, society, the school board and the school are all held responsible for making

school torturous for the students. As for Hope, and her role in the torturous structures, she says, “It isn’t me... I’m not the one...it wasn’t me...I don’t know why”; she, too, is tortured, cast as the helpless victim of the nameless, faceless structures. In the end, however, she is left feeling even more grief stricken, “I feel horrible, sick that I allowed myself to yell at them like that” (HM 72). Not only does she have no control over the situation, she has lost control of her emotional state.

At the beginning of the exploration, I posed the question of how Hope’s representation serves her. I feel that a claim can be made that her actions, those I have witnessed for two decades, demonstrate her investment in the possibility of hope. In her representations, however, she appears to reject and deny the possibility, because, as she points out, “Walt Disney endings” are not realistic, and a ruined life is a greater possibility. The monologue appears to allow Hope to wear the badge of seer and cynic and pessimist boldly, as if it is an ironic and informed choice. It perhaps permits Hope to set herself apart from other teachers, “I don’t have, I didn’t have these idealistic things like I’m going to change the world or I’m going to make an impression on my students and I’m going to teach them all these ways of the world, all these naïve things that the other teachers have” (HI 49).

What might such representations and struggles mean in terms of the possibilities for students? Hope reduces education to the act of learning meaningless content. Similarly, structures within the school are

seen to be inflexible and useless. Hope's representation of the teacher is equally one-dimensional. "Teacher is always right, teacher is all powerful, teacher tells you what to do -- this kind of crap" (HI 77); this is how she describes it. She explains why this is an image that does not fit her, "The kids see you as a teacher, whatever that is, I don't know, power. Teacher tells you what to do; teacher will give you all the right answers. Most of time I don't even know what the questions are, never mind what the right answers are" (HI 85).

Hope rejects any representation of herself as a teacher, "If somebody asked me what do I do, I wouldn't say I'm a teacher" (HI 61). "I feel like a fake. I'm not a real teacher" (HI 865). "I don't think -- nothing - - um nothing will make me feel not like a fake...I don't feel like a teacher. I don't know why. I have this feeling. I still have it" (HI 893 – 897). I asked her the following, "Do you want to feel like a teacher? There was a brief hesitation in her reply, "No, not really. (laughter) no -- no...I guess I really don't want to teach. I think that's the problem" (HI 901, 905). She feels like fraud in a system that she feels produces fraudulence.

Hope believes that schools limit possibilities for students, "School the way it is set up, like you're forced (emphatic, voiced raised); We're going to do this today (again emphatic, voice raised); We're going to do this, like everyday with the kids, like, we're going to do this -- It's not learning at its best" (HI 93). Hope defines what learning at its best

would be. “Well -- learning for the sake of learning, because I want to learn something, like I don’t know, - if I wanted to learn to paint my house or lay down some floor or if I want to learn about some civilization, the Egyptian civilization I find fascinating -- . Because I’m doing it for myself, because I’m interested in it. Because it means something, a nice painted house or appreciation of a society” (HI 93).

Hope makes a clear distinction between self-directed learning and what takes place in school. I asked her the following question, “Is it possible in schools, for -- students to learn how to be self-directed learners? (HI 97). In Hope’s response she signals the role of students but maintains that teachers are powerless to foster self-directed learning, because of rigid and fixed characteristics of schools that, she feels, have not changed since her own school experience. Hope explains, “If, if they want to be self-directed learners. But schools aren’t set up that way. What I see of the kids, and when I went to school myself, it’s like, you have to know this, we’re doing this today, and I end up myself, doing the same things -- and it drives me crazy. “So why do we have to do this?” (imitation of whining voice)” (HI 99). Hope answers the student’s question with, “ You just have to do it, it’s going to be on the exam” (HI 104).

I was interested in knowing what Hope felt might happen if she did not “cover” what she perceives as essential to the exam, “Then I wouldn’t be -- fulfilling the obligations of the job I have -- . Like I’m expected (emphatic) to do this material. Or this is what they’re going to need for

the exam to pass, and if I don't cover that stuff I'm not doing my job" (HI 104 – 109). Hope appears trapped by the need to 'force' students through an exam process. "When you've got the secondary five leaving exams and this material has to be covered, this is what they have to know to pass the exam, if you don't cover that material they don't pass the exam. How do you get around that...if these kids need to graduate high school" (HI 117 – 125).

Despite Hope's arguments that the students need the exam to graduate, she suggests in the interview and in the monologue that graduating from high school is meaningless for students from the reserve. Her reasoning is presented in the monologue, "There are about 30 good jobs here in Broad Lake. So 30 of you can have the good jobs and then the rest can do all the crummy ones. Which don't really require college or University education. I mean, look at all your parents and other relatives. The working ones anyway. They're all somehow employed, making good money, buying shiny trucks, skidoos, plasma 48 inch TVs and DVD players. And all without a high school diploma!" (HM 60).

Hope explains to me what the exam preparation entails, "It comes down to writing these three things, an argumentative essay, a personal essay and a response. Then -- that's what we have to concentrate on, to get them through this thing" (HI 125). This last segment is significant because it draws our attention to Hope's view of the concept of knowledge. I would like to consider whether that vision of knowledge is

one that creates possibilities for students. Hope maintains that what takes place in school is meaningless; she says, “Whatever we’re doing in school has no bearing in reality” (HI 197). In the above excerpt (HI 125), we see that Hope’s vision of her task is narrowed to content: she has to teach the form and structure of three types of writing. The conflict or contradiction that this image presents is embedded in Hope’s discursive construction of knowledge. As an English teacher, she believes that she is teaching the form and structure of the writing. She appears unable to see the forms of writing as possible means through which her students can individually construct their own knowledge around issues that are personally meaningful. Hope’s vision of teaching and learning is grounded in the transmission of knowledge; she appears unable to see the possibility of construction of knowledge as a meaningful alternative. She does, however, toy with the idea briefly in the following sequence. I asked Hope if she had ever fantasized about the perfect teaching situation. The conversation unfolded as follows:

AVRIL: If you could have a, if you imagined, fantasized about the perfect teaching situation. What would it be?

HOPE: I guess I don’t fantasize about the perfect teaching situation.

AVRIL: Okay, so now’s your opportunity. So what would the perfect teaching period be?

HOPE: ----- I don't know, we'd all have a discussion that's meaningful to them (emphatic) and to me (emphatic) --. They all participate in it and have ideas, you know, argue with each other about the ideas -- . Stuff like that.

AVRIL So what would you as a teacher have to do to create that?

HOPE: -- Do -- I don't ----.

AVRIL: Well what would have to be in place, for that to work?

HOPE: -- I guess for them to be interested about a topic -- to all of them -- and wanting to talk about it -- Having ideas about a certain subject -- participating -- . You know, one of these -- Mr Chips debates -- not Mr. Chips, who was Robin Williams in that stupid movie, Mr...

AVRIL: Oh right, Dead Poet's Society.

HOPE: Yeah, Dead Poet's Society -- . That kind of crap -- , but I can't quite see my students in Dead Poet's Society --, (laughing) the Dead Meat Society. (HI 632-650)

In the above excerpt, Hope draws the fantasy slowly back to hopelessness, where an alternate form of learning is reduced to "stupid" and "crap", and the students to "Dead Meat." Hope might characterize the last line as an example of her cynical humour, and her rejection of the perfect teaching fantasy as an example of her pessimism. Can they be characterized as hopelessness?

Through the monologue, Hope represents herself as a failure as a teacher; in the interview she refuses the teacher identity altogether. She characterizes educational structures as inflexible, and what is taught in schools as meaningless. “You sort of wonder, where does the system get you? You have no control over the system, doing things like teaching kids, it’s something I really can’t say I do well or want to be doing, so what’s...” (HI 284). The thought drifts off, and I wonder if she would have completed it by saying, “What’s the point?”

Hope’s refusal of the teacher professional identity brings with it, the refusal of the “power” that she associates with that identity. As a result she appears to feel powerless to change structures, powerless to make teaching meaningful to the students, powerless to have an impact on them. How, I am left to wonder, would Hope view her role as a teacher, if her understanding was constructed using alternate discourses of education, teaching and learning.

Concluding Comments on Teacher Role

The most significant aspect of Hope’s struggle is her sense that educational structures constrain and limit the lives of individuals. Thus, Hope’s answer to the question “What is the purpose of education?” is one that renders her powerless in the wake of societal and historical forces and a curriculum that she feels is non-negotiable. The other women also struggle with the question of the purpose of education, but the conflicts

they seek to resolve focus on their perceptions of the difference between delivering a curriculum and preparing students for life.

Their questions around curriculum cause them to reflect on whose values, history and worldview are embedded in the material. Some of the women, as a result of their reflection on curriculum content, turn their attention to the processes required to prepare students for life. This, however, raises more questions for them: life where? doing what? These questions return them to choices of materials; as one woman writes, “If we are to prepare students for the bigger picture (outside world) should we not have to expose them to more than Native content material. Is Shakespeare still relevant anywhere? The moral themes could be ‘found’ elsewhere I’m sure” (BJ 3).

What is significant in the above passage is the use of the words “expose” and “found” in relation to curriculum content and knowledge. These words typify most of the women’s work with the notion of teacher function. The women’s thinking demonstrates that they discursively construct knowledge as independent of the students; the teacher’s role, therefore, is to deliver that knowledge, possibly through a process that involves the students in decision making. The women are prepared to reject curriculum content that they feel is inappropriate, but would like to replace it with other content. Such was the case of Zoë in her decision to abandon the use of *Lord of the Flies* for “Native” literature.

The ways in which the teachers define their function gives us insight into the epistemological positions that the women take up. These positions may be examined, or unexamined, and can be identified in competing discourses. The positions they hold are often temporarily held and may be conflicting, as represented in one woman's struggles with the teacher role, depicted below. She left the community over twelve years ago. In the group session, she explains, "[M]y job should have been – to, to assist them in going where they wanted to go. I had no business walking in there, saying, this is where you need to go" (GG 1127).

In the interview several months later, given her statement that she felt she had no business making certain decisions as a teacher, I asked her what role she felt that white teachers should play. After a long pause, she began, "Um, I think we have a huge role to play -- I think, I think that, that -- education, is the key, to protect yourself. I think, you know, like -- people like Matthew Cooncome, people like that, Elijah Harper. You have to have people like that -- And the only way you're going to get people like that is education. So that's really important" (GI 424).

She identifies the qualities she feels the Indigenous leaders need, ease with language and experience on which to draw, but when she turns to the role of the white teacher, she struggles to even express one full thought, and is unable to answer, "But you know, its, I don't see, I never, almost, you know -- . I don't know, I don't know -- .I never resolved this (emphatic) (laughter) I left -- . I said, I can't do this. So I

don't have a definite answer anymore....You know -- , I don't, I really was uncomfortable about trying to teach them about their culture. I thought that was wrong. I had no business doing that (emphatic)". She continues, after another pause, "I think I would be teaching a lot -- . I would be focusing a lot more on language skills, and practicing using it, than I would be on -- getting, "feel good because I'm an Indian" literature. You know what I mean? Because that's what I was really focused on. You know, everything's got to be theme based, on themes that they can connect to -- . But, on the other hand (Emphatic & followed by laughter), you know, as an English teacher here (southern Canada), that's what I try to do all the time. Because I know they need things they can connect to -- .So I don't know". She finishes, with the firmly voiced declarative, "I wouldn't go back" (GI 428 – 436).

The participant is unable to resolve the conflict between the range of actions that might be taken in the name of English teaching. Faced with the realization that she has stated she would reject an approach she now uses "all the time", for more direct teaching of language skills, she finds a temporary resolution with, "I wouldn't go back".

Overall, the women appear to privilege an information-driven curriculum; on the other hand, they are able to name what might be considered teaching that would better serve the Naskapi students. They would, for example, be an "assistance to their journey or process" (GJ 11); they would help "them figure out what they're good at, what their

aptitudes are...so they'll feel they're doing something useful with their lives" (LI 230); they would set up situations "where the students guided themselves" (ZJ 26), or where they could "exchange views and opinions" (AJ 16); and where there is "discussion that's meaningful to them (emphatic) and to me (emphatic) – they all participate in it and have ideas, argue with each other about the ideas" (HI 638). These are scenarios that value process and place the students at the center of the learning, in active construction of their own knowledge. Unfortunately, for the women who have left the community, these observations are retrospective; their ideas were prefaced or followed by comments such as: "if I went back", or "now I realize," or it happened "once." The women who are still in the community appear unable to enact such pedagogy, and explain the reasons as a result of student inability, disinterest or lack of potential.

This chapter began with the women's thinking around A.O. Neville and his beliefs and values. Their thoughts around Neville raise the troubling possibility that their own beliefs and values are similar, and that they may be complicit in supporting educational structures and processes that significantly constrain or diminish the lives of Indigenous students. This presents a dramatic challenge to women who have invested in fantasies around teaching which, when embodied, would characterize them as effective, inspiring, and dynamic in their role.

The women find themselves faced with serious challenges that require them to try to answer questions such as, what is the purpose of education, what is appropriate curriculum and what does it mean to prepare someone for life. These are questions that are as difficult and troubling as the question of potential, and what does it mean to realize one's potential. That is an issue that is addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Teachers, Students, and their Potential:

The Spirit Bird

After viewing the film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, three of the women chose to write about connections between their teaching experience and deeply felt moments related to a bird that appears strategically at significant points throughout the film. It soars overhead in the opening sequence when the mother explains to the child, Molly, that this “spirit bird” will look after her. The bird appears in the segment where Molly is planning her escape from the internment camp and again when she has collapsed in the desert and is nearing home.

The spirit bird represents both inner resources and outer guidance. While its presence in the film is associated with Molly, the women’s reflections on Molly lead them to think about their Naskapi students, student potential, the potential of the Naskapi community, as well as their own potential to lead and inspire their students.

The women’s work with potential is significant in relation to their identity construction for several reasons, linked to the following. The women appear to have difficulty defining potential and recognizing it in their students. The phenomenon of othering is evident in the women’s work around potential, raising the troubling notion that it might be

understood as something that is not experienced individually, and further, that it might be culturally defined. They struggle with the notion of why potential does not appear to be realized, and what changes need to take place to ensure that this is the case. These issues are significant to the study, because it appears that there is an interdependent relationship between how the women construct the potential of the students and the community, and the construction of their own potential and identity. I would also suggest that their understanding of potential is linked to their conscious and unconscious desire, their hopes, expectations, visions, and fears. In the following section I expand on the above.

The women connect the scenes in which they see the bird with notions of hope, power and freedom. Yet, there is some ambivalence about their thoughts, as the following demonstrates. The women see Molly as a highly skilled and independent child, capable of drawing on her personal resources. That this strength is internal, is expressed most directly by one woman who explains, “She was giving herself power and that’s when the bird came” (ZG 394). Yet the discussion around Molly and her strengths hinges on the notion that Molly’s knowledge and skill is traditional knowledge, a knowledge that is not valued in educational institutions. “That was her (emphatic) teaching, right, and that’s not a teaching that, that, um, formalized school encourages, or acknowledges,” (ZG 206) explains one of the women. This is a point around which the

others concur. The conversation takes a turn at this point, leaving unexplored the relationship between the teacher's role in Broad Lake, the goals of the school, and the role of traditional Naskapi knowledge.

The same woman who concluded the discussion above had, however, considered the relationship in her journal. She writes, "[A] Teacher in Broad Lake Reserve has the power to move a student's culture and language out of her brain by feeding (sic) with another more than the student's own. I really knew nothing of Naskapi culture" (ZJ 14). The excerpt demonstrates the woman's ambiguity about the power she held and her lack of understanding of the local knowledge and culture. It also demonstrates that the participant sees Naskapi culture and knowledge as an information base that is separate from an individual's personal construction of the world. An information base conceived of in this way can be moved "out of the brain;" and can be replaced with one that is different. In this view, the different "information base" is the one on which formal education is based. Thus, there appears to be no place for traditional knowledge in formal education.

Also significant is the way in which another participant makes the link between formal education and the possibility of potential. She feels that potential will not be achieved without it. "I, I feel that -- , I feel that the kids don't achieve, half of their potential. For me that bird is freedom in that movie, and for most white people, freedom, freedom is an education. If you have an education you have economic freedom, you

have social freedom, you have that possibility, and they don't see that there are possibilities" (BG 1282). The participant's discursive construction of education as the "great equalizer" detaches it from any and all conditions through which the structures of education on the reserve were produced. The notion that the community "don't see" possibilities is problematic. What is the source of their "inability" to see possibilities?

The participant continues, "And I don't know if we can say (change in pitch follows:) Oh, its all the student's fault, because they don't do good work, they don't show up at school, da-da-da. I don't know if it's the parents, I don't know if it's the teachers, but they, they have -- I see, I feel that there's so much potential in that school that's -- potential that's going nowhere. Potential that's wasted. I just feel that there could be so much more to -- . I don't know how to get it done -- or how you would get it done, but there are kids who are never going to leave there, that have so much ability.... There's so much that -- is never going to be fulfilled" (BG 1282). Significantly, the woman appears to be listing the factors that may play a role in why potential might remain unrealized. When she reaches the teachers in her listing, she uses a rhetorical strategy that changes the direction of her statement. She initially appears to be incorporating teachers into the factors that may contribute to the problem, however, she counters the possibility with a strategically placed

“but”. This “but” leads her to her own emphatic list of all that *she* as a teacher is able to see.

This woman sees potential, yet the students (and community) are not able to see it; thus she feels potential is wasted, going nowhere, unfulfilled. Further, and to her great concern, she does not know how to “get it done”. This is the point on which this passage turns. The teacher in question is still living in the community and thus what she is experiencing, the inability to “get it done,” is a direct challenge to her own desire and potential as a teacher.

This passage raises several additional questions that need examination: What is potential? How is it identified? And, what is the role of the transient teacher in achievement of potential?

The question, what is potential, is not easily answered by the teachers. Two of the women make reference to former students who graduated from high school, left the community for pre-university college studies, but returned either without completing the program, or without continuing on to university. They are seen to be examples of “wasted potential”. The source of their potential is described by one woman as follows, “Those are people I think of as smart. You know, that have potential” (BI 274). Here, being smart is synonymous with being in possession of potential. Another woman is more direct with her belief that not everyone has potential. She claims, “Some of them have potential. Others are...” (HI 703). I ask her to be more specific about

what potential is, and she replies, “I guess an interest in something. Who do I think has potential? I am trying to think of the students -- . Well, I was just thinking of [student] -- .When she was in my class -- I always felt that -- I really liked her of all the students because she was so nice and pleasant -- . I don’t know. She has potential. She still has it. She still is interested in things and wants to do stuff. Umm -- I am trying to think of the students now -- .They seem to be interested in things. [names two students]. You know, interested in doing some stuff. You can have interesting conversations with them -- . They don’t just sit there, “Duhh. (emphatic)” (HI 727).

Thus to have potential, you have to show interest in school, be nice and pleasant, and carry on interesting conversations. You cannot just sit there. Unfortunately, there *are* students that the teacher identifies who do *just* sit there, or who disrupt, or who are not interested. These would be students she would consider to not have potential.

Currently, however, in the province of Quebec, teachers are required to actively and explicitly plan learning and evaluation activities that will result in the development of student identity and the achievement of potential. Every student is understood to have potential that can be developed in an educational setting. The secondary program states,

By having the opportunity to utilize their personal resources, make choices, justify and implement them and assess the consequences, adolescents will become aware of their identity and the values that influence them. The learning that the students acquire at school,

whether as part of the subject-specific programs or in the context of school and classroom life, contributes to their self-knowledge, to the achievement of their potential and to their awareness of the personal, social and cultural basis for their world-views. (Education Quebec, p. 48)

In contrast to the above notion that potential development can be part of a curriculum for all students in a province, one of the participants explores the issue of what she believes is the community's readiness for school success. She links the readiness to potential. She says, "And, and, and I know that this is, what? The second full generation of schooling? And maybe, and maybe I'm looking at potential from a white person's view, but umm, maybe in, the Naskapi view of the potential is, you have a family, and that's what your potential is -- but, there's just -- there's so much that could be done with that community, that -- I don't think -- is going to happen in [my child]'s life time" (BG 1282).

The segment raises several troubling notions: that potential is culturally defined, thus that it differs from one culture, community, or group to another; that your potential as an individual is defined for you by your membership in the particular culture; and that the extent to which a group's potential can be witnessed or developed would evolve over generations, until readiness for formal schooling is met. Thus, in this scenario, a culture might be seen to have differing or less potential, but might, over time, "increase" its potential so that it eventually aligns with the view of potential of the mainstream and dominant culture.

Colonial discourse is evident in these constructions of potential as is the discourse of cultural evolution (Emberly, 2001).

Another woman agrees with the notion of school success as an evolutionary process; she suggests, however, that it is related to changing mind-set rather than changing potential. Yet, in this construction the Naskapi community is still believed to be in an “early stage”. “I think, we’re coming from, we’re obviously educated because we’re teachers, and so we had to be educated in order to get in our position. We’re probably from families with at least high school education -- our parents-- so that right there is two generations. Before that there was a third generation, and with our mindset and, and two generations isn’t very much time. So maybe next generation. Like if these kids -- can at least feel respected by their teachers, and if they can feel that they’re worth something” (ZG 1284). In this case, the woman feels that valuing oneself would be a precursor to school success; the subtext of this statement is not only that teachers must be respectful, but that the students come to school, from their homes, with limited self-worth.

Overall, three of the teachers believe that some students either do not have the potential to succeed in school, or they do not have the potential, yet. The reasons, they feel, may be cultural. Significantly, two of the three women who hold these opinions are currently working in the community. The third is working further north.

The following excerpt is significant in that the speaker situates the students' inability to achieve potential more concretely in the specific actions of community members. "So many times these kids are let down, you know the parents will say something and it doesn't happen and, and ah -- So maybe that's why they don't realize that's there's potential for things to happen, or if they make the commitment, somebody else would meet them on that commitment, you know. Umm, you so, so maybe that's part of it. And maybe that's the nature of working within that culture, you know" (BI 288). In this case inability to achieve potential is seen to be the result of parental failure. Here potential is seen to be an issue of hope and trust, which would result, if there were parental commitment. This explanation supports the teacher's belief that she is unable to help a student realize her potential for reasons outside of her control.

The woman continues, "I'm sure there's other places as well but I think that there's so, there's so much potential, there's potential for further education, there's potential for stuff happening in the school. There's potential for stuff happening in the community and ah -- I just don't see it...and I don't know how you point that out to people. You know" (BI 288). Again, for this teacher, she feels her role would be to point "it" out to the community, but she is unable to know how to do so. This is a position that aligns with the colonial construction of Lady Bountiful, who is able to identify a problem. However, as reflected earlier,

this teacher's assertion of all that she sees contrasts sharply with her inability to solve the problem, "to get it done." The language signals the extent to which she feels destabilized; her ability to see "potential" is repeated four times, yet the potential she sees is disembodied. It is not the potential of a student, with whom she would have a relationship in the classroom, but "potential for stuff happening in the school...in the community."

What remains constant in the overall discussion of potential is the way it is connected to notions of academic success; further, education is constructed as "the great equalizer," the key to economic and social freedom. Unfortunately, the discussion does not focus on how education or educators might change in the face of students' unrealized potential. Instead, the focus is on changes that the students or the community must make for them to be able to have or use potential. This is most evident in the experience of the woman who is troubled by her inability to "point this out" to the community; she does not *appear* to connect unfulfilled potential with her own practice, nor with educational structures. I have italicized the word *appear* because I believe it is possible to suggest that her preoccupation with this issue is a window into the woman's unexplored grief around having been unable to realize her own potential as a teacher in the setting.

I believe that the sorrow this woman experiences around her own undeveloped potential is shared by four other participants whose

experience in the north caused them to question their practice, their intentions, their beliefs, their abilities, and their training: Their repeated use of negative terms and expressions of self-doubt to describe their abilities and actions allow us to explore the significance of their comments. The first woman questions the impact of what she taught. She writes, "I wondered if what I was teaching ...and doing was relevant. Was it so necessary for them to learn [my subject]? So few end up using it for real...Should I be here and what am I doing to them? Am I wasting their time? Chopping away, bit by bit, adjective by verb, their culture, their mother-tongue. Their being?" (AJ 16). In this case, the curriculum is the destructive tool with which she finds herself armed. She wonders about the impact of her actions on her student's "beings".

A second woman questions her competency as a teacher, linking it repeatedly with personal "lack". "In Ridgeville, I had the impression that I lacked resources to respond to the needs of students who I now realize were children with special needs or with specific learning disabilities. But at the time, I believed I was incompetent because I lacked confidence in myself and in my knowledge" (MM 25 - 27).

A third writes about feelings of failure and futility, which are a result of her own inability to foster trust, "I remembered the sense of failure I felt at never being able to connect or adequately serve my students. I tried to combine the program that I was sent to teach with materials that had Native content, but it seemed patronizing. I ...was

proud of my students' work, but still was always left with a feeling of futility...that I was never going to be trusted enough to break through the cultural barrier that existed" (GJ 5).

The fourth speaks of inadequacies in training and personal action. "How can "we" help? That is something as a teacher I never could answer. I know I did a poor job as a teacher, never meeting their needs" (LI 3). "To be honest I wasn't prepared (no understanding) to teach in that environment. My teacher training was inadequate in all sorts of ways but I too was far too quiet. I should have become more involved, asked more questions and challenged things more often" (LI 12).

The depth of self-doubt is palpable. It is no surprise that three of the above four women left the community feeling they had failed or had fallen short of what was required of them, despite staying for periods of up to seven years. Currently one no longer teaches, and a second describes giving up on teaching in the north, needing to start all over, but wandering around the province for years. The negative impact that this experience had on these women's sense of self and belief in their own potential as teachers is unquestionable.

This is most obvious in the monologue that follows.

Linda

This monologue was written by a woman who arrived in the north as a recent graduate who was both anxious for her first teaching experience and looking forward to a northern adventure. She had

accepted the job over another offer made following her training. After some thought, she chose to work with the Naskapi community, "That's fun and exciting and different, and... Oh (emphatic), I'll be living in the north. Oh (emphatic), I'll be experiencing the tundra" (LI 272).

She stayed in the community for seven years.

Linda's Monologue (Letter to My Daughter, Alison)

Thursday, June 19/96

Dearest Alison,

Well today was the day. The movers arrived this morning and loaded up the truck with all our boxes! I can't believe it, we are really leaving! I must admit it feels odd to see strangers taking our stuff away, I wonder if I will ever see any of it again! But stranger still to be leaving so much behind. We sold all our furniture and the car. We won't be leaving [here] until the 3rd of July, and the house is pretty empty. You kids are taking it all in stride though. You don't seem the least bit bothered by it all. I have to say Alison, that you children are the most wonderful creatures. I love you so much, and I'm so glad you are in my life. It is because of you 3 that we really decided it was time to leave [here]. I want to show you the world and want to have more adventures with you. Living up here in the North was a great adventure and one that will be hard to top. My only regret is that you aren't old enough to have any memories of it. The boys will, I hope. They will remember things like camping and fishing, driving through the tundra, and mountains of snow! I hope they will remember the good friends we have had here and our house. We have had some

really terrific times, but the novelty has worn off and I feel I need to move on.

I came up here to be a teacher, and yet that has really taken a back seat to all the other things that life has offered me here. This was my first teaching assignment straight out of university and I was very ill prepared to teach high school English to Naskapi children. I guess I never really took time to consider their needs. I was too caught up in wanting to experience "Northern Canada". I made a few shallow attempts to know the Naskapi people and their traditions. But living 15 km away from the reserve meant there was little contact or chance to socialize out of school hours. I did try to tan a caribou hide a couple of years ago! Man, what back breaking work. And in the end I couldn't finish it before it went rotten and had to be thrown out!

It is very unfortunate that I never really had the chance to get deeply involved in my teaching career up here, because every other year I was either pregnant, or working part time or taking months off in a row to have a baby! In some ways I regret that, but I wouldn't change things now. I love the Naskapi children and really had good experiences with them. This past year had to be the worst though, Alison. I didn't know I had [the illness] until after Christmas. So all during the fall and into the winter I thought I must have been suffering from some kind of nervous breakdown. I hated going out to school everyday. I was a nervous wreck. I don't know how I kept going. And I shouldn't have. I should have stopped myself - or someone else should have noticed my condition and told me to stop. I hated leaving you 3 little guys everyday, even though I knew you were being well taken care of. All I could think of was how much I wanted to leave [this place], but more over how much I didn't believe in myself as a teacher. I lost all confidence in my teaching ability this year, and along with my energy level, my desire to teach seems to be fading away. I hope the move to a new place, a new school, will help me regain some lost enthusiasm and perhaps I can grow as a teacher for a change.

The main focus of my life over the last 7 years has been you 3 children - something I did not expect when I first came there in 1989. It's amazing how the focus on one's life can alter so abruptly. I will take with me so many beautiful memories of the natural beauty of the place and of our experiences here. But I doubt that we will ever

return. Hopefully I can stay in contact with a few of the students. The few girls in the high school that I have been able to get close to are really wonderful people. I hope they all follow their dreams and further their educations so they can help their people. I don't think I did very much for any of them academically, but I hope at least they saw in me someone who would listen and who cared and who wasn't trying to take advantage of them in any way.

Now Alison, it's on to another adventure! I am so excited and very tired. Good night Sweetheart. Sweet dreams. Tomorrow is another busy day.

Love,

Mom xo

Exploration of Linda's Monologue (letter)

Linda explained in a note accompanying the monologue and in the interview that she had some difficulty deciding what to write.

Significantly, during the interview she says, "Well, I haven't spoken about [the town] -- well probably just about since I left" (LI 429). Despite the fact that she was part of a teaching couple, she also says, "You know, even [my husband] and I don't talk about [the town] all that much -- really" (LI 437).

She begins her letter with an image of an important stage in their departure; the movers are loading up the family's personal effects in preparation for their move from the community. In the interview passage where she has said that she and her husband do not discuss life in the north, she explains that some of those boxes, packed seven years ago, remain unopened.

“Everything’s in boxes, up in that attic, and it’s just filed away, just filed away. Just like [overseas], everything’s filed away, -- like everything’s filed away. And it’s a part of my past. I know it is -- That’s where all my children came from (laughter). But, ah -- . It’s a distant -- it feels like a million years ago now -- .It really does. It feels like a long, long, long, long time ago. And it’s umm -- .Yeah, it’s hard to put myself back into that situation and think about it” (LI 437). The boxing of the past appears to remove it from present thought and attention.

Linda’s professional identity was shaped significantly by two aspects of her personal life while up north: parenting and illness. She arrived in the north, a young single woman; she was a novice seeking an adventurous teaching experience. Within thirteen months, however, she was married and the mother of a small child. There is ambiguity in the way in which she describes the impact that these events had on her life as a teacher. She writes, “It is very unfortunate that I never really had the chance to get deeply involved in my teaching career up here, because every other year I was either pregnant, or working part time or taking months off in a row to have a baby! In some ways I regret that, but I wouldn’t change things now” (LM 7).

In her final year in the community, an undiagnosed physical illness took its toll. With symptoms that caused her to believe she was having a nervous breakdown, she struggled to cope with both parenting and teaching. She wanted to leave, to move elsewhere. In the opening

paragraph of the monologue (letter), however, Linda had explained the move in relation to the children, “It is because of you 3 that we really decided it was time to leave [the town]. I want to show you the world and want to have more adventures with you. Living up here in the North was a great adventure and one that will be hard to top” (LM 5).

In the second section of her monologue (letter), however, she links the need to leave the community with her illness, her parenting fears, and with her self-image as a teacher. She begins with an explanation of her state of mind, “I hated going out to school everyday. I was a nervous wreck. I don’t know how I kept going.... I hated leaving you 3 little guys everyday, even though I knew you were being well taken care of. All I could think of was how much I wanted to leave [the town], but more over how much I didn’t believe in myself as a teacher” (LM 7).

In the final section of the paragraph, Linda explains her hopes for the move. “I lost all confidence in my teaching ability this year, and along with my energy level, my desire to teach seems to be fading away. I hope the move to a new place, a new school, will help me regain some lost enthusiasm and perhaps I can grow as a teacher for a change” (LM 7).

In addition to the loss of desire and of enthusiasm for teaching, the last phrase indicates she feels she has not grown as a teacher. She had arrived, “very ill prepared to teach high school English to Naskapi students” (LM 6) and left, seven years later, with a sense that, “I don’t

think I did very much for any of them, academically” (LM 8). In an effort to salvage some meaning from the experience as a teacher, she writes, “I hope at least they saw in me someone who would listen and who cared and who wasn’t trying to take advantage of them in any way” (LM 8).

The struggle to find value and meaning in the teaching experience up north is still troubling for Linda, as this interview passage shows, “You know one of the best, greatest senses, sense, of, of accomplishment as a teacher, or whatever, that I ever had up there -- and it’s terrible, I suppose. And it was my last year teaching and I was doing Sha, I was doing a unit of Shakespeare.... And I, oh, I’ve forgotten his name, but he was not a strong student, very cute boy, very quiet, and everything, but he wasn’t a strong student. But we went over and over these passages in, in, I think it must have been Hamlet, and broke them down, and, and everything to make them understand what was going on. And we practiced monologues, and everybody had to perform. But anyway, on the written exam, he did so well. He got in the 70s and I, I felt so good for him. And he, he didn’t, like, say anything to me, but I could see, just physically in his body and stuff that he was so pleased and proud of himself, that he’d gotten that mark” (LI 206). Linda’s own enthusiasm had risen as she described what happened. She goes on, pleasure rising in her voice, until a sudden, sharp shift, occurs. She continued, “And, and I thought wow, you know. Pheww. I reached him, I got, somehow, a little, little something in there clicked, or something. And that was one of

my prouder -- isn't that awful, that I just remember that. And Shakespeare, (blowing a raspberry). What good is Shakespeare to them? (laughter) Oh god" (LI 206).

Linda's perception of the student's sense of accomplishment appears to be what gives Linda her own sense of accomplishment. Yet she struggles with this, using the word "but" repeatedly, as if countering a challenge to her right to feel a sense of accomplishment. Then, faced with the realization that she had linked her greatest teaching accomplishment to curriculum content that had been challenged in the group discussion, she went on to make an argument for herself as to why the use of Shakespeare is of conflicting value to the students.

The self-doubt that is evident in the above passage is an issue that Linda raises later in the interview. She does so while mentioning that she is in regular contact with a group of people who taught in the same community at the same time. She contrasts her contact with that group, with the research experience. She explains, "We never actually talk about the experience or how we felt when we were up there. So I really haven't spoken about it, since leaving -- um, but it was nice to talk about it. And it was good to hear that I wasn't alone -- with my self-doubts and all this stuff, too. But I guess I'm surprised to hear there were as many people with doubts, or like I said before, I thought everyone was very -- confident and knew what they were doing up there, and very -- self-

assured and professional and everything. But I guess -- it was all just a cover-up. (Laughter) Oh god" (LI 429).

As a novice, who entered the community, Linda constructed herself in reference to the other teachers with whom she found herself working. As a result she felt trapped, feeling pressured to conform to the model of professional, while only being able to masquerade as one. "I'm surrounded by these professionals who've been doing their job for years, and they know what they're doing" (LI 102). Her response is to try to do the same, "Look professional, just go around looking professional, just pretend you know what you're doing. You know, just this façade going on, and, and keeping up appearances, and keeping up the show. And you don't want to question, because you don't want to sound stupid and you don't want to look stupid, and you don't want to look like you don't know what you're doing. So just keep on, just keep on doing what you're doing" (LI 102). She was unable to ask questions, for fear that she would be exposed, so she continued with what she felt was a masquerade. She adds, "And it must, I mean, I'm sure that's what I was doing, teaching up there, probably the whole time I was up there, was trying to keep up this façade. And, and look like a professional" (LI 104). In contrast, she felt, "everyone else, knew what they were doing. (intonation rising) Everyone else was really on the ball. (laughter) And, you know --, god, yeah, they knew what they were doing" (laughter) (LI 60). The intensity of these

memories, which refer to events over a decade ago, underline their significance for her.

In Linda's journal, she explains that she feels she had no idea how to "help" the Naskapi students. She expresses that she "was inadequate" and writes, "I know I did a poor job as a teacher, never meeting their needs" (LJ 1). She felt she was ill-prepared for the job, and that her university training was far from useful. She says, "I just felt that [the university training] was just sort of, ahh (intonation changing to false formality) making sure that you knew how to write on the chalkboard properly and dress accordingly. You know it was just all just little fluffy things, (laughter). But there was, there was very little deep meaningful, useful stuff I could carry out of there, to really teach" (LI 236). Ill-prepared to "really teach" she kept up "the façade" of being a professional throughout her time in the community. In the monologue (letter) she writes that she hoped the move to another place would allow her "to grow as a teacher *for a change*," underlining how little she felt she knew, even after seven years in the community. The letter has an almost apologetic tone, as if this is a period in her life, for which Linda needs to apologize to her daughter.

In describing the preparation to write the monologue, Linda explains that she was concerned about what to "divulge". She explains, "And the more I thought about that, I didn't like the way, like, I wouldn't be able to express everything I wanted to express because I would feel

that I was going to be hurting that person's feelings or (pause) or, maybe not being really honest with myself about things and things" (LI 32). This raises the question of what thoughts she felt unable to divulge, and who might be hurt by the revelations, and why? And equally, in what way she might not be honest with herself.

With the monologue (letter), Linda attempts to frame the northern experience as an adventure, for which "the novelty has worn off" (LM 5), and one which is simply a phase before, "it's on to another adventure" (LM 9). It is addressed to one of the children, underlining the important role that parenting has played in the experience for Linda. And while she emphasizes her deep love of her children, it appears that the cost of becoming a parent was the loss of her dream of teaching. This was a cost that initially aroused resentment, and later reinforced her feelings of inadequacy as a teacher.

"Yeah. Well I felt that almost everybody else was really, deeply involved. I remember being home with the kids, during my maternity -- and being really resentful of the kids and resentful of, just everything. I was just full of resent -- ment. That here I am, stuck with another kid at home, and everyone else is going out and doing these really incredible things at school, and getting really involved and dadadadadada. And I knew I shouldn't be resentful. I knew that was a wrong emotion to be having" (LI 60).

Linda's intonation rose as she continued to describe her emotional struggle, "I've got little kids, my god, little babies at home. I've got to nurture them and love them. And, like. I guess I did. I don't feel I was doing an adequate job, at anything, at that point in my life" (LI 60). Linda struggles with the discursive construction of the mother as the loving nurturer, which would run counter to the resentful mother she felt herself to be, and which she feels is "wrong". "Everything was just, kind of, miss-mash and thrown at me. And I didn't really sit back and take the time to really, ah analyze, and think about the way my life was really going. And did I want it to go in that direction, and things like that" (LI 60).

At a certain point in her years up north, Linda appears to weigh the possible constructions of self as mother and teacher, and makes a conscious effort to embrace the role of mother, constructed as the loving nurturer, at which point the demands of teaching become the source of anxiety. "Those feelings of resentment, once I put that aside, and realized, you know, just get on with it, and this sort of thing (pause) having to drive out to [to the school], everyday, and leave them all behind, really killed me there for a while, too... to leave them all behind, again, and go out on my own, that really bothered me" (LI 109).

Linda appears unable to construct a self that manageably incorporates the role of parent and teacher, the latter which would require her to "go out on [her] own". In the interview segment below, she

uses the words “to divide myself into more parts” to describe what it means to struggle for integration. The parts, however, are constructed in reference to images of the teacher, as “professional” who “knows what they are doing” and the mother who is the “loving nurturer”.

“I, I really think that anyone who starts off teaching shouldn’t ever have children until they’ve been teaching for many years (laughter). So that they can get that one part of their life kind of settled before something else hits. I think I’ve always been torn, feeling that I’m not doing an adequate job as a mother, and (emphatic) not an adequate job as a teacher because I spend so, (pause), I think that’s one fault of mine as a teacher, I would always drag everything home with me. I couldn’t leave it at school and, and just wipe my hands of it, at four o’clock, or whatever, and say, See you tomorrow. I’d drag it all home. So my nights would be full of it. And then my weekends would be full of it. And then I’d think, Oh crap, I haven’t spent any time with my kids. I’m a shit mother. God, you know, and I’d be beating myself up, about that, too....And I, god, I wish I had more -- I don’t know if it’s energy or just an ability to divide myself into more parts. I don’t know what it is, but I -- just the ability to leave my bloody school work at school (laughter)” (LI 181).

Linda struggled to be what she understood a professional to be, that is, “to know what she was doing”; she did so by working on schoolwork at nights and on weekends, but that only left her feeling

inadequate as a parent. On the one hand she felt the need to bring work home, to fulfill the teacher role, yet she also felt that her inability to walk away from work was a failing. When she did bring work home, it reduced time she felt she should spend with the children, which lead to more feelings of inadequacy.

Currently, Linda is not teaching. After living in the north, she taught in two different settings, however when she moved to her current home, she chose not to seek a teaching position, choosing instead to work in a library. As a librarian, she does not experience the 'dread' that she associates with teaching. "I chose not to teach when I came to [this province] (pause). But you know, I think, with teaching, I think that what the dread comes with always being on (pause) always being on. It's like, being there and putting on a smile and there's always somebody there. And there's always going to be somebody asking a question or demanding something. And I think a little bit of the dread comes from that. That there's no time in the day, for yourself. Just to even think for two seconds. Once you get in that classroom, you've got to be on for the whole day, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom (pause). Ummm. Yeah. Like I caught myself in the library, today, actually before that preschool group came...And I just sat there for five minutes, staring into space. And, finally, I realized, good god, what other job is there, where you can just actually sit there and stare into space for five

minutes. And no one's going to come over and go: what are you doing (falsetto)? (laughter)" (LI 169).

Linda's experience in the north was marked by self-doubt about both her teaching and her parenting. The question, "What are you doing?" is one that she was "beating [herself] up with" (LI 181), about both roles. There is some irony in the notion that Linda's discursive construction of what it means to be a teacher is one that might be used in reference to being a teacher *or* a parent, "It's like, being there and putting on a smile and there's always somebody there. And there's always going to be somebody asking a question or demanding something" (LI 169).

I wondered how the construction of her professional identity might have differed if she had begun her teaching experience elsewhere. Near the end of the interview I asked the following question, "You said that you weren't prepared to teach in that environment. Do you think that the training you had would have prepared you to teach in a different environment?" She paused and sighed before answering, "God (pause) no, I still think it really would have been inadequate (pause) not, uh, okay, my whole experience was coloured by having kids and being in and out of teaching, and everything, and like I say, I don't feel I consistently had time to teach and get into teaching and everything" (LI 416). So while Linda pinpoints the inadequacies of training as a problem, she is able to pinpoint the role that parenting played on her perception.

In the last paragraph of her monologue (letter), Linda juxtaposes two thoughts. The first refers to students with whom she connected, “I hope they all follow their dreams and further their educations so they can help their people,” she writes. This is immediately followed by, “I don’t think I did very much for any of them” (LM 8). Linda appears to have been unable to see her own dream through to fruition; instead she was at home, watching as others lived the northern adventure that she had dreamed of, “doing these really incredible things at school, and getting really involved” (LI 60).

With the loss of the dream came the loss of the possibility of a teacher identity, with which she arrived in the north, which in turn diminished her sense of self. She left the north as follows, “I just kind of, I sort of have this visual image of myself as this ghostly figure kind of coming and going out of the school, but I don’t think I made any impression like a, you know, like a lasting impression, on anybody or anything. Just sort of filtered through” (LI 56).

Linda went north in search of a teaching adventure, but was unable to be guided by the professionals who she wished to emulate. She was without her own “spirit bird,” unable to fulfill her potential and unable to provide the guidance she believed her students needed. She suggests that it is the role of teacher that left “no time in the day, for [her]self”. I would counter, however, that it was the construction of her identity as a parent that left no time for her to shape a professional

identity. In the end, as a teacher, she became ghost-like, rather than the spirit bird she may have wished to be.

The exploration of Linda's monologue and the women's work with the idea of the "spirit bird" draw attention to the significance of their understanding of potential and its relationship to both inner resources and outer guidance. For some of the women, like Linda, the data suggests that their inability to see the students achieve their potential goes hand in hand with turning their gaze inward – to question their own actions, to doubt their own ability, or to doubt their readiness as teachers. Thus, the students' unrealized potential is connected to their own perceived failure to realize their personal potential as teachers. The data demonstrates that this interrelatedness is also the case with the other participants who appear to turn their gaze outward to the students and community, rather than to their own practices. In this case we can use a psychoanalytic notion to understand the unconscious processes that may be at work. More explicitly, we might say that the data demonstrates the conflict the teachers experience as a result of their students' failure to succeed in a way desired by the teachers. Projective identification (Robertson, 2004) suggests that the conflict may be projected outward, thus the result may be the perception that the students are not ready to learn or to participate in education.

The post-colonial notion of "othering" (Attwood, 1992) plays a troubling role in the above dynamic. If we accept that the conflict is

projected outward by the teacher (Britzman, 1998), and if we accept that through the process of othering, individual Naskapi people might be seen as part of an undifferentiated whole, without distinct desires, history and abilities, then the conflict may be projected onto the undifferentiated whole. Thus, the entire community may be perceived as being unable to understand the value of education, lacking potential or unable to realize potential. Notably, it is the women who are currently teaching in the community who appear more likely to perceive the unrealized potential as an issue that requires changes in the community rather than in their practice as teachers.

The chapter that follows explores the case of Guinevere, whose dream of fulfilling her potential was directly linked to moving north to teach. This dream was shattered, yet she did not give up on teaching. Her case allows the reader to witness the three themes, explored in the previous three chapters, at work in the construction of one white woman teacher's identity.

CHAPTER 8

The Fragile Fixings of Guinevere:

One White Woman's Struggle to Construct Identity

In the introductory pages of this thesis, I sketched out the contours of identity, as it is understood in this study. It is:

- in constant and fluid transformation (Bloom, 1998; Masny 2004);
- performed through representations of the self (Hollway, 1989; Robertson, 1994);
- “subject to the effects of unconscious wishes, desires and processes” (Weedon, 1997, p. 84; Robertson, 1994);
- subject to the effects of intersubjective relations (Hollway, 1989);
- subject to the effect of power relations (Hollway, 1989; Foucault, 1997).

It is possible to see the embodiment of the contours, named above, in the exploration of the women's work around their deeply felt moments during the viewing of *Rabbit Proof Fence*, as well as in all the participants' work with the three themes, and finally in the women's monologues. Each woman's words permit us to explore the ways in which they bring voice and meaning to their experience as white women teachers in the north. The explorations of the women's monologues demonstrate the way

in which the meaning that is fixed is done so through language; thus, it is fragile and temporary.

While I inserted each of the monologues strategically into one of the three specific headings, I feel it is clear that each woman's self-representations give us insight into all three themes: perceptions of community divisions and membership, views of the teacher role, and beliefs around potential. These three elements intersect powerfully and painfully in the identity construction of the seventh woman, whose monologue is at the heart of this chapter. It is treated separately, because of the way all three of the above themes are repeatedly evident in her self-representations. The case of this woman also stands out because she had specifically articulated that it was her dream to teach in the north. Once again, I want to underline that my work with the monologue is intended to demonstrate the conflicting ways in which individuals give voice and meaning to an experience, and to explore the psychological and social uses of the representations.

Guinevere

Guinevere flew north with the desire to integrate into an Indigenous community, to change lives and to create a new life that differed completely from the one that appeared to await her if she stayed in the south. She left Ridgeville twelve years ago, thus she is reflecting on the experience from a distance not available to some of the other participants. Note: Words that Guinevere chose to omit in her journal

entry, by using ~~striketrough~~, have been left in the text, and appear exactly as found in her writing.

Guinevere's Monologue:

It remains somewhat of a mystery to me. It feels what I imagine a past life would feel like, if you believe in such things. Perhaps it was an inherited spirit of adventure, the fear of becoming my mother, and even a boy, but the only reason I was aware of at the time was that I wanted to live another life than the one I had been living. I longed to chase the caribou, ride a ski-doo along the ridges and through the bush and smell like the spruce boughs I had slept on that night.

Upon arrival, I was well taken care of. The teachers and other characters that kept Ridgeville running were celebrating their own return home. I was along for the ride. My first taste of reality came when I realized that none of my belongings would arrive within the next three weeks. School began, people re-established their routines and I was left to figure it out myself. I realize now that had I asked, I would have been welcomed into their homes, but I didn't. Instead, I found a spoon in my driveway and a pot in my house and I began to discover the many culinary pleasures I could experience with my two items and the goods at the Northern store.

In the corners of memory draped with cobwebs, I only see flashes of image and hear partial sentences from voices that were once so familiar. Each morning I pass by bear paw snowshoes strung with caribou gut sitting idle in the corner. It stirs a flutter of emotion as that spoon stirs my coffee moments later.

Strangely, the moments I would rather forget are the ones screaming for attention. I herded my students to class only to find myself in the middle of a family feud. One pregnant teenager leaned over my shoulder to grab the larger girl behind me by the hair. I crumpled underneath the weight of her fall and can still see the mother-to-be's foot missing my head by a hair. I know I screamed, but can't hear the noise. A teacher charged down the hallway as the

doors of the surrounding classrooms swung open. I stood, but was grabbed by the shoulders and felt the force which builds just before a launch. It never happened, but wild eyes met mine and I was ordered to the office. Keys violently catapulted themselves through the vice principal's doorway (I know it was the intent of the keys, because I am not violent). I locked myself in the washroom and broke like a twig. Later, I was told that I "handled it like a rookie." Those words sliced a wound which never healed, even after I realized that once teachers are able to "handle" Crazy, they should really find a new job.

And then the fire.

There are no voices which remain in my memory of that day, only images. We gathered at a staff member's house. Raw sadness floated in the eyes of the teachers. I watched their suffering helplessly. By the end of that morning, this community had replaced sadness with hope and shock with strength. Plans to reopen the school had begun.

I stirred my coffee this morning. I didn't think about the caribou, my ski-doo or even the smell of spruce boughs. My days in Ridgeville gave me the knowledge of things I didn't know I needed. After years of wandering around the province, I was invited to teach at a school in Aylmer. It did not surprise me that the recommendation came from a contact in Ridgeville. However, I was surprised by the sense of familiarity in this new school. I found something I had longed for. The lessons I learned in the North gave me the ability to recognize the power of a community of colleagues and friends. This time, I'm not letting go.

Exploration of Guinevere's Monologue

Guinevere's monologue has a significantly different tone from her journal; this is intended and is explained by Guinevere in the interview. She wanted to counter the sense of failure that she felt was expressed in the initial piece of writing. Before taking a closer look at the monologue I want to explore what Guinevere felt was behind the negativity in the

journal. That discovery can then be contrasted with what Guinevere seeks to represent in the monologue.

The feelings that Guinevere articulates in the journal are so powerful, that she describes having what she wryly called, “a moment,” in the process of writing. She had brought to words some thoughts that she had previous not expressed. In her journal, she had written “OUCH” at the end of the second to last paragraph, the one in which she had made the painful observations.

In the group discussion she described what had taken place. While she remained composed as she spoke, her pace and volume increased significantly. Following Hunt (1989), this is an example of affective intonation, which draws attention to the emotional impact of what she was saying. I have left the passage in its entirety because Guinevere has articulated very clearly how in the process of working up north, she was stripped her of the belief that she had something to offer as a teacher.

“And...while I was writing this, I kind of realized, that, you know, being so young, and having these, you know, this wonderful dream of how life was going to be, forever and ever, um -- , That was not really -- it was arrogance, and I was walking into that world, thinking that I was going to become part of it, and, you know, I look back now, and, who the hell did I think I was doing that. And, I realized very quickly, from things -- like when they set the school on fire, that, in fact, I was not welcome there. And, no matter how hard I tried, to bring in, you know, Native literature, to use in my English class or something like that, I had no business being in a position where I was going to somehow, lead these kids, you know, into this sense of pride, that I felt, they didn’t have. I think I was completely wrong. I think they just, they weren’t showing me any of it. And, and so, in the end, I kind of feel, like that whole process,

betrayed my dream, but at the same time, I had an active role in betraying the kids. Walking in there everyday, telling them, I have something to offer you” (GG 1127).

The staggering loss of Guinevere’s dream of leading her students to a sense of pride is felt in the language she uses to describe the devastation she experienced; not only is she betrayed in the process, but she believes she has actively betrayed the students that she longed to help.

There is a distance in the monologue that stands in contrast to the journal entry and the group discussion, in which it might be suggested that the sense of loss are palpable. In the monologue Guinevere refers to partial images and fragments of speech; she focuses on the lessons she “learned in the North.” As a result, the monologue counters the above journal segment’s representation of utter failure. It does, however, explore one of experiences that contributed to Guinevere’s devastation and it acknowledges the lingering echoes of that experience.

Significantly, despite her sense that in writing her journal she had resolved the residual negative feelings, and moved on, she discovered in writing the monologue that this was not the case. She writes, “Strangely, the moments I would rather forget are the ones screaming for attention” (GM 4). The emotional intensity and pain she experienced echo through the choice of her language (Robertson, 2004). Overall, however, the monologue demonstrates Guinevere’s desire to find meaning in an experience that, as she explains in her journal, “filled me up & gave me a

new life, but was also emotionally devastating in its betrayal of my self dreams “ (GJ 11). The monologue, as Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest, serves Guinevere in that it allows her to “make sense of [her life] as a whole...to make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart come together again, by retelling and restorying the events of one’s life” (p. 746).

There were two dreams that took Guinevere north. On the one hand she dreamed of, as she explains, “another life than the one I had been living”. She wanted to ensure that she did not drown in a suburban life, as she felt both her parents had. She wanted to develop her “genetic spirit of adventure,” a spirit that she felt had been squelched in her father, through the suburban life he chose to lead (GI 98, 102, 286, 295). The second dream is a rescue fantasy. She explains it as follows, “I think that one of the reasons I became a teacher was to get up north. I don’t think it was always about the teaching. It was very much about going up north, because I’d already been up north -- and so, so -- it wasn’t so much, leadership as a teacher, as a classroom teacher -- as it was about -- you know, almost like going in and rescuing Natives, you know. Making sure that everything’s okay there (laughter)” (GI 49). Echoes of the colonial discourse of “hapless Natives” in need of rescue (Harper, 2000a) appear to influence Guinevere’s move north; she arrives with a fully articulated dream of doing something about what she perceived was the terrible situation for Indigenous people, thus acknowledging the

impact of the colonial past. This is an issue that sets Guinevere apart from the other women. While she appears to make light of this now, the source of her concern that everything might not be okay, and that rescue might be necessary, has its roots in Guinevere's youth, a point that I discovered in the interview session.

As an adolescent she had participated in a student exchange with Inuit students, with whom she became close friends. She explains why she felt a sense of responsibility and why she used the word rescue to describe what she felt compelled to do. "You know, like, about six month after I came home from um -- my first trip -- um -- I got a phone call that one of my friends had gone off into the tundra with two of his buddies and they were drunk and sniffing gas and they got on their skidoos and decided to go to Montreal. And eventually -- ah -- they ran out of gas and they started to walk and one by one they fell asleep, passed out, couldn't walk anymore and they were separated and they were all found but one of them had both -- ah hands and both feet and his nose amputated. And ah, they all ended up in hospital. And ah -- so they were in the Montreal Children's for a while. And so I was in there visiting them. They (emphatic) very much felt that the time they spent on the exchange in Montreal convinced them that they wanted to be in the city. And -- and I thought that, you know, we had really screwed up that whole exchange program in sort of giving them a really tainted view of what life is like, you know -- and just sort of reinforced what, what television had told

them, you know” (GI 53-57). She explained that when the Inuit students came south they were entertained with a full slate of activities every day. She felt that what they experienced was not typical of a day in the life of an adolescent and she felt that their exchange trip was an inaccurate representation of life in the south.

While in the interview she jokingly uses the term “crimes of the fathers (laughter)” (GI 340) to speak about her motivation, the above excerpt demonstrates that an event occurred that embodied for Guinevere what those crimes might be. As a result, I would suggest, she came to feel some responsibility. She was witness to the agony of the amputations, and she was also witness to the recognition of having participated in some way in that horror (Felman and Laub, 1992).

Felman and Laub (1992) write about past trauma, such as the Second World War, and the way in which we often view such events as locked in a historical past. They claim, instead, that the repercussions of these events are pervasive and evolving. In Guinevere’s story we see the ongoing effects of colonial expansion, which for some remain an event enclosed in our past. In the interview, Guinevere characterized her desire to rescue as part of her naivety; she speaks with tremendous force in the group session about what she thinks of as her arrogance. Thus, we might say she has engaged retrospectively in a harsh post-colonial critique (Gandhi, 1998) of her own intentions. Yet, given the kind of horror she

witnessed as an adolescent, can her desire to rescue be judged? Is there any appropriate response to what she witnessed?

As the monologue and journal demonstrate, Guinevere was unable to enact her dream of being the rescuer, and as a result her dream of adventure was also squelched. In the following excerpt, Guinevere pinpoints the facets of the experience that contributed to her failure to realize the dreams. “I felt that I wanted to leave the (only) home I had known to integrate with a Native community in the North. ...The people lived in a kind of segregation which I had not expected. I felt that I was welcomed into the lives of the people who lived in town, but I did not have the skills I needed to ever feel that on the reserve....I remembered the sense of failure I felt at never being able to connect or adequately serve my students. I...was proud of my students’ work, but still was always left with a feeling of futility-- that I was never going to be trusted enough to break through the cultural barrier that existed. [There was a] cultural silence that existed between myself and my students. I never wanted it to be that way, but it was. I wanted desperately to instill pride in my students, but felt trapped by the fact that I simply was an outsider. It was like tricking them into believing that I had something to offer them, when it could only come from within the community” (GJ 5 – 7).

The above journal passage underlines Guinevere’s feelings of failure at being unable to forge connections with the students and

community; she sees the problems as her own shortcomings, which prevent her from being able to secure what she wanted “desperately” to accomplish. While Guinevere’s intention was to assimilate, over the course of her experience up north, Naskapi people came to be constructed as an impenetrable group of homogenous others (Attwood, 1992). Guinevere suggests she is ill-equipped to get through the fence that is erected as a result of what appear to be cultural differences (McConaghy, 2000a).

There were also several key events that might have contributed to Guinevere’s feelings that she did not have “something to offer.” Late in her second year, her efforts to incorporate “materials that had Native content” (GJ 5) resulted in backlash from a member of the community who had returned after years away. Guinevere appears to have faced with a paralyzing paradox; she feels the community is refusing to let her use the very materials through which she is trying to make her teaching meaningful. She found herself in a no-man’s land, between educational structures she felt did not respond to the needs of the community, and a community that needed a different response. Yet her response as a teacher, to adjust curriculum through the lens of cultural relativism (McConaghy 2000a), to incorporate Indigenous curriculum materials, was rejected. Despite the fact that the rejection came from one community member, the blow is seen to have been delivered by the

community. Thus, the one Naskapi voice is seen to represent all Naskapi people (Attwood, 1992; Fine, 1994).

Her explanation of the situation and her reaction is fragmented, suggesting that she has not yet been able to fully explain why her use of “materials that had Native content” generates such a reaction. “He’s been doing the Pow Wow trail and bla bla bla...Okay. I thought that was kind of interesting, but then there was so much backlash from this guy. I was like, really. That’s interesting. And then, then I was, by that time, though, that was the end of my second year, -- and I was, you know, I give up, I don’t get you people (heavy laughter)” (GI 352-356).

Psychoanalytic theory (Hunt, 1989) allows me to suggest that the laughter masks the emotional impact of this blow to Guinevere’s dreams and the impact of what it means to say, “I can’t do this” (GI 428).

In the same time period, the violent altercation that Guinevere describes in her monologue also took place. While she explains that she had never been touched violently, and that this had an impact on her, it was the being told she had “handled it like a rookie” that left her with a “wound which never healed”. By the time this event had taken place, Guinevere had been teaching for two years, among people by whom she was left in awe. To be called a “rookie” at this point, by someone who she sought to emulate, appears to have been devastating for her.

Guinevere’s adulation of her colleagues, and their impact on her as a novice, is evident in the following six excerpts. She states, “I was just

so impressed with -- you know, (laughter) I mean, I was so young, you know, that I was walking around going, (lowering her voice to a whisper:) "Everyone's so smart" (laughter) (GI 797). "They were all so (emphatic) good at their jobs" (GI 517). "Confidence, sensitivity, humour with the kids, a rapport with the kids -- umm, you know, ideas, constant ideas, all these ideas... People seemed to be very professional" (GI 525). "I felt awed by the talent of the staff (Guinevere's Insertion: and the ease with which they seemed to be part of this community)" (GJ 5). "I, I, wanted to be -- all of them" (GI 521). "I was extremely (emphatic) self-conscious and -- awkward ...I was just, -- . I just couldn't, I didn't have a language, half the time (laughter). I didn't. I don't know...but I don't remember ever speaking. I remember being very quiet all the time" (GI 821). Here Guinevere constructs herself in contrast to her seemingly accomplished colleagues. She engaged in what might be considered a struggle resulting from power relations (Foucault 1997; Hollway, 1989); she is living a relationship between the powerful expert and the awkward novice, where one is constructed interdependently with the other.

The person who had told Guinevere she had handled the situation "like a rookie" was one of the "skilled, awe-inspiring, talented" people described above. Beyond that, however, he had been an important role model for her. She explains the impact of his use of the word rookie; "I lived with him when I first went to Ridgeville. When I was student teacher, he had a major impact -- and so I really looked up to him and I

thought that I had really -- mishandled that situation, that I should have somehow been able to diffuse what was going on and certainly, if not that, been able to, actually, you know, participate in getting the kids back to class. Bringing order back to chaos. And I, and I definitely had the opposite reaction and was embarrassed and humiliated by the comment" (GI 497).

To say she was embarrassed and humiliated is an understatement; the comment wounded the very core of who she was. It appears to have stripped her of the notion that she could harbour a wish of being like her colleagues. Power relations (Foucault, 1997) are at work, and Guinevere is additionally disadvantaged since teaching on the reserve, in this episode, is constructed through gendered discourse; it is a tough job that requires uncharacteristic physical strength and emotional stamina.

Guinevere's perception, "I can't do this" was the result of the combination of these events and circumstances: The failure to assimilate, or even connect with the Naskapi community in some way; the realization that she was unable to instill pride in her students; feeling herself unable to bridge the distance from educational structures to the needs of the community; as well as the humiliation of not securing the approval of a valued role model. These events and circumstances can be directly associated with the three themes structuring the thesis.

It can be suggested that Guinevere was unable to cross the fences she felt existed; unable to determine how to fill the role of teacher, meaningfully; unable to be a guiding spirit bird for her students, and finally, was rejected by the one who she considered to be her own spirit bird. These are the factors that contributed to her decision to “give up.”

Guinevere left the community, and found work in the south. She explains, “I wasn’t ready to give up as a teacher. But I came back and started over. That was my second, first-year-of-teacher. It was a whole new ball game. So when I walked into a city school, multicultural school, I had to relearn everything” (GI 444). Thus the experience of teaching up north appears to have resulted in the devastating loss her identity, the traumatic loss of the self. Remarkably, she did not give up on teaching, she did, however, need to “start over.”

The next years were spent, as Guinevere explains, “wandering around the province” (GM 8). The word wandering captures a sense of aimlessness that is notably absent from the descriptions of Guinevere’s current school. In this school, she explains, “I found something I had longed for” (GM 8). In the group discussion, she had said, “It took me six years to get to great. You know, after I left... To get the feeling that I’m, you know (pause, laughing), it’s a great school, job is great (more laughter)” (GG 739 - 749).

Guinevere’s unfinished line in this last sequence, “To get the feeling that I’m, you know...” could be filled in a number of ways, and I

am left wondering what she would have said, had the thought not been refused. Could it have been “teacher (not a rookie)”, could it have been “great” or perhaps it was simply that she is “part of it”? We can not say. It is possible, however, to suggest that the role of a supportive school community is currently one of the most important elements in her process of identity construction.

What Guinevere has found in her current school is what she appears to have longed for, the “power of a community of colleagues” in which she is no longer the silent, observant rookie. The image she had witnessed in the north, the power of a teaching community to “replace sadness with hope and shock with strength,”(GM 6) had stuck with her, despite her own feelings that she had been unable to “be” part of that teaching community. In the interview she explains, “I think that that’s what I took from Ridgeville. I think that, you know, I went up there, with this whole Native thing going on, and, you know, all about the issue of the day, and left there, with something that I had not expected to leave with, and that was this -- the -- learning -- of the skills that you need to have to function as a member in a community and to keep that community tight. And, and, you know, looking out for each other, taking care of each other --. I didn’t know how to do that when I was up there --. I understood what it was, better, when I left, and so -- this community that I’m in right now, I mean, these are exceptional people that I work with. And, the most important thing in that school is to preserve that, so

we will, you know, sacrifice all kinds of things, to preserve -- the, the culture of the school" (GI 537). In the school Guinevere feels she learned to take risks and grow and as a teacher. She has a leadership role for the first time in her career. She describes the staff draw strength from each other and explains that this surpasses "what it means to be a teacher, that just has to do with what it means to be a member of a community" (GI 761).

I would suggest that the importance of a powerful community of caring colleagues in meaningful relationships (Westheimer, 1998) and Guinevere's place in such a community, are the representations that Guinevere seeks to make through her monologue. In doing so, and in linking her recognition of the importance of such a community to lessons learned in the north, Guinevere appears able to find meaning in the devastating experience of the loss of her dreams. I would add that experiencing first hand the power of a community to "replace sadness with hope and shock with strength," (GM 6) has even greater significance -- I would suggest that it allows Guinevere to counter the pain and guilt that resulted from her perceived participation in the trauma and horror experienced by the young Inuit men two decades ago.

CHAPTER 9

Projections of My Investments:

Securing Love & Mourning Loss

Soon after I finished the transcription of the data, I met with a class of graduate students registered in a research methods course. In a brief presentation I spoke about the design of the project; in the short time that remained I mentioned that what had surprised me in the first few months of working with the data, was the trauma that was expressed in the participant's writing.

I explained to the students in the course that in the first phase of the research three of the women disclosed in the group discussion that they had apologized to me in their journals. Their apologies were the result of the fact that they felt that what they had written was surprisingly: "sad," "tragic," "negative," or too "selfish". By the time they had submitted their monologues I had had more time to become familiar with their journals and so my attention to the issue of pain was heightened. The trauma that some revealed in their journals was evident in the monologues as well. They made use of powerful language to describe painful experiences: having being sliced, having wounds, being left with a wound which never healed, the pain of facing students, being tortured, shrieking, blowing up.

Despite the trauma, most of the women appeared to impose a narrative structure on their monologues that allowed them to conclude that the experience brought meaning and learning to their lives. As a researcher, reading the women's writing, seeing both pain and the desire to find purpose, I questioned whether I was bringing to the reading something that escaped me. I wondered if the grief that I was reading in their self-representations was somehow connected to my own sadness for something that was simply beyond my grasp.

While planning the research design, I had imagined what I would write about in my own monologue, were I to do so. I had decided it would be about a short exchange I had with an elder with whom I worked; I considered it as a happy moment in which I was acknowledged for the work I had been doing. I had always associated teaching in the north with great challenges and personal learning; I felt my own monologue would have represented that, so I was not sure where to go with the women's sadness.

However, one day, I did sit down to write my own monologue, believing it would be a useful exercise. As part of the process I found that I needed to contextualize the event that I wanted to depict. In order to do so, I found myself writing not one but two anecdotes. Later, when I took a closer look at the juxtaposition of the anecdotes I found an unexpected link to the women's sadness. I have inserted my monologue below, and

followed it with a discussion that includes attention to countertransference.

Avril's Monologue

There is a sequence that I have replayed over and over, in the last four or five years. I think that with each re-thinking of it, I have fine-tuned the warmth of the day, the angle of the sun, where I stood in relation to Joe, the expressions on our faces. The actual event took place a year or two after I had moved south, yet I was back on the reserve, once again.

Before leaving I had coordinated a Naskapi language curriculum development project. After my move to the south I would fly in three times yearly for a week or two at a time and I would review local goal-setting and progress, work on some curriculum development, do general troubleshooting and write a report for the government funding bodies. This is a role that I continue to fill.

Each time I go up, I work with the technician, an elder and whoever is the local coordinator at the time. I think of these trips as thinly disguised vacations; it's true, I work long hours but the work is creative and involves discussions and meetings with people with whom I love to reconnect. I also find the time to retrace my steps along the ridges and roads, often alone. I was not ready to leave when our family moved, even though we were in preparation for three years, having opted to manage the departure with deferred salary leaves of absence.

It took me four years of visits back to Ridgeville, before I could return to the little house on the lake in which I had lived. The first time I did so, the person with whom I caught a ride simply had to stop there, so I was not really prepared to pull into my former driveway. Although in having written those words, I am not really sure *how* I would have prepared. I stepped out of the vehicle and stood on the lawn, looked across the lake at this view I embraced so many times, and I wept with a force that surprises me, even now.

This anecdote, I suspect, could have been the heart of my monologue, however I want to go back to the story with which I began. I was back in at Broad Lake Reserve a few years after moving away. It

was surprisingly warm (however that might be a detail that I have written in). I was outside the school having recently arrived, when I ran into Joe, the elder with whom I work on the curriculum project. Joe, who is in his seventies, is the last word on language in the community. This is largely because he is co-author of the lexicon, but also because of the respect he earned through the decades that he served as chief. In the sequence that I like to replay, this is what an observer would have seen: Joe and I greet each other, with kissed cheeks. He then says to me in the telegraphic English he uses: "You home." I nod in agreement. He says, "Now you stay." There is no rising inflection - it's not a question, it is just a statement. He laughs, I smile, we part.

Generally when I have replayed this string of images, I have read it as part of my desire to make a difference, and to be acknowledged. Joe, I have believed, was welcoming me back, because he saw that I was contributing to the maintenance of the language. We shared the need to see the language used in the community, thus through my contribution to this shared vision, I was at home.

Once, however, when I replayed the images, I had to ask myself, Did he pat me on the head? That little thought drives the sequence: The kind parent pats the child lovingly on the head, and in doing so, mirrors all that she desires: to be loved, to be needed, to belong. In Ridgeville and Broad Lake, I belong, in a way that I have been unable to, elsewhere. It is my home.

I had not placed the two anecdotes together until writing the monologue. In doing so, however, it is possible to see the thread that connects them, and to explore their importance. There is my grief in having left, and my joy at being back, and along with it the notion that I was "home. " There is also the importance that being home was a designation that was granted by another person. So rather than the anecdotes being simply about 'home,' they are about belonging, about affinity and affirmation, and about giving and receiving love, and its loss.

Here then, is the connection with the women's stories. Two of the women used the words "wounds" to describe their feeling of having failed to be received as a member of one community or the other. The woman who cried in the group discussion did so as she struggled through her description of being unable to connect with the community, despite marrying and having a child. My point is not to generalize about the significance of perceptions of membership at this point, but to return to my concerns about what I was bringing to the reading. I want to suggest that the process of engaging the women in explorations of their own experience of teaching in this community, gave me an opportunity to mourn the loss of the love I was no longer able to secure as a result of my departure from the community.

If this is the case, then this dynamic would play a role in how the women made meaning because it might influence, for example, the ideas that I followed up in the discussion and individual interviews. I would even suggest that this dynamic might have influenced my decision to ask the women to write monologues as part of the research.

This does not suggest that the meaning that was made was not authentic, nor the women's own, but that the meaning that each of us made, was shaped in the space between us, as we worked through memories. In clinical terms, this dynamic would be considered countertransference; it can be understood as my projection of my

investment in the role of white teacher in an Indigenous school into a space shared by all of the women.

There is an additional issue that needs to be addressed; it is related to the fact that I know all of these women as friends and colleagues. While I simply considered us as such, over the course of the research I was required to take into account what it meant that some of these women perceived me as a mentor, role model or having the power to judge them. These perceptions may have been influenced by the fact I had been at work in the school before each of them arrived, thus was more experienced; their perceptions may also have been related to my current function as an occasional consultant at the school up north.

My understanding of their perceptions unfolded gradually. When I originally read the notes of apology in the journals, I simply thought of them as indications that the women had been troubled by the writing that resulted from the exploration of their deeply felt moments. I was ignoring the fact that they had written these notes not only to a researcher, but to me. Further, each woman had either addressed me personally or referred to my role as teacher in the past, in ways that surprised me. This needs to be explored

One woman's apology in her journal ended with, "I hope I have said something of value on the other pages. Thank you for thinking I have something to contribute." The same woman closed her monologue with, "I don't know if this is what you were looking for when you were asking

for this.” The notion that I will judge the value of what is written, and decide who is worthy of contributing, and that I was ‘looking for’ something specific is disturbing. It suggests that the power relations at work privilege me. Even more troubling however was the comment from a woman who refers to events seven years earlier. She writes, “I often think of your comments that discreetly implied I was using too many lists, that there were too many maybe, you never know, vocabulary sheets. As the years went by I think the lists decreased a lot.” The message is clear, I had the power to judge, and had been perceived to have done so, and that she feels it is worth mentioning that this thought remained with her.

On the other hand, another women tells me the role I played for her. “It’s true that you were a model and you still are, for me, eh?..But you knew that? [I had not considered that, I thanked her and she continued] Well it’s true. Because at school, I used to watch the way you did things. And I thought about the way I was, what should I do, how am I going to do it?” While that comment is somewhat reassuring in that she did not perceive me as a judge, another participant explains how she was unable to turn to me for support. “I didn’t want to keep turning to you, and, and saying: God, what should I do now Avril, What should I do – because my lord, you were doing your own thing, and, and everybody was just so busy doing so many other things”.

Two additional references generate laughter. In one the woman reveals to me that she used my name to get a student teacher placement at the school. She says, "I thought, Oh my god – and I used you, I used you! – (repeated emphatically) – That's how I got in, I'm sure of it. I sort of nabbed him [the Director of Instructional Services] at the end and said, 'You must know Avril Aitken' ". She and I laughed at that together.

The next anecdote brought laughter from the participants during the group discussion, but it gave me pause for reasons I will explain afterwards. The women were discussing how one tells if they have made an impact on their students, when one woman began to share an anecdote. Earlier on in the discussion, she had mentioned that I was her mentor in her first year, that we had journaled together around her practice. At this point she explained that one of the students called her during her second year, when he was out at CEGEP. The suggestion is that this is an indication that she has made an impact on him, yet after a brief pause she adds the punch line – he was actually calling for my phone number. This generates laughter among the women.

I suspect that the way in which I was overlooking all the references to having authority is part of my own struggle between the desire for recognition and feelings of unworthiness.

It might be argued that the credibility of what I want to say will be undermined by the authority some of the women accorded me, as well as my refusal or misrecognition of this authority. I would prefer to argue

that the impossibility of separating ourselves from the “unconscious detours of history, memory and communities” that make identity the social and psychic construction it is, demand instead that we change the way we understand the act of research. Doing so would mean accepting that it is possible for people who know each, who have a shared history, to be able to conduct and participate in research that is of value.

The last point I want to make in this exploration of my researcher role and personal investments in teaching and in the research process requires me to go back to the last anecdote I mentioned. As I wrote in the lead up to that anecdote, the women were discussing having an impact on students. This time instead of summarizing the excerpt, I have included it in its entirety. The speaker begins to tell the story; it is performed with strategic pauses and changes in intonation. She begins, “Well, Doug called me when he was in CEGEP (here is the strategic pause for effect). He wanted Avril’s number (laughter) – (group laughter) -- But, while we were on the phone – ‘What are you doing?’ ‘Oh, I’m going out tonight.’ Thursday night. He was going downtown to Crescent street, partying. ‘Be careful, Doug’. ‘Yeah miss, I remember what you said, ‘No glove, no love!’ ”

There was collective laughter as the women digested the message that Doug had retained, which was the “impact” of the teacher’s intervention: he remembered the importance of condoms. The woman

wrapped up the anecdote with the following, “So, fine, it had to do with sex -- But, that could have saved his life, right -- that little insy bit.”

What the speaker fails to mention, and what gave me pause when she told that anecdote in the group setting, was that the young man in question, Doug, took his life. The suicide happened in the year that followed his year at CEGEP in Montreal. The weight of the punch line for this segment of the anecdote is clear – it *could have saved* his life, past tense – rather than, it *could save* his life. Significantly, a topic shift took place at this point; the women moved on to how the impact teachers have is not simply academic but also social. Doug’s death, however, a social reality, did not figure in the discussion, nor did the deaths of the other young men, students or former students, who were also unable to go on living. The image of Doug rose in the conversation around teacher’s impact on students; his image was neither refused, nor buried, but Doug remained simply part of a humorous anecdote.

The same denial is present in the introduction to my own monologue. I have written that I have happy memories of my experiences as a teacher in the north; I mention “great challenges and personal learning.” But what about the students we lost? In the film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, when Molly arrives home, she says to her mother, “I lost one.” That line now grips me, as I try to account for how it is that we could have collectively, without prior discussion, in the group setting, allowed

the students we lost to be voiceless and nameless. How could we not rise to Doug's name, when five of us taught him, and when those who did not teach him have worked side by side with his mother who is a colleague at the school? How can we not bring thoughts of the suicides to the discussion when our Naskapi colleagues at the school have suffered staggering losses to such deaths? Among the eight Naskapi women teaching at the school, six have lost the closest of relatives to suicide: two have lost sons; another lost her brother; two others lost nephews; another lost her cousin. These losses had a direct impact on the other Naskapi women teachers as they were more distant relatives of at least one of the young men mentioned above, as well as close friends with those who suffered the loss first hand.

I mentioned the silence and omission of the suicides to Linda during her interview, because she and I had shared a classroom one year, and one of our students later died in what, to many, was a suicide. This young man spent time in our homes; he was a musician and magician-in-the-making who used to practice his tricks with an audience of my own daughters. Linda's response was simply to repeat her sense that she had failed to make a difference in the students' lives. She said, "What, what (emphatic) -- impression did we leave with those poor boys? Aaach (guttural and emphatic), they must have felt they have noooo (emphatic), no chance in hell for any kind of life....So, you know, what, what do you do, what do you say" (LI 260). With the guttural

exclamation, “Aaach,” she spits out a thought that has not made it to words – it is too unimaginable. It is horrifying to think that you have been unable to help your students find even a shred of meaning in life.

There is another possible explanation for the omission of the suicides. To describe this alternative, I will go back to Guinevere’s journal, as she was most articulate in voicing the distance that many of the teachers experienced. She also describes, with precision, how the phenomenon of “othering,” was embodied in the school. She wrote, “In Broad Lake I had such a difficulty connecting with the individuals that I did see on a daily basis that there was not enough to relate to -- they became “the Naskapi” as opposed to [Thomas] or [John] or [Jane] or [Susan]” (GJ 9). This explanation is as troubling as the first one, described above – it is the possibility that the deaths of these young men lost salience because they were simply one, or two or three, or four, among an undifferentiated group of students, who are Naskapi.

Sadly, in both explanations, the dreams of white women teachers and the construction of their identities play a role in how the “ones we lost” are represented.

In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned my initial surprise at the evidence of trauma and sadness that I observed in the women’s language as I read through the data. Exploring this issue lead me to the recognition of my own need to mourn as a result of my experience of

teaching in the north. A close look at each individual's self-representations, my own included, gives us insight into the uniqueness of each woman's experience of loss or sorrow.

The case of our *collective* omission of the loss of the young men to suicide is different, however. It suggests that we are unable to symbolize, that is, bring to words, the grief we feel. We are unable even to say we have been a witness to the suicides. Linda's inability to find the words is evident in her response to my question. She replies, "So, you know -- what -- what do you do, what do you say" (LI 260). Through our silence, perhaps we are also demonstrating that we are unable to acknowledge that we may have participated in some way in the loss, betrayal or rupture of the dreams of these young men (Felman & Laub, 1992). It is horrifying to think you have had no positive impact on a child. It is unthinkable when we consider that the dreams that many of us brought to the reserve were driven by the wish to save, to rescue, to love and be loved. Perhaps, though, we are silenced by something greater -- by the recognition that our best intentions and our hopes to love and nurture our students cannot overcome forces that are greater than our individual desire. Such are the forces of the continued and evolving consequences of colonization, the results of a history that is not of our making.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion, Implications & Questions for Further Research

It would probably not be worth the trouble of making books if they failed to teach the author something he had not known before, if they did not lead to unforeseen places, and if they did not disperse one toward a strange and new relation with himself. The pain and pleasure of the book is to be an experience. (Foucault, 1997, p. 205).

In this thesis I have taken the position that identity is not a stable foundation of who we are, or who we might be. I maintain, instead, that identity formation is a dynamic and fluid process (Bloom, 1998; Masny, 2004). Further, I claim that what is perceived as a unified identity is actually a temporarily fixed by-product of an individual's struggle to bring voice and meaning to her lived experience (Mama, 1995; Weedon, 1997). Thus, though language, a moment in the fluid process of identity formation is captured (Robertson, 1994).

Following Hollway (1989), I maintain that the voice and meaning that is secured is never fully intentionally determined, nor does one secure it alone. It is realized through relationships with others, where individuals position themselves through the language they use. There is a range of possible ways of being, defined through language; these are discursive positions. Each position represents an implicit set of specific values, beliefs, ideas, behaviors, rules and regulations (Foucault, 1997). The individuals who enter into relationships, who share experiences, and who interact, shape the range of these positions. They do so through the subtle negotiational shifts in power, that is, the power relations that

occur between them (Foucault, 1997; Hollway, 1989). The meaning that is secured is also shaped by their desire (Weedon, 1997; Robertson, 1994). The discourses and desire intersect and collide in this shared space, and meaning and voice are negotiated and temporarily secured. The meaning and voice that are secured are a *fragile fixing*, a provisionally fixed identity, one of the multiple positions that may be held, in language, by an individual.

The self-representations of the white women teachers in this study allow us to witness the way in which fragile fixings are secured. Their self-representations (in speech and writing) capture the significance that relationships play in the process of their identity construction. The descriptions of their experiences allow us to see power relations at work between the women and their Naskapi students and colleagues, members of the Broad Lake Reserve community, and the women's white colleagues within the school.

We can identify the way in which others, whether white colleagues, students or members of the community, are constructed, and can identify the way in which these constructions are connected to the women's own sense of self. We can identify colonial discourses and competing discourses of education in the ways in which the women speak and write about Naskapi people and their role as teachers. And we can identify the often-poignant pulse of the women's desire: their hopes,

fears, dreams, and their visions of who they wish to be as teachers, and of how they wish to be viewed.

An exploration of the self-representations of the participants in this study reveals that **the process through which white women teacher's identity is formed has significant consequences for the Naskapi students and community and for the women themselves.** In the section that follows I describe the consequences.

The women enter the school on the Broad Lake Reserve with dreams and wishes of who they will be as teachers in this particular setting. Each woman enters into relations with the other, and in this space, they test the possibility of bringing these fantasies to a lived reality. The process of identity formation of these white women has significant consequences for their Indigenous students and the community, first of all, by virtue of the fact that the women's attempts to operationalize a dream take place on a reserve. This is a context where the community has experienced the grip of the pervasive effects of colonial discourses that are entrenched through structures and processes, such as the Indian Act (Cooke, 1976; Wilkinson and Geoffroy, 1989). This is a setting where the Naskapi community is struggling to redefine itself and create new identities associated with a postcolonial critique (INAC, 1978; Loon, 1991; McConaghy, 2000a). The school, however, remains a potential site for the reproduction of colonial discourses through, for example: relations among staff, regulations,

disciplinary practices and curriculum choices (Aitken, 1993; McConaghy, 2000a).

Thus, the context into which these white women enter as teachers is one where the discursive possibilities available to individuals or groups in interaction may be constrained. The constraints may be the result of the ongoing effects of colonial expansion. An example of this would be the way in which the government must approve decisions around education for Naskapi students, but only after consultation with an outside school board that administers the school (INAC, 1978). The constraints may also result through the reduction of the negotiability of power relations, which is sometimes characteristic of institutions such as schools (Foucault, 1997). For example, if the predominant discourse of education is one that privileges transmission of information, then the role of the teacher will be the control and management of information (Grundy, 1987). Securing and retaining power would, therefore, be important. There would be greater negotiability of power relations in an educational setting that is characterized by discourses that favour the construction of knowledge (Donovan, Bransford and Pellegrino, 1999; Legendre, 2004). Through the women's representations, however, it is possible to identify that the participants in the study generally privilege transmission of information and content. An additional element in the discussion around power relations relates to the notion that the Naskapi people have been disadvantaged in the past through educational

processes favouring pastoral welfarism (McConaghy, 2000a) and language that views the Naskapi people as limited (Wilkinson & Geoffroy, 1989).

There is added significance in the fact that the teachers did not live on the reserve but traveled to and from the community daily. This scenario created a context in which the discursive construction of “others” finds geographic salience. The distinctions between the white and the Naskapi communities appear to be clearly delineated: you live in town or on the reserve; you are Naskapi or white. Through the data, it is evident that the women describe each group as if it is a homogenous whole. For the women in the study, the perception of these “fixed” and “unified” communities (Attwood, 1992; Fine 1994) played a significant role in the development of their professional identity, as they seek, find (or are unable to find), or refuse group affinity and affirmation. Conflicts arise as they seek to identify with, or disassociate themselves from these communities.

For the Naskapi community, the women’s perception of rigid binaries of Naskapi and white (Attwood, 1992; Fine 1994), and the phenomenon of the invisibility of whiteness (Dyer, 1988; Frankenberg, 1997; Atwood, 1992) result in the disappearance of the Naskapi women teachers. Further, as a result of the phenomenon of othering, the students (and community members including Naskapi teachers) may be at risk of becoming one of many who make up an undifferentiated

collective. Thus, in relationships between white woman teacher and other, a Naskapi person may not be viewed as an individual with distinct desires, history and abilities. Instead the person is simply “one” other, in contrast to the white woman teacher. This is particularly potentially damaging when the other has been constructed as needing rescue, less able, without potential, or not fully evolved, in which case these characteristics may be seen to be representative of the entire community.

The women’s investments in their fantasies provide them with images of what they wish they would be *like* as a teacher, and how they wish they would be *viewed* as a teacher. For the participants in this research, this includes, to: be good; be needed; be able to rescue; be able to identify and solve problems, be in control, be passionate, be energetic, be cool, be memorable, be bold, be skilled, be caring, be able to stand out, and to earn the respect of peers. For the woman who refuses the teacher identity, her fantasy is to reveal the anger she feels.

The way in which these fantasies have an impact on the teacher-student relationship students may have serious consequences for Naskapi students. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that if the student does not mirror back the corresponding role that would allow a teacher to enact, for example, a rescue fantasy or a fantasy of self-effacing goodness, or a fantasy of skilled problem solving, then the teacher is destabilized in the process (Britzman, 1998; Britzman & Pitt 1996). The conflicts the teacher feels may be projected outward onto the student,

and in the case of a context such as this, where the post-colonial notion of “othering” may be at work, the conflicts may be projected outward onto the collective other, the Naskapi community. Thus, individuals or the community as a whole may be perceived, as we see in the women’s representations, as unable to understand the value of education, lacking potential, unable to realize potential, lacking leadership skills, disinterested, lacking commitment, or without goals.

The women, despite privileging an information-driven curriculum (Grundy, 1987), are able to name what might be considered teaching that would better serve the Naskapi students. They understand the value of processes that place the student at the center of the learning (Donovan, Bransford and Pellegrino, 1999; Legendre, 2004). Unfortunately, for those who have left the community, their observations refer to what they would now do – not what they did while in the community. Similarly, the representations show that the women who are still in the community appear unable to enact student centered pedagogy and explain the reasons as a result of student inability, disinterest or lack of potential.

Equally problematic is the way in which the women who continue to teach in the school appear to understand potential. Students with potential, it appears, are seen to be recognized as such, because they have already experienced success at school, are perceived to be smart, interested or have goals, and get along with the teacher in class. The suggestion is that having potential means having the ability to

correspond and conform to the discourse of education that privileges control and management of knowledge.

Significantly, the one teacher who articulates most closely a student-centered approach to teaching is the woman who arrived in the community at a point in her life that felt chaotic and meaningless. She entered into the classroom and school without any formal teacher training. She began teaching without a dream of being a teacher; in fact it was the contrary.

It is evident, however, in her utterances and writing, that the way in which she privileged relationships with white colleagues and with Naskapi students, and her identification with both groups, contributed to how she constructed herself a teacher (Britzman & Pitt, 1996; Laplace & Pontalis, 1973). Her sense of self as a teacher was so significant that in “tearing” herself away from the community and moving south, she describes the result as, “It was like I had no identity” (MI 419).

For the above woman, as well as the other participants, the process through which white women teacher’s identity is formed has significant personal consequences. The white women teachers who move north to work in the school on the Broad Lake Reserve settle into homes in Ridgeville. For many, the northern experience is simply referred to as the “Ridgeville” experience, despite the daily trips out the reserve. The social aspect of Ridgeville life appears to figure prominently for the women, as does identifying with the white teaching community. Thus,

seeking affinity and affiliation appears, in the women's representations, to be a high priority. In the white teaching community, however, differences among individuals, such as language or sexual orientation, may result in isolation for those whose differences suggest to some that they do not correspond to the needs and interests of the white teacher group (Britzman, 1998).

The women's monologues present seven distinct and unique ways to describe the significance of the northern teaching experience. The monologues, [other than that of Hope] demonstrate the value the women place on representing the time spent as meaningful, even if it was difficult (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In some cases however, the ongoing effects of the difficulties have had a significant impact on the women. One has left teaching, another "wandered around" the province for six years trying to find meaningful work, and two describe unhealed wounds. Many question whether they helped or hindered their students during their time working in the school. For the two women remaining in the community, one feels that uprooting her family from their home is the only solution to a situation she feels unable to resolve. For the other teaching is a painful process.

It appears that there are several factors that the women had not counted on before arriving in the north. They had not imagined the impact that the struggle for affinity and affiliation would have on their experience. Nor, it appears, had they anticipated the injury they might

feel at having to yield to the horror of historical reverberations much larger than themselves. Equally, I would suggest that they had not imagined the hostility that might exist among colleagues. And significantly, it appears they had not considered the need to question the purpose of education or their role as teachers.

One of the participants in Helen Harper's (2000b) research stated, "There is no way to prepare for this," in reference to the northern teaching experience. The utterances and writing of the participants in this study echo this sentiment, with statements of feeling ill equipped and unprepared for what they faced. In their comments, they refer directly to the training they received which they felt was inadequate.

Significantly, five of the women appear to reach a point where they are no longer able to rationalize working in the community. They voiced or wrote, "I can't do this", "I give up," "What the hell am I doing there?" "I don't want to stay here," "I couldn't go on like that", "All I could think of was how much I wanted to leave," "I guess I really don't want to teach". These women were not novices who made these observations after an initial feeling of failure or of being overwhelmed at the beginning of their careers or on finding themselves inadequately trained (Hargreaves & Jacka, 1995). All the women chose to return for at least a second year, and collectively they have worked over thirty years in the community. Thus, they are or were committed to making sense of the teaching experience.

The exploration of the women's monologues and self-representations demonstrates that their feelings of being able, or not, to carry on are related to the psychic in connection with the social, relationships in connection with language and pivotal experience, the exterior and the interior, discourse and the unconscious. Each case is complex and differs significantly from one woman to another. The women's perceptions of the reasons they "can't do this", include the following. Note that each bullet represents one participant's perceptions:

- Inability to assimilate into the Naskapi community, to fulfill the role of rescuer and to secure approval of colleagues
- Rejection by members of the white teaching community
- Rejection by members of the Naskapi community
- Inability to negotiate the roles of mother and teacher
- Rejection of teacher role and identity

In contrast, the two remaining participant's self-representations demonstrate their discovery of their perception that they "can do this".

Significantly, despite their comments that they were inadequately trained, the women's writing and utterances suggest that **their perception that they "can" or "can't do this", is NOT contingent on technical knowledge or expertise associated with teacher training, but is linked to what the women originally thought they "could do" when they first made the decision to teach in the isolated, Indigenous school:**

- Guinevere imagined she would assimilate into the Naskapi community and make a new life for herself while she rescues the Natives;
- Marie wanted to bring meaning to a life that had become meaningless, and in the process change her student's lives;
- Brenda wanted to be in a context where she was needed, where her skills as a good teacher would be put to use;
- Ann expected to use her knowledge, creativity and skills to make a difference for the Naskapi students, while being a member of a respectful community of colleagues;
- Zoë wanted to make a difference by being the type of teacher people would remember;
- Linda expected to go north lead an adventurous life;
- Hope wanted to maintain the freedom that her northern lifestyle permitted.

I would suggest that in a significant number of the women's self-representations [written and spoken], it is possible to trace a line from the dreams that the women appear to have held – to the women's struggles to enact their fantasies – to their frustration or sadness at being unable to be who they desire [and, equally, to see in their students a reflection of what they desire] – and, ultimately, the resulting consequences: feelings of deep personal failure and/or perceptions of failure in the students or community.

Given what appears to be the significance of these women's sense of self and dreams around teaching, the following are recommendations that I feel are essential. **Preparation of teachers for work in**

multicultural or non-dominant settings, or for anti-racist work in education:

- Must create opportunities for teachers and teachers in training to explore the dreams, fantasies and hopes that they associate with being or becoming a teacher;
- Must incorporate explicit attention to teacher's identity formation;
- Must include discussion and reflection on the interrelatedness of relationships, language, discourse and the unconscious in the formation of teacher identity;
- Must use, as the central focus, a process such as Screenplay Pedagogy - that brings objects of the unconscious to the attention of teachers and teachers in training, so that it is possible to "systematically ascertain, through dialogue and analysis, their possible meanings and effects for pedagogy" (Robertson, 2004, p. 80);
- Must incorporate discussion on the relationship between the construction of selves and others and the associated impact of the phenomenon of 'othering'.

The above recommendations for the training of teachers signal my preoccupation with the urgency of viewing identity formation as an ongoing struggle that is both psychic and lived and that has implications for pedagogy. The recommendations are preliminary, in that further

studies must be undertaken to deepen such an understanding of identity formation. I would, therefore propose the following as questions for further related research:

- How would work with film texts, with teachers in training, further inquiry and knowledge around teacher education?
- How would exploring the significance of personal dreams and fantasies around teaching influence how a teacher, or teacher in training, brings voice and meaning to her experience?
- How would discussion of personal conceptions of identity and identity formation, and knowledge of notions of non-unitary identity and the associated role of the unconscious influence how a teacher, or teaching in training, brings voice and meaning to her experience?

There are two additional areas requiring further reflection, which fall underneath the overarching issues of identity formation. The two areas are: the impact of relationships with and within communities, and the possibilities and limitations of discourses at work in teaching and learning. The two areas should not be treated independently of identity formation; they connect and interconnect in the process. However for the purpose of better understanding the role of each one, I treat them as two separate issues in the following section.

Regarding the impact of relationships with and within communities

In an essay entitled, *Powerless Unanticipated*, Seymore Sarason writes of hearing repeatedly from teachers over the years, that they entered the profession believing that they would “be part of an intimate, stimulating group of friends who shared experiences and had common

goals” (Fried, 2003, p. 16]. For many of the teachers that Sarason met, that was not the case. Hargreaves and Jacka (1995) describe factors that may play a role in this phenomenon, including “conditions of physical isolation, teacher cultures of non-interference and individualism, [and] absence of administrative or collegial support” (p. 60). This attention to teacher communities is not only voiced by teachers; as Westheimer (1998) notes, it is part of the recent discourse around educational reform and is raised by a range of diverse groups. Westheimer writes, “Teacher professional communities are seen as a promising solution to a profession wrought with isolation” (1998, p. 136).

The thirst for collegiality is evident in Guinevere’s story; it becomes the driving theme of her monologue, and a way through which she makes her painful experience up north meaningful. Similarly Marie is currently questioning whether to continue teaching because she has been unable to recapture the sense of belonging she experienced up north with supportive colleagues. For Ann, the depth of the lack of collegiality resulted in her need to leave what might otherwise have been a challenging and satisfying job. The representations of these women demonstrate that the role and significance of relationships within a school cannot be underestimated.

First of all, there is the notion, explored in this thesis, that identity is constructed in the space between individuals and others, thus relationships will significantly shape how a teacher understands herself

as a professional. There is also the notion that, as Hargreaves and Jacka write, “Schools are not just places of teaching and learning. They are places of politics too. There are differences of power between teachers and students, between teachers and administrators, and among teachers themselves. Becoming a teacher means having to come to terms with these power relations of schooling” (1995, pg. 45). These power relations contribute to the context and culture that teachers face.

In another essay, in which Sarason is reflecting on school culture, he raises the issue of the need for dialogue and discussion of individual’s conceptions of their school (Fried, 2003). As Westheimer (1998) indicates, in communities, “beliefs matter”. If I link these thoughts with my preoccupation with relationships and power relations, I find myself with the following possible questions for further study.

Please note that the structure I have used in the questions, that is, the use of the terms “voice and meaning” is intended to underline that the purpose of their exploration would be to further our understanding of identity formation:

- How would ongoing dialogue with a team of colleagues regarding school culture and individual beliefs and ideas influence how a teacher brings voice and meaning to her experience?
- Additionally, how would knowledge of the notion of power relations and dialogue with a team of colleagues regarding power in school settings, influence how a teacher brings voice and meaning to her experience?

Further to the importance of communities, is the issue of how differences are constructed between communities. This study allows the reader to explore the significance of the ongoing effects of colonial expansion in Canada's north. It looks at the way in which colonial discourses can be identified in the representations of the women participants. It explores the phenomenon of "othering". This study also explores how the notion of "othering" is particularly significant because of the way in which it intersects with the psychoanalytic notion that there is a relationship between a teacher's self-perception and her perceptions of her students. The result may be the disadvantaging of students who, through educational discourses and processes may have, like Naskapi people, been disadvantaged in the past. These issues raise the following questions for further study:

- How would knowledge of the ongoing effects of colonial expansion and dialogue regarding the effects of colonial discourses influence how a teacher brings voice and meaning to her experience?
- How would knowledge of the phenomenon of othering and discussion around individual ways of understanding others influence how a teacher brings voice and meaning to her experience?
- How would knowledge of how a group, such as the Naskapi, were disadvantaged through colonial discourses and processes in the past, influence how a teacher, working in the setting brings voice and meaning to her experience?

Regarding the possibilities and limitations of discourses at work in teaching and learning situations

Over a decade ago, when I was still teaching up north, I had a pivotal moment when one of my thirteen year old students asked me, for what might have been the hundredth time, “Why do we have to go to school?” In my monograph (Aitken, 1993) I describe being suddenly unable, at that moment, to answer his question. The reasons that previously might have slipped easily off my tongue were no longer adequate. Like the women in this study, I found myself faced with questions regarding the purpose of education and my role as a teacher in the school.

I had recently begun graduate studies when the above event took place; eventually my search for answers led me to attempt to use methods of critical pedagogy with my students. I learned that what I was doing could be described as taking up a discourse of education that competed with the normative discourse of education. The notion of competing educational discourses was an eye-opener for me that has resulted in many more years of trying to understand how discourses operate, and how to use that information to better understand my role as a teacher. By the time I left the north my approach in the classroom could have been characterized as student centered, focused on knowledge construction, and aimed at student empowerment. As a language teacher I struggled to understand how to create opportunities

for the students to use language to reflect on their lives and to engage critically and creatively with the challenges they faced.

I mention the above anecdotes because the women's representations demonstrate that as well as being faced with questions about the purpose of education, the women appear to understand the role of the teacher in very personal and idiosyncratic ways. For example, Hope defines her job using an image of the teacher as all-powerful and educational structures as oppressive; she feels trapped and powerless to do anything but get students "through" the exam. Guinevere originally wanted to lead her students to a sense of pride, felt unable to do so, and unable to know what to do. Brenda appears to view education as the great equalizer and the key to freedom, yet faced with students' inability to be successful, she believes that changes must take place within the community.

These three women appear to have imagined significantly different purposes of education; further, faced with the inability to make teaching and learning meaningful, one gave up, the second has persisted, powerlessly and angrily, and the third is considering leaving the community. They appear to be unable to identify alternate ways of understanding the purpose of education and the role of the teacher, despite the fact that their views can be linked to specific and possibly competing views of knowledge.

An interesting point of contrast to the experience of these women is the way in which Zoë and Marie understand the teacher role, and the impact that has on their sense of self. Zoë's successful attempt to make learning culturally relevant, and Marie's emphasis on creating connections with her students led both to find the teaching experience deeply meaningful. What counted for knowledge for these two women differs significantly from the conceptions of the three women mentioned previously.

Grundy (1987) and Fox and Gay (1995) demonstrate that the way in which knowledge is understood has a significant impact on what happens in schools. For example, they write, "Education decisions that emphasize scientific rationality, empirical inquiry, and monoculturalism generate very different curricula than those which prioritize knowledge construction, social consciousness and social diversity" (Fox & Gay, 1995, p. 65). I am wondering what would happen if teachers were engaged in discussions around what they understand to be knowledge, and how they believe learning takes place, and equally, how their beliefs and the beliefs of others are representative of a range of discourses. Thus, I am interested in the following questions for further study:

- How would knowledge of discourse theory and opportunities to discuss, identify and explore competing discourses of education influence how a teacher brings voice and meaning to her experience?

- How would experimentation with constructivist approaches to teaching and learning influence how a teacher brings voice and meaning to her experience?
- How would engaging teachers in discussion around current research on learning influence the way in which a teacher brings voice and meaning to their experience?

A few final thoughts.

The intent of this study has been to explore the identity formation of white women teachers; my eleven questions for further research are shaped by that intent. There is, therefore, a distance and detachment in what I have written in this final chapter. The voices of the women who so openly shared their experiences seem absent; as is mention of my own desire to understand my experience as a white women teacher, through the research process. And certainly, the questions do not communicate the urgency of finding ways to better serve Naskapi students and community members through education.

Thus, while my eleven questions for research seem appropriate given the fact that I believe that what is learned from this thesis should be used as a stepping-stone for further reflection and study, the questions also seem somehow inadequate. Will they help us to understand how to better prepare people for effective work in settings such as the one in which the women found themselves? This question, I realize, is more closely linked to my desire for narrative coherence.

It appears to me that my eleven questions lead to a second set of questions. For example, if the women understood how competing

discourses operate, would they necessarily seek alternate ways to solve teaching problems? If they felt isolated, would they seek to place school culture and community on the table for staff discussion, and would that change their experience? If they examined their dreams and fantasies around teaching would they be any better equipped to deal with the relationships they face in the classroom? What kind of preparation will help a teacher to deal with the lingering vibrations of our colonial past? And equally, would involving a teacher in discussion of how colonial discourses operate necessarily mean she would engage in a postcolonial critique of the educational structures, processes and practices of the context in which she finds herself?

The fact that there are two sets of questions loudly signals the tension I feel. They demonstrate the lived struggle between my intent to conduct research - designed poststructurally, and my desire to bring narrative coherence to my own experience. As a researcher, I have claimed that, "experience could not speak for itself but could be considered a category" (Britzman, 1995, p. 233); yet on the other hand, I have simultaneously been trying to find meaning in my own experience, an experience shaped in interaction with the women, with Naskapi students and teachers, and with Naskapi community members. The meaning I seek for myself, is something I desire for them, as well.

It is perhaps no surprise then, that while I feel that I have been able to wrap up the research in a coherent way, and while I have some new

insight into my experience as a white woman teacher, as well as my need to mourn the losses associated with my departure from the north, I am left with new and unanswered questions about what it means to conduct research, poststructurally.

I have taken, and continue to maintain, the position that what is perceived as a unified identity is actually a temporarily fixed by-product of an individual's struggle to bring voice and meaning to her lived experience. I consider these provisionally fixed positions as "fragile fixings". Yet, the compelling accounts of the women, and their drive for narrative coherence create enduring images of what it might mean to experience life in the north, as a white woman teacher. The accounts of their experience might even be considered to eclipse what this study contributes to our understanding of the fragility of provisionally fixed identities.

Such are the tensions of poststructural research, of working with self-representations and language, of treating experience as a category, yet doing so while seeking one's own narrative coherence. It should be no surprise that I find myself, as Foucault (1997) writes, in an "unforeseen place," a place that I am struggling to name, with thoughts that I am trying to harness, trying to stitch together, trying to fix.

Limitations

Recently I was asked if the notion of limitations is consistent with the conceptual framework used in this study. The question is significant. For someone seeking to know about the experience of white women

teachers working in the north, then the research design might be understood to have limitations. For example, the study focuses on the experiences of a small group of women who taught in one isolated Indigenous school on a reserve at some point during the years 1985 to 2003. The locations of the school, the community where the women lived, and the reserve in no way typify northern Indigenous communities. Thus, the women's experiences are distinct and unique and are unlikely to be duplicated.

The intent of this study, however, is not simply to detail the experience of the women; it is to explore identity formation. Significantly, the factors that might, in a positivist framework, be considered as limitations, might be considered to be the strengths of this project. For example, it may be considered a limitation that there is a paucity of research in the following three areas: the role of teachers in Indigenous education in Canada and Canada's north, the role of women teachers in Indigenous education, and teacher identity conceptualized as white. Additionally, the use of a psychoanalytic lens in non-therapeutic research is still in its infancy, so little work is available in this area as well. Further, the use of subjectivity theory is not part of the current discussion around the preparation of teachers for work in non-dominant settings. These may be considered by some to be limitations. Given, however, the stance I am taking, it might be claimed that contributing

newly constructed understanding to an area in which little is known, is instead a strength.

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Notes

¹ A review of recent issues of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* demonstrates that the terms Indigenous, Native, First Nations, Aboriginal and Indian can still be found in the writings of Indigenous Canadian scholars. In this text I have chosen to use *Indigenous*, unless I am quoting from a text in which another term is used.

² Texts such as Battiste (2000), Binda & Calliou (2001) Brandt Castellano, Davis & Lahache (2000) foreground the voices of Indigenous scholars and educators and focus on the development of Indigenous systems of education that are self-determined, and that prioritize Indigenous language, culture and the recognition of Indigenous ways of knowing.

³ Richardson's (2000) writing on the creation of texts makes reference to the notion that all writing reflects constructed views of the self and reality that are value laden. "Language is a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality and of the Self...No textual staging is ever innocent (including this one)" (p. 925).

⁴ Ellis & Bochner (2000) describe personal narratives as the part of the human need to understand who we are. The drive to bring narrative coherence to our lives is, they claim, part of our need "to make sense of our lives as a whole...to make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart come together again, by retelling and restorying the events of one's life" (p. 746).

⁵ The constraints may be the result of the ongoing effects of colonial expansion; an example of this would be the way in which the government must approve decisions around education for Naskapi students, but only after consultation with an outside school board that administers the school (INAC, 1978). The constraints may also result through the reduction of the negotiability of power relations, which is sometimes characteristic of institutions such as schools (Foucault, 1997).

⁶ While Masny's (2004) work helps me to clarify the distinction between fixed and fluid, it is important to underline that the examination of the fixings, as undertaken in this research, does not entirely correspond to the position that Masny would take, regarding identities and the exploration of the constant formation-transformation process.

⁷ The claim that language is not "transparent" is intended to suggest that a statement or term may communicate a range of meanings with conflicting beliefs, values and perspectives. Further, meanings may change over a period of time.

⁸ It is understood that teachers who engage in critical pedagogy have explored and problematized what they accept as natural and self-evident and have challenged their values, beliefs and ideologies from a critical standpoint (King, 1994). This is what is considered to be a "critical self-reflexive practice" (Dei, James-Wilson & Zine, 2002), which depends on self-reflection, particular for those in the majority (Nieto,

1999). Thus, effective education, associated with critical pedagogy, is dependant on the actions and practices of transformed individuals (Dei, James-Wilson & Zine, 2002; King, 1994; Nieto, 1999). The transformation of the individual, in this case, is seen as the outcome of the development of consciousness as an ideological process. This concept of the transformed individual is dependent upon an image of the self as fixed and unified, and waiting to be uncovered. Further, the transformation process is dependant on a view of the self as “a stable, reliable, integrative entity that has access to our inner states and outer reality” (Flax, 1990, p. 8); this is consistent with the humanistic view of the self.

⁹ According to Kristeva, the result of taking the position of unified subject, however, ensures the existence of a site of repressed meanings, meanings that would allow for alternate ways of being. Kristeva, signaling the role of language, refers to this site of repressed meanings as the semiotic chora, which is a site where “a process of semiotic generation constantly challenges and seeks to transform the apparently unitary subject of the symbolic order” (Weedon, 1997, p. 85). Thus, the subject is in process, in the process of taking up meaning and repressing other possible meanings.

¹⁰ I am using Foucault’s definition of power relations; he describes power as a strategic relationship between two (possibly individuals, groups, organizations, communities), wherein one resists because

she/they are not doing what she/they want[s]. Foucault writes, “resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance...to resist is not simply a negation but a creative process; to create and recreate, to change the situation, actually to be an active member of the process” (1997, p. 167 – 168).

¹¹ The two-race binary that characterized culturalism, can be found in these texts: Antone (2000), Battiste & Barman (1995), Battiste (1998; 1998), Calliou (1998), Kirkness (1998), Marker (2000), Stairs (1995), Weber-Pillwax (2001).

¹² Educators and researchers working within the tradition of cultural relativism focus on learning and teaching styles, on inclusion of Indigenous content and language, and on pedagogy and classroom organization intended to correspond to perceived different needs of Indigenous students. See Antone (2000), Battiste & Barman (1995), Goulet (2001), Kirkness (1998), Marker (2000), Stairs (1994;1996).

¹³ Examples of texts that exemplify the radical view can be found in Haig-Brown (1995), and an example of neo-assimilationist discourse can be found in Clifton & Rubenstein (2004). Both corresponded to the categories as described by McConaghy (1998a).

¹⁴ The transcription process was a significant step in the process of analysis as it gave me the opportunity to listen carefully and repeatedly and take note of changes in intonation and pace. The

importance of this stage is confirmed by Mishler (1999) who writes, “Transcription is not simply a technical procedure but a critical step in the analysis of discourse, reflecting theoretical perspectives on language structure, function and meaning” (p. 169).

¹⁵ Significantly, until recently the use of syllabics was limited to two main purposes. They were first used in translations of Biblical passages and other religious texts. Additionally, syllabics were used to translate government documents distributed through the local band office. Records of officially sanctioned processes related to the management and organization of the Naskapi Nation would also be distributed in Naskapi language in syllabic. In the last two decades, however, projects initiated through the Naskapi Development Corporation and the local school have resulted in the creation and distribution of Naskapi language materials, such as historical texts, picture books, and information-based texts. Instruction in Pre-Kindergarten through to Grade Two is provided entirely in Naskapi. English is introduced in the third grade, and is used for 60% of the instructional time.

¹⁶ During the 1970s, several members of the Naskapi community participated in programs designed to train Indigenous people to teach in their Indigenous language; this was an initiative of DIAND. From that point, the elementary students’ schedule included Cree language classes

in which the trained Naskapi teacher would instruct the students in the use of the syllabic system. (Burnaby and Mackenzie, 2001).

¹⁷ Some might suggest that the three themes are simply parts of the narrative structure of the film, thus claiming that the women's utterances and writing were shaped or determined by the film and that the women had simply consumed the texts (Robertson, 1994). That position would not correspond to a psychoanalytic approach to reading, which suggests that the significance of identifying the elements of the film, lies in the way in which the elements are linked to deeply felt moments. Identifying the deeply felt moments permits the women to be aware of the way unconscious processes shape the meaning and allows them to explore, in new ways, how they make subsequent meaning.

Of course this raises the issue of what might have been signaled had the white, women teachers been viewing another film. Would relationships, communities, teacher role, and desires around teaching also have been the themes that evolved through the women's discussion of deeply felt moments, even if they had been viewing a completely different film? That is a question I am unable to answer. I can say that the connection between the themes that arose in this study and elements of the process of identity construction are too important to ignore.

¹⁸ A monologue is a form of a text that is written as a speech that one person makes to the self or to another. It is written to reveal both the situation at hand and the character herself. A "dramatic" monologue is

intended to be acted out in the form of drama. The dramatic monologue captures a message with a specific audience in mind. An interior monologue, while also effective when acted out, is intended to capture thought at the level of inner speech. In terms of style, the dramatic monologue may use language that is decisive, and the text might be considered to be persuasive or explanatory. On the other hand, the thoughts expressed in the interior monologue might be tentative, exploratory or incomplete.

¹⁹ The students' preoccupation indicated in this segment is one that demonstrates that the process of "othering" is not simply a process that is identifiable in the white women's speech and language. Thus, Naskapi individuals may equally construct "white" as a unified and homogenous group, without reference to overlapping, partial or shifting identities. It is, however, the way in which power relations operates between the groups that is significant and thus, may limit possibilities for one group or another. For example, while whites may be constructed as having money, power and authority, in contrast to Naskapi, they may also, as one woman suggests, be constructed as being incompetent in the bush, in contrast to Naskapi people.

Appendix III: Questionnaire

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Judith Robertson, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Investigator: Avril Aitken, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Ottawa
Thesis Title: Fragile fixings: An exploration of the self-representations of white women teachers in a non-dominant setting

Date: _____

Name of participant: _____

To assist me in understanding more about your background, please complete the following questionnaire. Thank you for your assistance.

1. What is your current age? _____
2. Of which, if any, racial or ethnic group would you describe yourself as being a member?

3. With which, if any, religious group would you describe yourself as being affiliated?

4. How would you describe your current class status?

5. How would you describe your class status while you were growing up?

6. With which, if any, political organization would you describe yourself as being affiliated?

7. Describe the post-secondary programs you followed; indicate the degrees or diplomas sought or obtained.

8. Describe any courses or programs you followed or workshops you attended that focused on anti-racist education, multicultural or Indigenous education.

9. What was your age when you began to teach at Kawawachikamach? _____

10. How many years of teaching experience did you have when you began to work at the school? _____

11. During which school years did you work at the school? (indicate dates)

12. Describe the circumstances through which you came to be employed at the school. (For example: compulsory transfer, seeking work in the north, and so on.)

Appendix IV: **Viewing Instructions**

This step in the research process requires you to watch the film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, a ninety-five minute Australian feature film that premiered in January 2002 and was released in DVD format on April 15, 2003.

As you are viewing, you may experience deeply felt moments. Take note of these deeply felt moments on this sheet. You can note the event, the characters, scene, shot, idea or any other dimension that will help you later as you refer back to your notes during the journal-writing step of the research process.

Appendix V: **Journal Prompt**

This step in the research process requires you to reflect individually and prepare a two-page (300 – 500 word) journal entry, a “work in progress” that traces the directions of feelings in relation to deeply felt moments during the viewing.

To assist, you may respond to the following question, using the paper that has been provided:

In what ways (if any) does <i>Rabbit Proof Fence</i> raise issues for you about your experience of teaching in an isolated Indigenous school?

Appendix VI: Probing Questions for use During the Group Discussion

Following Viewing of *Rabbit Proof Fence*

- **Probes to free association:** For example: What are you thinking? What are your thoughts about the film?
- **Direct challenges:** For example: Can you say more about what you are thinking? About what you just said?
- **Creative rejoinders:** For example: What kinds of questions would you ask the director about the film? If you were to imagine directing your own film about a similar topic, what would you include in the film?

Appendix VIII: **Interview Topics**

I am interesting in understanding your decision-making and the process through which you crafted your monologue. Can you describe the steps you took and decisions you made in order to arrive at your completed product?

I am interested in understanding the ways, if any, that participation in the research activities has changed your perception of your teaching experience in an isolated Indigenous community. In what ways, if any, have viewing the film, reflecting, discussion and/or writing changed your perception of your teaching experience in an isolated Indigenous community?

SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This is to certify that the University of Ottawa Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board (REB) has examined the application for ethical approval for the research project **Fragile Fixings: An Exploratory Study of the Self-Representations of White Women Teachers in a Non-Dominant Setting (File 06-03-09)** submitted by Avril Aitken, and supervised by Judith Robertson of the Faculty of Education. The members of the REB found that the research project met appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement and in the Procedures of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Boards, and accordingly gave the research project a Category Ia (Approval). This certification is valid for one year from the date indicated below.

Catherine Paquet
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For the Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB
Christine Dallaire

August 26, 2003
Date