

EXPERIENCES IN NATIVE STUDIES 10:

SHARING STUDENT AND

TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

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by

Nicole M. Amiotte

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Native Studies 10 contributes to increasing Saskatchewan students' knowledge and understandings concerning Aboriginal peoples. In visits to a Native Studies 10 course, which had a mixture of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, in an urban community within Saskatchewan, the teaching of the Native Studies course was observed over the duration of two semesters. Four students and the classroom teacher were interviewed using a semi-structured approach.

The major findings of this study were that, although all participants believed the course could reduce racism, the participants elected to take the course for different reasons. The participants reported that prior to the Native Studies 10 course, they did not have Aboriginal content integrated into their other courses, with the exception of Cree language courses. Two participants elected to take Native Studies because they believed it was easier than social studies or history, one chose the course because it was familiar, and one believed it to be a good educational course. The classroom teacher incorporated a variety of learning activities into the classroom. The teacher believed students were enrolled in the course because they were looking for an alternative to social studies or history. He also identified some of the challenges of teaching Native Studies 10.

Native Studies 10 is not offered in all schools in Saskatchewan and it is being taken by a limited number of students. Because the participants believed there were positive benefits to taking the course, increased enrolment would be desirable. A challenge that exists for the course at present is to increase the number of students

taking the course and the rate of course delivery. Additionally, there should be increased supports for teachers of Native Studies by means of education, community support, and elder involvement.

Ultimately, rewriting high school curricula to be more inclusive of Aboriginal content and perspectives would ensure that all students have opportunities to learn these, not only those students who take the course. However, until a number of supports are in place to implement this change, Native Studies courses benefit those students who participate in them. In addition, Aboriginal content and perspectives should be further integrated at all levels of the curricula.

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## CHAPTER ONE: WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

### Introduction

My mother, Jane, raised my older brother, Keith, and me in a small mining community in Northern Manitoba. Later, Sheldon joined our family as a foster child. My mother is Swedish and German. My father, Leonard, is of Anishnabe and Métis descent. I am a combination of Scandinavian and Aboriginal heritage. I grew up emphasizing the European part of my heritage while denying the Aboriginal despite my mother's efforts to promote a healthy self-identity in me.

In my youth, I heard a number of racial remarks about Indians. Thus, I learned that being Aboriginal in Canada was not something of which I should be proud. I did not have the knowledge base to respond to the negative remarks I heard. There were few occasions in my school experience when the class examined issues related to racism and Aboriginal peoples. When we did have these discussions, I usually felt very uncomfortable and fearful I would be identified or singled out because of my ethnic background.

I completed a compulsory course in Native Studies after enrolling in the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP). I came to realize that I had been denied knowledge that would have supported my ability to think critically about the histories and current experiences of Aboriginal peoples during my school years. After challenging the myths I believed about Aboriginal peoples, I no

longer denied my Aboriginal heritage. In the first year of attending SUNTEP, I went from experiencing shame to embracing pride regarding my Métis ethnicity. The introductory Native Studies course provoked a transformation in me. I became conscious as to how being Aboriginal in this country had shaped and informed my identity. As well, I was emancipated from my previous feelings of shame.

Since graduating from SUNTEP, I have worked with Dene, Cree, and Métis communities. I have worked primarily with Aboriginal students in my eleven years as a teacher. As a result, I have had the opportunities to deconstruct some of the misconceptions students have concerning their respective heritages. Additionally, I have taught a social science course that focussed exclusively on the history of the Métis in an adult education setting. I have also taught Native Studies 30 at the Grade 12 level to adult learners.

Native Studies courses are now being offered in many Saskatchewan high schools, an opportunity I was denied. Now having taken and taught Native Studies courses, I am interested to learn what motivates students to take these courses in high school settings. Since I have taught mainly Aboriginal students, I wonder how these courses affect other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

### Context

The land we now call Saskatchewan was home to many Aboriginal groups prior to the arrival of Europeans and the establishment of this area as a part of Canada. With the arrival of the fur trade into this region, there was also an influx of European people. They came first for trading, and then for settlement and farming. In the 1800s, First Nations and Métis people who lived on the plains contended with a decline in the

buffalo population, which was one of the primary staples of their economies. Times were changing for Aboriginal peoples, and First Nations groups entered into treaty agreements with the Government of Canada. One of the terms negotiated in these treaties was for the provision of education by the Federal Government.

In the treaty agreements between First Nations groups and the Crown, the Government of Canada agreed to provide means for the education of First Nations children. Due to the arrival of the newcomers, First Nations leaders understood that for their children to survive in a rapidly changing world they would need to develop new skills. However, the way in which this education was delivered by the government did not correspond with the wishes of First Nations peoples. The Indian Act<sup>1</sup> permitted the removal of many First Nations children from their homes and placement of these children in residential schools even without the consent of their parents. Amendments to the *Indian Act* in 1894 and 1895 “gave Indian agents the authority of the law to force Indian children under 16 to go to school” (Schissel and Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 45).

The education delivered by the Canadian Government was detrimental to many students and generations to follow. Education denied students access to their families, their spirituality, their language, and their communities. In addition to this cultural genocide, the education provided was substandard in that it was orientated towards developing servants and blue-collar workers. According to Barman, Hébert, and McCaskill (1986), “Curriculum was to be limited to basic education combined with

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<sup>1</sup> The *Indian Act* is summary of all legislation pertaining to those defined as “Indian” by the Government of Canada. There have been numerous amendments to the *Indian Act* since its inception in 1876.

half-day practical training in agriculture, the crafts, or household duties in order to prepare pupils for their expected future existence on the lower fringes of the dominant society” (p. 6). Today, the public has become more aware of the extent of the sexual abuse, physical abuse, mistreatment, and lack of education that First Nations children received in these schools (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). The intergenerational effects of this attempt at cultural genocide are still present today.

Littlejohn (1983) explained that the Federal Government treated children of Métis ancestry differently. The Federal Government did not assume responsibility for the education of Métis students; therefore, Métis students did not have access to schools run for Indian children. Occasionally Métis children would be admitted, but “only if there were not enough Indian students to fill the school” (p. 13). Métis students were also denied access to public schools. The Provincial Government maintained that Métis students were a federal responsibility and did little to provide education for them in Saskatchewan until after 1942.

The residential school system was eventually phased out. Commencing in the 1950s, many First Nations youth began attending Day Schools run by the Federal Government. Métis students attended public schools off reserve. In both situations, the school system did not meet the needs of the students. One of the government’s initial objectives for Aboriginal peoples was assimilation into the Eurocentric curriculum hegemony. The school system represented the values and viewpoints of the dominant society. The curriculum and resources either omitted or misrepresented Aboriginal peoples as being inferior. Schools did not reinforce the cultural values or the languages of the children’s home environments. The schools did not address racism either but

rather continued to perpetuate the narrative of Canada's successful development without acknowledging the contributions of Aboriginal people or the harmful policies of this government towards them. The students who carried racist beliefs were not taught anything to contradict their beliefs, and, in many cases, had their beliefs reinforced by the school system.

The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (2002) commented, "Twenty-five or so years ago . . . what Aboriginal Peoples learned about themselves in schools was not a positive experience – to say the least. The curriculum failed Aboriginal Peoples" (p. 13). The curriculum failed non-Aboriginal peoples as well through omission, bias, and misrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples. Education did not act as an emancipatory agent for the majority of Aboriginal people; instead, Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) contended that through the residential school system "the federal education of Aboriginal children was devoted to the continuing relegation of generations of Aboriginal people to the margins of society" (p. 54). Even after the closure of residential schools, the majority of Aboriginal students did not experience the same level of success as non-Aboriginal students within the education system. This unequal level of success is still evident today.

Tymchak (2001) explained many factors that influence the current roles of Saskatchewan schools in *School<sup>PLUS</sup>: A Vision for Children and Youth*. Two of these factors are a noticeable demographic shift in the population and a need for addressing cross-cultural issues within Saskatchewan schools. There is an ongoing increase in the number of children of Aboriginal ancestry in Saskatchewan schools. It was estimated that "by the year 2016 they will represent 46.4% of this population" (p. 8). This

significant demographic shift also relates to issues in cross-cultural education. Teachers are expected to include the views of Aboriginal peoples, as well as other non-Western cultural groups in the curricula.

The Statistics Canada 2001 Census showed the Aboriginal population is increasing in Canada at a higher rate than the non-Aboriginal population since the birth rate among Aboriginal peoples was one-and-a-half times that of non-Aboriginal peoples. In the 2001 Census, 130,190 people in Saskatchewan identified as Aboriginal, accounting for 13.3% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2003, p. 9). Aboriginal children aged fourteen and under accounted for 25% percent of the population in Saskatchewan (p. 7). The census reported that 49% of Aboriginal people in Canada lived in urban areas. The highest concentration of Aboriginal people in a metropolitan area was Saskatoon, SK at 9%. Winnipeg had the greatest number of Aboriginal peoples living there; however, this number represented 8% of the overall population (p.9). Rather than being assimilated, as the government had wanted, the Aboriginal population continues to grow and self identify as Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal children are in many urban classrooms today. There is a need to increase understandings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in order to facilitate cooperation and decrease racism within our province and our country.

There is also a need to address the number of Aboriginal students leaving high school before completion. Saskatchewan Learning (2004a) reported that “Aboriginal students are not achieving the same benefits as other students – about 50 percent who enter Grade 10 eventually graduate from Grade 12 compared to 80 percent of the overall student population” (p.107). Without education, employment opportunities are

limited. Bernier (1997) confirmed that people who identify as Aboriginal in Canada earn significantly less than people who are non-Aboriginal. Howe (2002) agreed, but also shared that the “difference largely disappears for higher levels of education” (p. 2). Howe stated that over a lifetime, “An Aboriginal dropout lives an economically marginalized life in which the male earns only a little more than a third of a million dollars, and the female earns less than 90 thousand dollars” (p. 17). Student success in school is paramount to economic stability. Howe suggested that his “analysis has important implications for the funding of education programs to enhance the opportunities and increase the success rates of Aboriginal people” (p. 19).

In addition to lower education and income levels, Aboriginal peoples also experience higher incarceration rates and poorer health than non-Aboriginals do. Latimer and Casey Foss (2004) conveyed that “Aboriginal youth were almost eight times more likely to be in custody than their non-Aboriginal counterparts” (p. iii). During the summer of 2003, a research team conducted sharing circles in five provinces and one territory in order to gain the perspective of the youth in custody. Altogether, over 250 youth participated in the sharing circles. When youth were asked what would facilitate their rehabilitations, many called for increased cultural awareness and activities. Youth also expressed, “interest in learning Aboriginal languages and history from an Aboriginal perspective” (p. 17).

Alternative perspectives are necessary to understand current issues in our society relating to Aboriginal peoples. One of the grounds for the establishment of compulsory public education in Canada at the end of the nineteenth century was to prepare citizens to participate in the democratic process (Osborne, 1999). Schools have a role in

preparing youth to be active participants in democracy. If diverse peoples are to work together to create a better sense of community for everyone, all need to understand the underpinnings of current phenomena such as racism and poverty. Aboriginal peoples also need to know and understand legislation that relates specifically to them for the purpose of self-determination.

The media are one source of information concerning Aboriginal peoples, but news stories do not provide the historical connections necessary to understand contemporary issues. As well, Craats (1998) revealed in the neighbouring province of Alberta, stories written about Aboriginal people only made the news if they were negative. Positive stories were less likely to be highlighted. A news story is one resource, but it has limitations. Schools can provide information that is more comprehensive.

The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies conducted a survey with first year students at various Canadian colleges and universities during 2000 and 2001. The purpose of the survey was to determine what knowledge the recent graduates of Canadian high schools had acquired about Aboriginal peoples during their elementary and high school years. The researchers surveyed both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students from eight different provinces and one territory. Many students noted the lack of information they had concerning Aboriginal peoples. When asked whether, “schools provide opportunity for students to learn and understand Aboriginal issues”, 46.6% of students “disagreed” and 32.7% of students “strongly disagreed” (Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002, p. 101). In total, 79.3% of

students surveyed felt that their educations were lacking in information concerning Aboriginal peoples.

People need background knowledge to understand many of the current issues that relate to Aboriginal peoples. Unfortunately, as the Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies discovered, Aboriginal content is rarely implemented in school curricula. For example, I believe there is a lack of understanding concerning the treaties negotiated between the Canadian Government and First Nations people resulting in many misunderstandings. Personally, I did not understand what treaty rights entailed or why individuals received them until taking Native Studies at the university level. I had only heard the myths regarding treaty rights. These myths are still common today.

Many people in Saskatchewan probably do not have accurate information about treaty rights either. To illustrate, *The StarPhoenix* published an article headlined “Majority in Sask. opposes treaty rights: Report” on November 27, 2003. The report asserted, “The strongest opposition to settling aboriginal land claims and providing for Native self-government exists in Saskatchewan” (Saskatchewan News Service and Canwest News Service, A1). A spokesperson for the leader of the Assembly of First Nations, Nancy Pine, responded to the report and pointed to “the need for more public education about treaty rights” (Saskatchewan News Service and Canwest News Service, A2). Schools should play a greater role in alleviating the lack of accurate information concerning treaties and treaty rights among other issues.

One of the *Indian and Métis Policy from Kindergarten to Grade 12* objectives was “to ensure that all curricula and materials present Indian and Métis accurately in historical and modern terms and that Indian and Métis oriented materials and concepts

are part of all subject areas” (Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, 1995, p. 2). This policy was first printed in 1989. Unfortunately, it has not been actualized in many classrooms. Dorion, Prefontaine, and Paquin (2000) observed that many schools do not include or emphasize Aboriginal content if they have few or no Aboriginal students. There is a mistaken assumption that Aboriginal content is only important for Aboriginal students. Longman (2005) found that while there has been some progress in the integration of Aboriginal content into subject areas, “change has been slow” (p. 3).

The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee, known formerly as the Indian and Métis Education Advisory Committee, reports to the Minister of Learning in Saskatchewan. The Committee prepares an action plan every five years that supports initiatives within Aboriginal education. This process began in 1984 with the first recommendations submitted by the Native Curriculum Review Committee. One of the priorities established was the “need for the development of separate Native studies and Native language courses” (Minister’s Advisory Committee Native Curriculum Review, 1984, p. 2). The 2000 Action Plan developed by the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee included recommendations for the years 2000-2005. The Advisory Committee insisted, “All students benefit from knowledge about the Aboriginal peoples of Saskatchewan, and through knowledge, misconceptions and bias can be eliminated” (Saskatchewan Education, 2000, p. 4).

Cross-cultural curriculum has proven effective in alleviating misconceptions about other cultures (Henze, 2001; Melenchuk, 1987). In Saskatchewan, there are three courses that focus solely on the histories and experiences of Aboriginal peoples at the

high school level. Saskatchewan Learning released the curriculum for Native Studies 10 in 1991, Native Studies 20 in 1992, and Native Studies 30 in 1997. Native Studies 10 was revised and the new curriculum, *Native Studies 10: Social Organizations of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples* was released in 2002.

The three courses have different focuses. Native Studies 10 examines the “societal structures and practices of Indian, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Saskatchewan and Canada through time” (Saskatchewan Education, 1997, p. 3). Native Studies 20 investigates issues surrounding Indigenous peoples in Canada and throughout the world. Native Studies 30 focuses on contemporary issues of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society. Native Studies 20 is currently being revised. Students can take one or all three of these courses as credits towards the three social science course credits required for high school graduation. In each of the curriculum guides, the word “all” (referring to students) is used frequently. For example, “The aim of Native Studies 10 is to help all students develop their knowledge, positive attitudes and cultural understandings about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002a, p. 2).

Native Studies courses are being offered more frequently in First Nations schools than in other (non-First Nations) schools. In the 2004 school year, 95% of First Nations schools offered Native Studies 10, whereas only 19% of other (non-First Nations) schools offered the course. Native Studies 20 was offered less frequently than Native Studies 10 in both school systems. Sixty-eight percent of First Nations schools offered the Native Studies 20 course compared to 14% offered in other schools. Native Studies 30 was offered in 89% of First Nations high schools and 20% of other high schools (Saskatchewan Learning, Student Records, unpublished data, September 21,

2004). Clearly, the trend is to offer the courses in schools with higher Aboriginal populations. The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (2002), critiqued,

Governments, as a demonstration of their willingness to develop quality programming dealing with Aboriginal peoples, celebrate their new Native Studies curriculum documents. Yet the number of times these courses are actually offered to non-Aboriginal students is an indication of the two-faced nature of the dominant education system. (p. 176)

The vision of Native Studies as a course for all students is not being realized when the courses are offered in 20% or less of non-First Nations schools in Saskatchewan.

Students in Grade 10 must take one of Social Studies 10, History 10, or Native Studies 10. Saskatchewan Learning (2004b) reported 2547 students took Native Studies 10 in regular studies (not including Advanced, Basic, Alternative Education, or French Immersion) during the 2002/2003 school year (p.12). This number translated to 18% percent of Grade 10 students in regular studies electing to take Native Studies. Students in Grade 12 must choose one of Social Studies 30, History 30, or Native Studies 30. All are Canadian Studies courses. In 2003-2004, 2,004 students took Native Studies 30 while 7,722 students chose History 30 and 3,845 students took Social Studies 30 (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004b, p.12). This translated to less than 15% of students electing to take Native Studies 30. Few students are taking Native Studies courses, which factor could be related to the limited number of schools offering the courses.

Recent literature criticizes courses designed around the experiences and oppression of specific minorities. McMahon (2003) stated that these courses are meant

to pacify oppressed groups while doing little to change the present structure of inequality. McMahon contended, "Instead of providing opportunities for empowerment, these token gestures toward inclusivity actually serve to further marginalize peoples' histories and cultures and maintain dominance" (p. 263). The creation of Native Studies courses increases awareness of Aboriginal people's history and culture, but only for those students who participate in the courses.

It would be preferable if all students learned accurate information and Aboriginal perspectives in mainstream courses. This would require a rewriting of existing social science curricula. Because Native Studies courses have been created as parallel to existing social science courses, it would seem that students have opportunities to learn a more inclusive view of history. However, Native Studies courses are offered more frequently in First Nations schools and are taken by a small percentage of the population. One must still ask why this knowledge is not being taught to all students.

A number of recommendations were made in the *Council 2005 Information Booklet Prepared for the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Annual Council Meeting*. Of interest were two recommendations that both related to a need for increased Aboriginal content in Saskatchewan schools. One of these recommendations was, "That the STF strongly recommend to the Department of Learning that one of Native Studies 10, 20, or 30 be a necessary credit for high school graduation" (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, February 23, 2005, p. B9). This is not the first time a recommendation was made of this type; a somewhat similar one was present in the *Council 2000 Information Booklet*. Students need three credit hours (three courses) in the area of the social

sciences to fulfill requirements for graduation from Saskatchewan high schools. To suggest a course in Native Studies be compulsory for high school graduation is one way to ensure that all Saskatchewan students learn a history that incorporates the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples. To change the existing social science curricula is another way.

Native Studies courses may challenge some of the dominant beliefs held by students. Saskatchewan Education (1997) emphasized careful consideration of the Native Studies course content and how to manage students' emotions, which may include "disbelief, scepticism and resistance" (p. 24). The Native Studies 30 curriculum guide states,

If done effectively, Native Studies can provide a vehicle for negotiating a new and more positive relationship between the school and the Indian and Métis community. If done poorly, racist views can be further entrenched and students left more divided and confused than ever. (p. 24)

Teachers must plan effectively and communicate well in the Native Studies classroom. If existing social science courses were to change to be more inclusive, teachers would need to be prepared to facilitate the discussions.

Because Native Studies is at present an elective course, those students who choose to take Native Studies courses are probably of either Aboriginal descent or desire to increase their understanding and awareness. Therefore, students who take the courses may be more open to the course content, although there may be still some resistance to the learning. There have been positive reactions to the content in Native Studies courses. Tuharsky (1999), through interviews with four Aboriginal students in

Native Studies 20, found that the course positively affected self-concept and cultural identity amongst the students.

Even though students elect to take the course, attention needs to be paid as to how students will react to the material because it may be very different from what they have learned previously. Research has shown that students experience various emotions in response to the cross-cultural awareness that can include pride, anger, guilt (Tatum, 2000) or denial (Schick & St. Denis, 2003). These emotions can either contribute to or detract from learning that occurs in a Native Studies classroom. My objective is to gain insight into teacher and students' reflections concerning the learning in a Native Studies 10 course.

### Importance and Significance

To decrease racism and to increase equity, Saskatchewan residents need to work with one another, respecting that there are diverse values and ways of seeing the world that are relevant and worthy of study. The school plays an important role in preparing youth for the future and facilitating change. In order to create the type of province in which people want to live, there is a need to address contemporary, structural inequities occurring at present. Saskatchewan Learning (2003) declared, "The vision of Native Studies 10 is to nurture a generation of students who will be prepared to interact in mutually respectful ways in a multicultural environment" (p. 2). If Native Studies courses are to create understanding between diverse communities, all students will need to participate in the courses.

The experiences of the teacher responsible for the delivery of the Native Studies 10 and experiences of students who elect to take the course are valuable to people

interested in evaluating the effectiveness of these courses. Students can provide insight into what motivates them to choose these elective courses. They also can share their reflections of the learning in a Native Studies course, which can be used to provide future direction for Native Studies curricula. Teachers of Native Studies also have valuable insights into their preparation and their understandings of student learning.

### Research Focus

This focus of this research is find how Native Studies 10 contributes to all students developing “their knowledge, positive attitudes and cultural understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002a, p. 2). Those students who elected to take Native Studies courses will provide more meaning to studies evaluating the effectiveness of Native Studies courses. The particular questions to be addressed are:

1. For what reasons do students elect to take Native Studies 10?
2. In what ways does Native Studies 10 contribute to increased knowledge, positive attitudes, and cultural understanding among diverse groups in Saskatchewan?
3. What are the experiences of the classroom teacher?

## Definitions

Aboriginal – “‘Aboriginal peoples of Canada’ includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada” (Government of Canada, 1982).

Métis/Metis –The Métis National Council (2002) uses the following definition: “Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation” (<http://www.metisnation.ca/who/definition.html>). The word “Métis” is spelled differently in different documents. I will spell the word “Métis” unless I quote from a document in which it is spelled “Metis.”

Native – This term is generally not used in current literature when referring to Aboriginal peoples, but in prior literature it is, “used to include three distinct peoples – Indians, Metis and Non-Status Indians” (Saskatchewan Education, 1984, p. i).

Native Studies – “Native Studies is a growing field which brings together many different disciplines and perspectives to reveal the historic and contemporary meaning in the lives of Native peoples” (Brizinski, 1993, p.1).

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

I interviewed four participants and a teacher involved in a Native Studies 10 course. My awareness of what occurred in a Native Studies classroom prior to this study was a result of my experiences as a student, as well as my work in Adult Education settings. My own personal awareness was limited; therefore, I sought further knowledge from relevant literature. In this chapter, I provide background information on the development and implementation of Native Studies courses, discuss the effects of omitting Aboriginal perspectives from the school system, review experiences of individuals and instructors from various cross-cultural courses, consider the benefits and limitations of integration as opposed to having separate courses of study, discuss factors concerning the teaching of Native Studies, and introduce aspects of critical multiculturalism. This research generated a background for the study by providing awareness beyond the classrooms in which I have taught.

### Native Studies Curriculum in Saskatchewan

#### *Development*

In 1981, the Saskatchewan Minister of Learning's advisory committee on curriculum and instruction was established to provide future direction for policy and programs related to curriculum implementation. The advisory committee shared the findings in their final report, *Directions*. Saskatchewan Education (1984) included a recommendation that "the Minister initiate the formulation of policies and procedures to

ensure that the unique needs of Northern and Indian/Native students are met” (p. 8). The needs of Aboriginal students were not being addressed by the school system. This was evident by the number of Aboriginal students leaving the system prior to graduation from Grade 12. Two recommendations made in relation to curriculum in the report included, “Native content should be integrated into the core curriculum” and “Indian/Native studies and Native languages courses should be developed and offered at the secondary level” (p. 50).

The Minister established a specific committee in 1982 entitled the Native Curriculum Review Committee, which released *A Five Year Action for Native Curriculum Development* in 1984. The committee recommended, “As a part of ongoing evaluation of current curricular materials and programs in this province, the dual concerns of educating Native students and educating non-Native students about Native people be taken into account” (Minister’s Advisory Committee Native Curriculum Review, 1984, p. ii). In this action plan, the committee stated the proposed target group for whom these changes were recommended included all students within provincial schools. A part of the action plan included planning for the development of Native Studies 10, 20, and 30 courses for the high school level.

Saskatchewan Learning published three separate curriculum guides for Native Studies during the 1990’s. Each of Native Studies 10, 20, or 30 can be taken as electives at the high school level. It is not necessary to have Native Studies 10 in order to take Native Studies 20 or 30. Students can elect to take any or all of the courses if offered in their schools. The goals outlined in the Native Studies 10, 20, and 30 curriculum guides are similar, although worded differently. All three guides’ goals relate to the importance

of the students gaining an understanding of Aboriginal peoples, increasing awareness of their own cultural identity, developing an understanding or sensitivity to other cultural groups, and having the knowledge base to understand current issues by becoming aware of historical contexts.

The Native Curriculum Review Committee was renamed the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee in 1999. The group continues to develop action plans for five-year terms. In the latest action plan, the committee stated one indicator of progress in Aboriginal curriculum actualization would be having one course of Native Studies being compulsory for all students to complete within the high school system. As mentioned on pages 11 and 12, few students are electing to take the courses and not all schools are offering Native Studies.

### *Implementation*

Dewar (1999) interviewed non-Aboriginal teachers of Native Studies in Saskatoon. The majority of Native Studies teachers in Saskatoon were non-Aboriginal at the time of his research. Some of these teachers had taken Native Studies courses in university although not all teachers had an academic background in the subject area. One teacher identified that the goals of the course changed dependent upon the cultural background of the students in the course. For Aboriginal students, the teacher focused on the development of pride. For non-Aboriginal students, the teacher hoped the course would alter misconceptions and address racist attitudes. One of the challenges identified by the teachers in the teaching of Native Studies was “meeting the needs of the demographic mix of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students in the courses” (p. 74).

Teachers of Native Studies who have diverse students in their classes need to be aware of emotions of students when discussing issues of race and racism. A teacher shared with Dewar that non-Aboriginal students have dropped the class because they felt uncomfortable with the conversations. Some teachers also were more cautious when having Aboriginal students in the class for fear of saying something that would offend them. Blades, Johnston and Simmt (2001) reported that teachers of social studies have to “ ‘tread a fine line’ between feeling the need to present contrasting and perhaps controversial perspectives and being concerned not to offend anyone in the class” (p. 36). It is not easy for teachers and students to discuss topics such as racism. There are often those students associated with the victims and those students associated with the protagonists either directly because of their experiences or indirectly by virtue of their ethnicities. Students often know only their own realities and when they discuss sensitive issues, it is important that the teacher is able to create an environment where misconceptions are discussed and, more importantly, addressed.

The course content of a Native Studies course may make some teachers uncomfortable because it highlights the negative actions inflicted by the non-Aboriginal community. Some of the teachers Dewar (1999) interviewed felt that the content of Native Studies courses related to serving “an Aboriginal political agenda with which they, as teachers, were leery presenting” (p. 61). For example, a teacher shared, “The curriculum seems to be so confrontational, so anti-establishment, anti-white at times” (p. 62). If non-Aboriginal teachers are experiencing dilemmas with the content, non-Aboriginal students might find the content difficult as well.

The teaching of Native Studies involves learning the policies and structures of the dominant society in relation to Aboriginal peoples. From the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples, the majority of these policies have been negative. Aboriginal people experience a lower standard of living compared to non-Aboriginal communities. This living standard encompasses factors such as education, health, income, life expectancy, and housing. All of these variables are interconnected. Some people use a “blame the victim” approach when analyzing why Aboriginal peoples are not accessing the same opportunities or enjoying the same standard of living as other Canadians. This approach continues to serve the needs of the dominant society, but a Native Studies course should challenge this perception.

Students learn in Native Studies some of the factors that inhibit the success of Aboriginal persons in our society. This learning involves acknowledging the policies and procedures of the dominant society; it also implicates the policies and procedures of the dominant society as part of the problem. The dominant society includes government, schools, religious groups, and law enforcement. Perhaps this concentration of content in one course appears to be “anti-establishment.” Generally, Canadians reflect positively about their citizenship; Native Studies courses could provide some different perspectives. The content of Native Studies courses includes studying some of the controversial decisions concerning Aboriginal peoples made by the Canadian Government.

Dewar (1999) found teachers supported the teaching of Native Studies courses because the courses were effective in transmitting positive ideas about Aboriginal peoples. He also found there was limited attention focused on racism because of teacher

uneasiness. Dewar stated this was a potential limiter of the course: “With stories of racism often saturating local news stories, it is important that students be examining the issue in a formal education context where there is supposed to be an open and respectful exchange of information and ideas” (p. 117). It is often difficult to speak about racism, especially in settings where there are diverse ethnic groups. These conversations may be difficult to have, but they are necessary.

Tuharsky (1999) evaluated the effectiveness of Native Studies 20 in affecting self-concept and identity for Aboriginal students. She interviewed four students, their former teacher, and an elder, all of whom were Aboriginal. Tuharsky found the students’ self-concepts and cultural identities were strengthened because of taking the course. Tuharsky attributed the positive developments to the pedagogy of the teacher, who incorporated Aboriginal epistemology into his methodology. The teacher had a university degree, but he had also learned from the elders. The students were in an environment in which their opinions were heard and were respected. The teacher shared that it was important to him how the students felt about themselves. In particular, he expressed concern about the Aboriginal students because of the many negative views they had already encountered in society. The knowledge and motivation of the teacher was central to the success of the course. As a result, the students reacted favourably to the course content.

#### Lacking Awareness of Aboriginal Perspectives

There are many myths that negatively affect the way people view Aboriginal peoples, as well as the way Aboriginal people view themselves. These myths are perpetuated in schools by what is taught and what is not taught. Lack of information

negatively affects all students. The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (2002) reported, “Still today Aboriginal Peoples’ histories, cultures, perspectives and realities are not portrayed accurately in social studies, history and other curricula taught in Canadian classrooms” (p. 37). The lack of information affects Aboriginal students who do not see their realities a part of the daily life in schools. The coalition also stated this lack of information hampers non-Aboriginal students:

In fact, non-Aboriginal students are generally exposed to a curriculum that is even weaker in content than that offered Aboriginal students. They are even less likely to be placed in schools, courses, classes, and extra-curricular activities where the new, improved content is being delivered on an ‘optional’ basis. (p. 16)

Although the coalition was aware that advancements were being made in terms of policies and programming in schools, it found there still was a general lack of awareness concerning Aboriginal peoples. When students were asked if they had the knowledge to understand current issues involving Aboriginal peoples, 80.7% percent of the 347 students surveyed either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with this statement (p. 102). The students, who were in their first year of university courses, did not believe they had the knowledge base to understand current issues.

Banks (2002) advocated that multicultural education is meant to benefit all students. This could certainly relate to Indigenous perspectives and content. Banks suggested mainstream students are being done a disservice by only being offered one way of viewing the world. He stated that this one-sided curriculum harms students who do not see their experiences represented in schools, and it does not prepare students for

working with diverse cultures. Banks stated, "Individuals who know the world from their own cultural and ethnic perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated" (p. 1). In Saskatchewan, this lack of preparation could relate to lack of interaction between members of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities.

Finney and Orr (1995) reported that many of the teacher education students in Regina, Saskatchewan had very limited knowledge concerning Aboriginal peoples. Haynes Writer (2002) also revealed the reflections of students enrolled in an education course in New Mexico regarding the lack of information they were provided in schools about Aboriginal peoples. Saskatchewan and New Mexico are similar in that they are both the traditional territories of diverse Indigenous groups. Both areas have higher populations of Indigenous peoples when compared with other provinces or states. In both areas, the stories and histories of the Indigenous people are not reflected in local schooling. In addition to the lack of information provided in the school setting, diverse communities of people rarely come to know one another in meaningful ways.

Tompkins (2002) acknowledged teacher unawareness of racial issues in Nova Scotia. There was a subconscious blinder to the experiences of minorities. Part of this problem involved the lack of interaction between diverse groups:

Far too frequently, white Nova Scotians only know 'about' Mi'kmaw people. Often what they know is minimal, incomplete and incorrect. And most frequently they simply don't 'know' any Mi'kmaw people in a real way. They lack the very personal relationships that would allow them to see how race,

gender and class are played out . . . . They never get close enough to see ‘what they need to see’. (p. 418)

Tompkins asserted this lack of awareness perpetuated teachers’ abilities to ignore how racism negatively affected Mi’kmaw students and African Nova Scotian students.

There is a lack of critical reflection concerning the experiences of Indigenous peoples in our school system. Students in teacher education programs are quite often recent graduates of the high school system. They are the future teachers of many Aboriginal students. When these teachers enter the teaching profession, they may have difficulty implementing Aboriginal content because they are not comfortable with the content due to their own lack of awareness. Longman (2005) and Thomas (2005) found in two separate studies that there were barriers to teachers’ implementation of Aboriginal content in Saskatchewan schools. Therefore, Aboriginal content is not being integrated to the extent that it should be. Because teachers experience these barriers, the lack of awareness continues; therefore, so do the myths. The myths that perpetuate in our society harm all people. These myths create barriers between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and perpetuate the present system of inequity.

Critical pedagogy questions the dominant discourses. McLaren (2005) shared, “Critical education theorists view school knowledge as historically and socially rooted and interest bound” (p. 409). Knowledge is never neutral but rather is socially constructed and related to issues of power. As an example, Chartrand (1992) explicated:

It has been stated that one of the features of a colonizing system is that it denies a history to the people it dominates. It is easier to assert power over others if they are made to feel they have no identity, they have no past, or at least no past

that matters. Regrettably, there is much in the way the Canadian education system treats history that supports the notion that the past of the many Aboriginal peoples does not matter. (p. 9)

From a critical education perspective, it would be useful to ask questions such as whose interests are being served by allowing for myths about Aboriginal peoples to perpetuate. Why does the history of Canada as told in schools often begin with the arrival of explorers? In addition, why are Aboriginal peoples' histories and stories not a part of the school experience for all students?

#### Cross-cultural Courses

The two studies conducted by Dewar (1999) and Tuharsky (1999) provided some insight into the learning that occurs in Saskatchewan Native Studies classrooms. In order to gain further perspectives, it was necessary to review literature related to diverse cross-cultural education programs that dealt with either Aboriginal content or inter-ethnic relations.

Melenchuk (1987) conducted a quantitative study regarding the effects of a cross-cultural curriculum when taught to eighth graders of European descent who lived in Regina, Saskatchewan. He wanted to find if the students' attitudes towards Indian peoples could be changed through instruction. He developed a curriculum related to increased awareness of First Nations peoples, which was implemented in two classrooms. The positive results of the study in terms of attitudinal change demonstrated that cross-cultural teaching could affect the attitudes of children. Melenchuk's data supported the role of curriculum as a mechanism for addressing cross-cultural understandings in our society and supporting prejudice reduction.

Teachers need to prepare to work with diverse students. The University of Saskatchewan's College of Education has incorporated a mandatory Education Foundations course, which delves into issues concerning cross-cultural education and Aboriginal people. Schick and St. Denis (2003) divulged that quite often students arrived in this course expecting that they will learn how to help Aboriginal students; instead, the researchers expected students to participate in self-analyses regarding their positions of privilege in society. The students often met this learning with resistance. Schick and St. Denis (2003) suggested, "Learners and teachers are not necessarily interested in hearing the difficult things that need to be said or doing the difficult analysis of unpacking their assumptions about inequality" (Introduction section, ¶ 1).

Students displayed a number of defences that may have interfered with their acceptance of course material. Schick and St. Denis found students held three common ideological assumptions in order to resist the learning. These common ideologies included the beliefs that race does not matter, Canada is a fair country in which everyone can succeed if they work hard enough, and individual acts of goodness make one innocent of racism. Schick and St. Denis affirmed,

Students' difficulties are not reflections of their inability or reluctance to engage with the imminent critique offered by the course. The concepts and ideological assumptions that we describe are embedded in the social fabric of our schools, communities, and the history of our nation. (Conclusion, ¶ 3)

Students in high school settings may also utilize these assumptions to protect their sense of "self" as they learn stories that refute the dominant myths often unchallenged by school curricula. The myth of meritocracy assists people in justifying why there are

varying levels of success in educational and employment settings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (Finney & Orr, 1995; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Tompkins, 2002).

Haynes Writer (2002) worked with a group of graduate students at the University of New Mexico in a course related to the experiences of Native peoples in the education system. The class comprised Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Haynes Writer shared that many teachers who work with Aboriginal children are not of Aboriginal ancestry. The current shortage of Aboriginal teachers is not going to be met soon in New Mexico. Haynes Writer asserted, “We can, however, prepare all teachers to appropriately teach Native children and teach all students accurate information regarding Indigenous peoples. This preparation and awareness begins in TEPs<sup>2</sup>, however bitter, horrible, controversial – or liberating – the learning may be” (p. 9). The words Haynes Writer utilized to convey the learning of the TEPs, or teacher education programs, pointed to some of the reactions students may have to course material.

Haynes Writer (2002) employed critical pedagogy to address issues related to colonization. She reflected that the students begin “to uncover how schools denied them the many inclusive knowledges to their learning because of specific political and social agendas. They learned that the absence of information, misinformation and the use of silence was devastating to all involved” (p. 18). The students were affected by the

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<sup>2</sup> Haynes Writer used the term TEP in the same way as it is meant in Saskatchewan - teacher education program. Unfortunately in Saskatchewan, many associate the TEP term only with the Aboriginal teacher education programs.

learning in the course. Haynes Writer implored them to take this new awareness to the classroom to work for social justice.

Tatum (2000) discussed the diverse experiences of people involved in undergraduate courses focused on the psychology of racism that she taught. Because of her former experiences teaching the course, she was aware of the ways students might react to the course content: Black students may experience anger and resentment; white students may experience guilt or denial. She was aware that sometimes students withdrew from the learning by not completing assignments or attending. She warned students at the beginning of the course that they might react to course content this way, and this helped students understand some of the emotions they experienced in relation to the course. Tatum was able to address these challenges in her courses because of familiarity with models of racial identity.

Racial development theories concerning Black people developed following the American Civil Rights Movement. Black people's attitudes and behaviours towards themselves changed during this time (Helms, 1990). Helms defined racial identity as "a sense of group collective identity based on one's *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular group" (p. 3). I was first introduced to one of these theories while completing my undergraduate degree. Although the theory related to changing awareness of racial identity in Black people, I found it paralleled my own experience as an Aboriginal person. The theory was helpful to my understanding of some of the behaviours I was exhibiting in relation to my changing sense of identity as I learned history from an Aboriginal perspective.

Tatum and Brown (1998) related that racial identity development may occur at different times for individuals in society dependent on various factors such as race or levels of interaction with other communities. They shared that generally, for people of colour, this identity development occurred during adolescence; however, “for whites, the process may begin in adolescence, but for those in predominately white, socially segregated communities it often does not begin until much later” (p. 12). They shared that because people are often at different levels of racial identity development, there is potential for misunderstanding and conflicts. Helms (1990) suggested racial identity development does not occur unless there is interaction with a minority group.

Farrell Racette and Racette (1992) identified Native Studies courses as an area where this interaction could occur. They stated,

The learning objectives of Native Studies often include an anticipated impact in the areas of awareness and understanding for the majority students and development of identity and pride for Indian and Métis students. It is important to recognize that changes are not achieved without considerable struggle. (p. 8)

Farrell Racette and Racette informed that students would have diverse emotions in relation to the course content. As well, the role of the teacher will be more challenging in a classroom that has Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students because the conversations may lead to things being said that other students find upsetting. They advise to plan for these types of discussions rather than avoid them.

#### Native Studies as a Separate or Integrated Course of Study

One approach within multi-cultural education is the creation of separate courses of study that focus on a particular ethnic group. Generally, these courses are electives

and often viewed by the majority as courses directed towards students of that particular ethnicity. Native Studies is an example of a separate course. Although the course is intended for all students, it is more often offered in Aboriginal schools and therefore taken by Aboriginal students.

By taking Native Studies courses, students become more aware of the information they were not previously taught regarding Aboriginal peoples. If they believe this information to be valuable, they might criticize the present education system for denying them this information. Henze (1999) found those students who participated in “curricular approaches to develop positive interethnic relations” (p. 541) came to understand that curriculum is a social construction that supports the stories of some while omitting the stories of others. Students may wonder why they were never exposed to this content previously. They may realize they have accepted myths as truths through no fault of their own. They also may become aware of the political nature of curriculum.

Henze attributed the success of ethnic-focus classes to various factors, but highlighted three. First, the learning was built into the school day. This gave the learner recognition that the content was important and of equal value to work in other subject areas. For instance, the learning took place over a longer period and did not occur in optional workshops. Second, through course activities that involved interaction and cooperative strategies, students spent time with peers they might not otherwise have gotten to know. In these courses, the students had opportunities to interact with peers from other ethnic backgrounds. Third, the teachers were knowledgeable in their subject areas and were able to engage students in learning. Saskatchewan Education (1997)

affirmed that teachers should be knowledgeable in the subject area and have “respect for the discipline of Native Studies” (p. 23).

Unfortunately, by providing separate courses for Native Studies, the school can say that it is responding to the needs of Aboriginal students. The creation of these courses allows the mainstream curriculum to remain the same (Henze, 1999; McMahon, 2003) because the needs of the “other” students are now “being addressed” within these courses. As well, according to Henze (1999), content in ethnic-focus classes is deemed oppositional:

The highly charged national context of racial/ethnic relations before, during, and since the time of study meant that the school’s ethnic-focus classes were not viewed as ‘neutrals’ or ‘objective’ in the way that mainstream educators view courses on U.S. history or world view. (p. 541)

Henze acknowledged that some teachers viewed ethnic-focus curricula as “biased or subversive” (p. 541). While some allege ethnic-focus courses have certain political agendas, it is more truthful to note that all curricula are a reflection of political agendas.

Ghosh (1996) referred to optional units of multiculturalism for student teachers as not being the most effective way of delivering course material because the few student teachers who elect to take these courses are already among the “converted” (p. 89). This could also be applied to the elective courses at the high school level. A student who chooses to take Native Studies is perhaps of Aboriginal ancestry or is already committed to increase understanding of other racial groups. In Saskatchewan, all students have been identified as the desired participants in secondary school Native Studies courses.

McMahon (2003) does not believe Native Studies should be a separate course of study, along with other optional courses concerning ethnic groups or feminist studies. She stated these courses are “token gestures” and lead to further marginalization by doing little to address the unequal distribution of power within society. She also stated relatively few students choose these courses. Students from the dominant group who choose them are viewed with “suspicion”; whereas, students from the marginalized group “are seen as being pandered to while earning easy credits” (p. 263).

Dewar (1999) also reported teachers shared that students see the Saskatchewan Native Studies courses as less academically challenging. Garcia (1984) contended that making a course easier for a specific cultural group is another form of racism. Nieto (2004) illustrated having reduced expectations of the “poor, working-class, and culturally dominated groups” did not only occur within the classroom, but also occurred within society (p. 59). Teachers are often unaware of their biases. Rather than challenging students academically, teachers may lower expectations of culturally different students. Although they may view these lowered expectations as assisting the learner, ultimately they are limiting the learning opportunities of the individuals and communicating a harmful message.

All students would have access to awareness concerning Aboriginal peoples if Aboriginal history, perspectives, and experiences were integrated into the mainstream curriculum. At present, Reynolds (2000) shared that this integration is not done effectively in social studies curricula. Reynolds stated Native history is generally mentioned only in the introductions of social science courses or offered in separate courses of study, such as Native Studies. Farmer (2004) also found that although

Aboriginal content and perspectives are included within the Saskatchewan Learning History 30: Canadian Studies Curriculum Guide and Teacher's Activity Guide, this inclusion is not done in a meaningful way.

Farmer reviewed the Saskatchewan guides and found although the curriculum included Aboriginal content and perspectives, "the guide relies on colonial tools of representation and at the same time uses those tools to minimize and rationalize the tragedy of colonialism" (p. 104). The guide does not teach students to deal effectively with, or have a current understanding of, colonialism. The guides do not validate Aboriginal worldview primarily because they "operate both as a product of the historical tradition they originate from, and as agents that reinforce the same tradition" (p. 102). The format of the guides function, "as a tool of Euro-Canadian discourse, by normalizing and naturalizing the destruction of the Aboriginal world and at the same time reaffirming the dominant position of Euro-Canadians within the narrative of Euro-Canadian history" (p. 99). One suggestion Farmer left readers with was to rethink the narrative from an Aboriginal perspective.

Based on the literature, there are drawbacks to the creation of separate ethnic-focus courses. Students might view these courses as easy. As well, because these courses are being offered, the present social science courses can remain the same. On the other hand, integration may not validate Aboriginal content and perspectives, especially if teachers are hesitant about integrating subject material due to the perceived barriers. Hooks (2003), although speaking to the role of Black Studies, shared these types of courses had a purpose,

Certainly for African-Americans the institutionalization of Black Studies provided a space where the hegemony of imperialist white-supremacist thought could be challenged. In the late sixties and seventies, students, myself included, were radicalized in classrooms by coming to critical consciousness about the way dominator thinking had shaped what we knew. (p. 2)

Critical consciousness is not limited to people of a specific ethnicity, but rather something all people can experience. Ethnic-focus courses can be an arena for this type of learning. Although having Native Studies as separate courses is valuable, having these courses available must not substitute for integrating Aboriginal content into all courses.

#### Teaching Native Studies

Prior to the establishment of formal education in this region by the non-Aboriginal population, Aboriginal peoples of Canada were able to relate to their young the skills they needed for survival. Armstrong (1987) shared this learning often occurred in context, incorporated the best time of day and/or seasons for learning, involved family members, and utilized experiential activities, storytelling, and rituals. Certainly, the types of skills necessary for survival have changed, but because the present education system is not meeting the needs of Aboriginal youth, it could be helpful to reflect on traditional modes of teaching and learning. An emphasis on experiential activities, the involvement of family, and incorporating respect for the environment would benefit all students, not just those of Aboriginal ancestry. One would hope different types of learning activities would be integrated into all classrooms because not all students succeed solely by focusing on the Western education methods.

Learning from books and lecture are still predominant teaching methods in today's classrooms.

Harris (2002) wrote of the difficulties incorporating Native Studies course into a Western institution. Harris suggested traditional Aboriginal teaching was holistic and experiential. This teaching relied on Indigenous beliefs of interaction and belief in immeasurable concepts. Harris stated by teaching "Native Studies", she has been "teaching students about Aboriginal cultures and issues in a Western educational setting by Western methods" (p. 1). Western methods include the passing of values that perpetuate and support a Western cultural image.

Harris shared that she tries to navigate her role differently in the classroom in order to incorporate traditional Indigenous ways of learning while teaching Native Studies at the university level. She tries to see students outside of the classroom setting. She takes her class into natural environments to learn or invites other people in. Harris tries to incorporate experiential activities, storytelling, and humour. Harris critiqued the present system: "The students learn about things they may never see, people they may never meet, and places they may never go from people who may not have experienced the objects of study either" (¶17). Harris noted this opposes Indigenous systems where traditionally learning occurred in context. These forms of learning are not unique to Aboriginal cultures, but they are reflective of traditional methods of learning in Aboriginal communities. Indeed all students would benefit from these methods.

Not only are the teaching methods important in a Native Studies classroom, but the purpose of the curriculum is as well. Wilson and Wilson (2002) related that the

infusing of Aboriginal content into the present education system is not an effective method for changing the curriculum. They shared,

Current provincial curricula were developed out of mainstream Canadian society with its own agenda for transmitting its own culture: colonizing its younger generation, as it were, to its own attitudes, values and customs in order to perpetuate itself. By simply infusing something into an already powerful and harmful system, we may be contributing only that - an infusion – and may in fact be perpetuating the problem. (¶ 3)

Farmer (2004) also outlined the ways in which Aboriginal content was integrated into the Canadian Studies 30 curriculum guide to support the development of Canada as a nation while the guide did not recognize the harmful effects of colonization.

St. Denis (2004) cautioned against the assumption that an education focusing on cultural revitalization and pride alone would solve issues within the Indigenous community. The focus on this strategy allocates the blame for the “loss” of culture to Indigenous peoples rather than acknowledging the assimilative goals of the dominant society. St. Denis reflected that the strategy of cultural revitalization has done little to improve the education system for Aboriginal peoples. St. Denis stated, “Cultural revitalization misdiagnoses the problem and places far too much responsibility on the marginalized and oppressed to change yet again, and once again, lets those in positions of dominance off the hook” (p.45). She shared that because of preoccupation with this approach, “other explanations for the on-going marginalization, exclusion, and oppression of Aboriginal people are denied and minimized” (p. 45)

The Native Studies 30 curriculum guide (1997), developed by Saskatchewan Education, included recommendations for teaching Native Studies. In order to address controversial issues, a number of suggestions were made: “The success of these experiences and material is dependent on accurate information, dynamic interactive teaching, frequent debriefing, and opportunity for student reflection and artistic expression” (p. 25). The guide recommended activities such as “talking circles, oral interviews and student directed research” as being successful for “enhancing identity and promoting self esteem” (p. 25). Independent research is especially valuable as a means of uncovering inequities in society and moving away from disbelief. Students are affected more by knowledge if they uncover it themselves. They may be less sceptical of new knowledge, which might contradict what they formally believed, if they do the research (Goodman, 2000; Tatum, 2000).

The guide recommended using elders as a source of Indigenous knowledge. Other community members can also be invited into the classroom. Goodman (2000) shared an effective way of encouraging empathy in students is through guest speakers because “hearing the information in person tends to be the most powerful” (p. 1066). The guide stated a teacher of Native Studies 30 should have a strong background in the content, a desire to continue learning, and an ability to recognize stereotypes and bias within materials. Henze (1999) also asserted the need for a knowledgeable teacher:

A less knowledgeable teacher could easily make the topic appear superficial or lacking in substance. Teachers of such courses also need to have strong pedagogical skills and be able to engage and challenge students to think

critically while at the same time creating a safe environment for discussion. (p. 548)

The Native Studies 30 curriculum guide stated there might be adverse reaction to the content because it is different from student belief systems. Although it may be difficult, a teacher still needs to address these conversations instead of avoiding them as a means of detouring from conflict. Race and racism are topics of discussion that will arise in a Native Studies classroom. O'Brien (2004) suggested emotions should be encouraged in the classroom because students are affected more by the words of a passionate classmate than if they come from a book: "Hearing historically silenced voices speak out emotionally about their plight often gives members of dominant groups their first exposure to the lived realities of oppression" (p. 70). Tompkins (2002) shared, "We learn a great deal from controversy. Often educators shy away from controversy. Yet we stand to learn much from people who hold different positions than our own" (p. 411).

Tompkins and O'Brien have rules established at the beginning of the courses they teach regarding how the groups will work together. Rather than avoiding these difficult discussions, they set the context. Valerio (2001) stated "a sense of safety" in the classroom must be established in order for learning to occur (§ 1). On the other hand, hooks (2003) believed pre-occupation with creating a safe context took away from the learning environment. Talking about matters of difference cannot always feel safe; instead, hooks mentioned,

Working with white students on unlearning racism, one of the principles we strive to embody is the value of risk, honoring the fact that we may learn and

grow in circumstances where we do not feel safe, that the presence of conflict is not necessarily negative but rather its meaning is determined by how we cope with that conflict. (p. 64)

O'Brien (2004) divulged two rules she had within her courses concerning discussions:

We have all been taught misinformation, both about our own group and about members of other groups. The implication here is that if I should be 'caught' making a racist statement, and then someone in our learning community challenges that statement, we need to understand that this is not a personal attack. Rather, it is an attack on the system that has allowed the misinformation to perpetuate such that I, and many others like me, have come to accept it as the truth. (p. 73)

O'Brien shared the second time a racist statement was made regarding a lesson the class has already learned, the statement was not accepted as a mistake. The person was held accountable because the racist statement was no longer due to misinformation. O'Brien "raises these guidelines to accentuate the afore-mentioned point that a course focusing on oppression in a deep and meaningful way cannot always be a 'safe' or harmonious space. Yet it is still a community" (p. 73).

Educators of a Native Studies course may need to deal with conflict. They need to create a classroom environment conducive to growth. Because of the content and differing perspectives in a Native Studies course, there are some things teachers should consider prior to teaching the course. These include incorporating various teaching

methods to promote student success, having a good understanding of the subject material, and being able to manage discussions that are not always easy.

### Critical Multiculturalism

McLaren (1995) explored three different approaches to multicultural education, which he considered possibly harmful and/or limiting. First, “conservative or corporate multiculturalism refuses to treat whiteness as a form of ethnicity and in doing so posits whiteness as an individual norm by which other ethnicities are judged” (p. 37). Other ethnicities are viewed “add-ons” to the dominant culture (p. 37), which is assumed superior. This approach is generally assimilative. Liberal multiculturalism views the purpose of multiculturalism as meant to assist some minorities groups to succeed with additional help, but it does not question the ethnocentric viewpoints involved in the process. Left-liberal multiculturalism highlights difference, and in doing so, “treats difference as an ‘essence’ that exists independently of history, culture, and power” (p. 41). McLaren does not believe the liberal and the left-liberal approaches are enough to create social transformation, which should be a goal of multicultural education.

McLaren (1995) instead advocated a curriculum based on critical pedagogy. Critical educational theorists believe the curriculum supports the beliefs and values of the dominant groups while limiting the views of subordinate groups. The curriculum does not only involve courses and materials, but also all the things that take place in the classroom (p. 413). A critical education perspective would require looking at the way Aboriginal content and perspectives have been added or not added to the curriculum. It would require looking at what the content added teaches children and youth about Aboriginal peoples in this country. It would question who benefits from supporting

separate courses of study for Native Studies instead of teaching all students these perspectives.

McLaren (1995) suggested a critical multiculturalism approach is required for curriculum reform. He made numerous suggestions guided by this perspective. He suggested a more concrete change to the canon, one that validates various traditions of knowledge. Teachers must question the assumption of the superiority of whiteness and Western knowledge. They should move away from the unquestioned Eurocentric views that underlie the curriculum. Those involved in curriculum reform should question how different groups are situated in the official curriculum and what this situation teaches students, whether directly or indirectly. Curriculum reform must affirm the voices of the oppressed. In addition, "Curriculum reform must recognize the importance of encouraging spaces for the multiplicity of voices in our classrooms and of creating a dialogical pedagogy in which subjects see others as subjects and not objects" (p. 55). This approach involves numerous changes to the entire organization of the curriculum. These changes would affect teacher and curriculum writers' unexamined beliefs, courses, course content, teaching methods, and student voice.

#### What is Left Out?

At present there is little evaluation concerning the effectiveness of Native Studies courses in Saskatchewan. Tuharsky (1999) shared the reflections of four Aboriginal students and their Aboriginal teacher regarding Native Studies 20. Dewar (1999) shared the perceptions of non-Aboriginal teachers of Native Studies. Those are two studies of Saskatchewan Native Studies curricula. What is left out is an examination of how Native Studies 10 is meeting its aim of helping "all students

develop their knowledge, positive attitudes and cultural understanding about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002a, p. 2).

It is important to hear the voices of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students in a Native Studies 10 course to evaluate the effectiveness of the course for all students. Since the courses are electives and since student motivation for taking the course is likely to affect the learning, reasons for taking the course must also be investigated. It was my intent to provide student and teacher perspectives in addition to my insights concerning the learning occurring in a Native Studies course.

## CHAPTER THREE: STUDY DESIGN

### Introduction

In this study, I employed qualitative research methods for gathering data that highlighted students' perspectives as well as one teacher's insights into the effects of Native Studies courses on student knowledge, understanding, and attitudes. I also gathered data through observation describing what I perceived to be occurring in a Native Studies classroom in order to ascertain in what ways Native Studies 10 contributes to increased understanding among diverse groups in Saskatchewan.

### Rationale for Qualitative Research

I decided to use qualitative research in this particular study because of the methodology's ability to incorporate participants' perspectives and voices. I wanted participants to share their thoughts about the Native Studies 10 course. I also wanted to observe students' reactions to course material. Overall, interviewing classroom students as well as the teacher provided me with many of the insights I wanted to gain. This particular research study highlighted the occurrences that took place in one Native Studies classroom over the course of two semesters. Although it was case specific, I believe some of the findings may relate to other contexts and contribute to increased understanding concerning how students are affected by learning Native Studies content in other Saskatchewan classrooms.

The methods used to collect data included classroom observation, followed by field notes, as well as individual tape-recorded interviews with four students and the classroom teacher. I selected students and then asked them individually to participate in the study in order to get the perspectives of males and females, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. I examined the interviews for themes and set up second interviews with the students and the teacher to follow up on the themes.

Since attendance was an issue for many of the students during the Native Studies courses, I found it difficult to select and retain participants for two interviews. Despite this challenge, I believe the setting for this study was ideal because there were non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students involved in the courses. Because I interviewed two participants only once and talked to four students in total, the study was limited. However, I believe I gained some insights into participants' perspectives on the course. As well, the interviews provided the students and teacher opportunities to reflect upon the course. I hope participants found this reflection beneficial and affirming.

### Behavioural Ethics

I submitted a request to the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Ethics Board and gained approval (See Appendix A) to conduct my research prior to entering the research area. I also gained approval from the school division. I had the students' parents or guardians and the teacher sign consent forms prior to the interviews (see Appendix B: Letter to Parent/Guardian of Native Studies 10 Student and Appendix C: Teacher Participant Consent Form). The student participants signed letters of assent (see Appendix D: Student Participant Assent Form). The forms explained that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time and that participation in this research project

was voluntary. It explained that student participation in the study was not a part of the Native Studies 10 course and the participants and the school would remain anonymous for the study. Pseudonyms would be used for the participants. The form also communicated the time requirement necessary for the interviews. After I conducted the interviews and transcribed the data, I gave the transcripts to the participants to read. When they were satisfied with how the transcripts read, the participants signed the Transcript Release Form (see Appendix E).

### Setting

When I first began to consider this study, I knew I needed to locate a high school within Saskatchewan that offered Native Studies 10 since not all high schools offer the course. I also wanted a setting that had Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students attending in addition to a teacher who would welcome me into the classroom. I began by brainstorming the teachers of Native Studies I knew. The year prior, I had met a teacher of Native Studies at a professional development event, and although I did not know him well, I thought that he might be willing to participate. I phoned Mr. David<sup>3</sup> near the end of the school year, and he immediately accepted my request. He also wanted to know if there was anything he could do to assist me with getting the ethics approval required by the school division, which I thought was supportive. Mr. David has a Masters degree and many years of teaching experience. He also has an interest in Aboriginal education.

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<sup>3</sup> Mr. David is a pseudonym. All participant names in this document are pseudonyms.

Prior to entering the school, I obtained permission from the school division and the school principal. The students who attend this school may have selected this school because they have had less success in other high schools. This school offers various supports to assist students academically, but it also supports them holistically. There were posters highlighting upcoming ski trips and discussion groups in the hallways of the school. As well, there were Aboriginal ceremonies for smudging in the morning and a breakfast program daily.

I observed the teaching of two consecutive Native Studies 10 courses over the duration of two semesters, taught by the same teacher. In both courses there was a mixture of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. I interviewed the teacher in the classroom. I interviewed the students individually in a private room within the library before school or after school depending upon the students' schedules. On one occasion, I interviewed a student in an office during the noon hour when the room in the library was unavailable.

## Data Collection

### *Observation*

One of the primary methods for generating data was observation of the Native Studies classroom. This experience allowed me to gain a sense of how the course was conducted, the content covered, and the language used by the students and the teacher. I often settled in at the back of the classroom in one of the student desks. I listened to the lesson and read whatever the students were working on. I did not record the talks occurring within the classroom while I was sitting there. If an insightful statement was

made or an event occurred that I did not want to forget, I would make a note on a sheet of paper to include in my notes later.

It was easier to interpret and understand the student interviews because I had seen the participants in the natural setting of their classroom. Bogden and Knopp Biklen (2003) noted qualitative researchers need to be involved in the setting because “action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs” (p. 4). I recorded my observations as field notes after I would leave the classroom. My field notes contained both what I observed and my thoughts about what I had observed. Bogden and Knopp Biklen (2003) defined field notes as “the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (p. 111). In fact, those notes became rather valuable as I spent more time observing in the classroom during the second semester. Later I coded these notes and used them along with the interview transcripts to develop themes.

I observed in the Native Studies classroom two or three times per week at the beginning of the first course, and less frequently after the first month. In the second semester, I visited the classroom on a more regular basis throughout the time-span of the course. I had learned during the first semester that student attendance was sporadic at times. In order for me to get to know the students better, I had to be present more frequently. I also learned through the initial process that I would need to visit the school more often to initiate and maintain the types of connections I wanted to have with the students.

### *Participant Selection*

After observing the students for a couple of weeks during the first semester, I invited four students individually to participate in the interviews. I wanted to get a variety of perspectives on the course; therefore, I tried to include males and females, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, who were attending the course regularly. I invited two male students and two female students to participate. I made assumptions concerning their ethnicities based mainly upon their appearances and surnames in order to try to select two Aboriginal and two non-Aboriginal students. Bogden and Knopp Biklen (2003) advised, "If you cannot see everything and talk to everybody, you want to make sure that you sample widely enough so that a diversity of types are explored" (p. 61). I sent home letters of consent to their parents or guardians.

All four of the initially invited students readily agreed. Two of the female students returned signed forms, one of whom signed her own consent form because she was eighteen years of age and lived on her own. One of the male students told me repeatedly that he forgot his form, but he was still interested in participating in the study. I gave him another copy after he had lost the first, but he did not return this form signed; therefore, I decided not to ask him again since I believed his behaviour showed he did not want to participate. The other male student's attendance became less consistent, and he did not return the form.

I gave assent forms to the two female students to sign. I interviewed the two female participants in addition to the Native Studies teacher. One of the female participants failed to appear for her second interview on two occasions.

Because I did not have sufficient data for completing the study, I requested to participate in another course of Native Studies 10. Not only did I want a male voice, but I also wanted more students involved. In the second course, I continued to monitor student attendance since this was an issue during the first study. I also tried to get to know the students better so they would feel comfortable talking openly with me. I was concerned that some of the students had said yes to participate in the study when perhaps it was because they did not know how to say no to me. I did not want to place students in this position.

From the second course, I invited one female student and two male students to participate. All three returned signed forms. One of the male students who submitted the form did not return to class the following day or again throughout the semester. I interviewed the other two students. One student I interviewed twice. The other I interviewed only once because he did not complete the semester. At the time of this writing, he was working on completing the work necessary to gain his Native Studies 10 credit.

One of the challenges I had was meeting with students privately. I spoke to the individual students outside of the classroom so that the participants would remain anonymous to the teacher and therefore not feel pressured to participate in the study. This entailed many informal meetings in the hallways of the schools. I also did not want the students to feel uncomfortable talking to me in the hallways because it may not be conceived of as “cool.” I realized they would rather spend their break times socializing with friends than spending time talking with me, so this was an area I had to navigate cautiously in order to remain respectful to the participants.

Selecting participants for the interviews was difficult for a number of reasons. For example, some students agreed verbally but did not return signed forms, two of the participants stopped attending school during the study, one participant did not show up for her second interview on two occasions, and there were a limited number of other students to choose from. In both courses, I had selected students who I thought would be willing to share their ideas with me. They also had attended the course regularly to that date. In hindsight, it might have worked better if I would have extended invitations to all students to participate in the interviews. Those students interested could then take the consent letters home to their parents and guardians.

### *Interviews*

The purpose of the interview was to obtain information from the respondents, but in a manner that was not imposing or overbearing. This was necessary so that the researcher-participant relationship was respectful. I began each interview with informal conversation: “The purpose this chit-chat serves is to develop rapport: You search for common ground, for a topic that you have in common, for a place to begin building a relationship” (Bogden & Knopp Biklen, 2003, p. 95). I reviewed the goals of the study with each participant, as well as the rights of the research participant. I reminded each participant that his/her identity would remain unknown and that a pseudonym would be used in any written data.

It was my intention to interview each participant twice. The first interview of the four participants occurred near the beginning of their respective courses, and the second interview was to occur near the end of the courses. I interviewed the classroom teacher

first while he was teaching the first course and again when he was teaching the second course.

I began the interviews by asking open-ended questions (see Appendices F and G). I encouraged the participants to share because “the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogden & Knopp Biklen, 2003, p. 95). I used this time to learn from the participants and to reflect on what they were saying. I practised active listening by maintaining eye contact when appropriate, making verbal responses, and asking more questions when necessary.

I used a tape recorder to capture participants’ words. I ensured the tape recorder was working prior to each interview and shared with participants why this mode of recording data was helpful. I tried to ease the comfort levels of the participants before each interview although no one appeared to be nervous. I told each participant he/she could shut off the tape recorder at any time during the interview and he/she would have a chance to review and approve the transcripts.

I wondered how the students’ perceptions of me would affect the interviews. I identified myself as a Métis woman when I introduced myself to both courses of students. This may have influenced the participants to discuss more sensitively some of the issues around racism. I am also a teacher, although not in this context, and I wondered if this would affect the conversations we had. Sometimes I did not think it did. For example, when Jessica and I had a discussion in the hallway about her relationship with the teacher of a different course, she swore during the conversation.

This made me think that she did not see me as an authority figure, but perhaps she may use this type of language even with teachers.

I was concerned with the comfort level of the participants during the interview process and phrased my questions more informally in conversational style. The structures of the interviews were open-ended so that they were “flexible enough for the observer to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic” (Bogden & Knopp Biklen, 2003, p. 71). My goal was to have all the questions addressed, but I also wanted participants to shape the path of the interviews and to include information that was important to them. Through this process, I hoped to gather new insights that would not be explored if I rigidly adhered to pre-developed questions. Bogden and Knopp Biklen (2003) suggested this conversation technique:

Since interviewers in this type of research are interested in how people think about their lives, their experiences, and particular situations, they model their interviews after a conversation between two trusting parties rather than on a formal question-and-answer session between a researcher and a respondent. It is only in this manner that they can capture what is important in the minds of the subjects themselves. (p. 35)

As a new researcher in the field of qualitative studies, I had prepared a number of questions to guide me that potentially elicited more information than closed or “yes/no” answers (see Appendix F). For the two participants that I did interview twice and the teacher, I had an opportunity to transcribe the data from the first interviews, determine themes, and explore further questions that arose from the data.

To complement the interviews, I also kept field notes to support my data. After I interviewed each participant, I recorded anything I believed to be important and an overall sense of how the interview went, which may not be apparent when reading the transcripts alone. The transcripts did not share observations such as the participant's tone, which may have communicated emotions like hesitation, excitement, or sarcasm.

### Data Management and Analysis

Bogden and Knopp Biklen (2003) suggested analysis be an ongoing task for the researcher during data collection, but for the novice researcher the majority of analysis should be left until the data have been collected. After all the data were collected, I read the interview transcripts, field notes, and my personal reflections. I recorded a list of coding categories I could use for each sentence or paragraph of the data. These categories were a result of "certain words, phrases, patterns of behavior, subjects' ways of thinking and events" (p. 161) that reoccurred in relation to my research focus or stood out. I reread the data again determining if I had thought of all the possible codes for the data.

From this long list of codes, I generated a list of themes into which the codes could fit by organizing the codes into various categories. After developing the list of themes, I then assigned a theme to the units of data by reading the notes again and recording the theme beside the sentence or group of sentences. I was aware that one sentence of data may relate to more than one theme, and I recorded these. In this manner, I organized the research data. Bogden and Knopp Biklen (2003) stated that, "Theory developed this way emerges from the bottom up (rather than from the top

down), from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected. The theory is grounded in the data” (p.6).

I employed more observations and interviews for gathering data during the research process. I also had different viewpoints from which to draw my analysis. The different viewpoints included those of the student participants’, the teacher’s, and my own as an observer. From this process, I gathered some of the reasons why these students chose to take Native Studies and ideas as to how the course influenced student attitudes, knowledge, and understandings.

### Developing Trust

In order to work effectively with the participants, I had to gain their trust. I discussed with the teacher the observation role I would have within the classroom and answered any questions he had concerning my research. I stayed in the observer role for the majority of the first course, because it was in this way that I could pay most attention to what was occurring overall. I often sat in a desk at the back of the classroom where I could see all the students and the teacher. As an observer in the classroom setting, I tried to participate in such a way that did not disrupt the normal flow of the classroom.

During the second semester, I took a more active role in the classroom. Sometimes I would walk around the class and help students during their assignments. Once I led a group discussion. I was mindful that Bogden & Knopp Biklen (2003) advised researchers to be cautious of becoming too involved because that involvement might interfere with the collection of data. They suggested researchers need to keep the primary task of data collection in mind, although they may interact with participants in

diverse ways. The teacher and I had discussed the level of interaction that I would have within the classroom. I wanted to be present more often during the second semester because of the difficulties I had with data collection in the first semester. I thought that by being there more frequently, I would know what students were attending the course regularly. I also wanted students to be more comfortable participating in the study because they knew me better or saying no, if they were not interested.

I was allocated some time to introduce myself to the classes at the beginning of each course and to talk a little about my role in the classroom and the research I was conducting. One day, near the end of the second semester, one student asked, "Do you have to be here?" I talked to the students a little more again about why I was there and provided information regarding a Masters degree. The first time I had mentioned it, there was little interest, but after the students came to know me better, they seemed more interested in what I was doing in the classroom.

Because of my work as an instructor with the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program, I was apprehensive that my presence in the classroom might cause the teacher to feel that I was evaluating his teaching methods. I did not sense this though. The teacher has many years of teaching experience in addition to a graduate degree; he was very welcoming and confident. I also did not want to appear as an expert in curriculum related to Native Studies. Instead, my role was to learn from the participants. The teacher and I learned from one another. On a few occasions, we discussed areas of teaching Native Studies in which we both did not feel as confident. We also shared ideas about curriculum resources.

I sent letters to the parents/guardians of the students so they were aware of the study. In these letters, I asked them to give consent for the youth to participate in the study. The participants were advised of their rights on more than one occasion. I clearly explained the consent forms and the transcript release forms I gave them. I shared with the participants that they would have a chance to review their transcripts and make any changes if necessary. Because of the possible lack of anonymity for the classroom teacher, I also stated that he would have a chance to review my interpretation of the interviews. Bogden and Knopp Biklen (2003) emphasized, "Researchers build trust by making it clear that they will not use what they are finding to demean or otherwise hurt people" (p. 73).

Although there were some challenges involved in meeting with participants in this study, I feel very fortunate to have worked with the individuals I did as I continued to wonder how others respond to the teaching of Native Studies.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTING THE DATA

### Gaining Entry

I contacted the classroom teacher, Mr. David, near the beginning of the school year to see if I could commence the study. He invited me to meet the students and gave me directions to find the classroom. I went a little early and walked around the hallways until it was time to go to the classroom. The school is a rather large building. Despite all the time I spent there during my study, I realized I saw only a portion of the school and only a portion of the activities that occur there.

As I orientated myself to the school on the first day, I walked up and down the hallways reading the bulletin boards and looking at photos of students involved in different activities. A small canteen and dining area for the students was off the main hallway. There was also a wonderfully open library with many big tables and chairs. Although the school building did not appear that different from many of the other schools I have visited, there were various innovative programs organized to meet the students' needs. A group of adults were taking a tour of the school while I was conducting my exploration; I thought they were there because they were interested in the programs this school offers to support youth, many of whom may not have experienced success in other high schools.

I entered the classroom at break. The teacher and I discussed the upcoming lesson, and I offered to help prepare the classroom. The desks were organized into rows,

but because the pending lesson involved group work, we changed the seats around. One student sat in the classroom quietly throughout the break.

The classroom was large, square, and typical of a high school classroom. There were binders open on student desks and papers stacked for the teacher to review. The teacher's desk was at the back of the room. There were textbooks organized in the lower shelves along the wall and dusty chalkboards on two sides of the room. There were windows located at the rear. The view from the windows was merely of another part of the school. There were coloured and labelled maps of Canada stacked on a filing cabinet at the back of the room. What could be considered unique to the room were the dreamcatchers on the wall, the pictures that incorporated Aboriginal themes, and a high shelf that held a small model of a long house and a woven basket. There were also *National Aboriginal Role Model* posters on the walls. The teacher talked with me about his desire to have this room designed and decorated to reflect the content taught within. He has taught Native Studies 10, 20, and 30 in this room.

The students came in after the bell rang. They asked why the desks were turned around, apparently not accustomed to innovation. Some went to sit in the new groups of desks; some decided to sit in the rows lining the outer walls of the classroom. There were fourteen students in the class during my first visit - seven girls and seven boys. I introduced myself to the students. I told them where I was from, where I had taught, what I was presently teaching, and why I was interested in visiting their classroom. The teacher asked the students to share something with me about what they had learned in the Native Studies course to that point. I enjoyed my first day within the classroom and all the times I visited after that date.

## The Participants

In the following section, I present data collected from the four students and the classroom teacher who I had the privilege to work with during my study. All participant names are pseudonyms.

### *Maria*

I noticed Maria right away because she was always in the classroom before class and during break. She would usually continue with her studies or her reading during these times and did not speak a lot to the teacher, other students, or to me. I wondered what she was thinking, as she rarely said anything during class. I thought that because Maria was frequently in the class and had all of her assignments completed, she would be an informative participant. I therefore asked to her to participate. She readily agreed. I gave her forms to take home and asked to meet her the following day.

The next day when I asked Maria if she had her consent forms signed, she said no because she lived on her own and had no one to sign the forms. When I inquired about her age, she said she was eighteen and had recently moved to the city, where she was living with a cousin. Maria had attended school in her Saskatchewan First Nation community prior to moving to the city one month earlier. She was completing two courses, Native Studies 10 and Art 30, and then she would have her Grade 12 diploma. Maria's goal was to attend university. Maria had already taken Native Studies 20 and Native Studies 30 in her home community. She chose to take Native Studies 10 at this school because it was familiar to her. Maria remarked, "Because I am more used to it, like I haven't taken other classes, just Native Studies." The school in her home community did not offer other options in the social sciences area.

When reflecting on the content of Native Studies, Maria did not recall Aboriginal content being taught in any of her courses other than Native Studies. Although she had taken a Cree class, she mentioned, "All we did was do Cree syllabics and things like that." When I inquired about content that may have been included in the school environment outside of the Native Studies courses, Maria recalled guests being invited to the school in her home community. On one occasion, someone came to the school to build a canoe, and the students could help the builder. On another occasion, someone came into the school to make snowshoes.

Maria shared within her earlier courses she had gained an understanding of treaties, reserves, and the land. The Native Studies 10 content did not seem too different. A few things she learned were not the same. For instance, the students watched a video in one class that contained information about the genocide of Indigenous people. Maria shared, "I have really learned a lot of stuff that I never knew before from that video." She referred to the fact that she was surprised to learn, "A couple of Indian tribes had been completely wiped out, I never knew about that." This was information Maria shared with her cousin after class at home. Maria also mentioned they did more work with maps in the Native Studies 10 compared to the other Native Studies courses she had taken.

Maria would like to learn more about Aboriginal cultural traditions. She mentioned, "I really don't know about the Sun Dance or smudging or anything like that." As each of the students was required to do an individual research project, Maria chose to do her project on the sweat lodge. She had never participated in one, but she researched it via the Internet. Through other students' projects, she learned a little more

about the Medicine Wheel and about smudging. Maria felt that spirituality should be part of a Native Studies course and speculated that her classmates might be interested in learning more about this as well.

Maria thought the course was beneficial in terms of learning Aboriginal content because others “learn how it was a long time ago and how sometimes we were treated.” She shared that others “learn about how we used to get everything taken away from us.” She said racism was still a problem in our society “for some people” and that the course had the potential to reduce racism. Even though she believed the course had these benefits, Maria commented that the course should be optional because “it would be good to learn history or social too.” She suggested it would be beneficial for students to take Native Studies and social studies so they can “learn from each class.”

Maria did not volunteer extra information during the first interview. I thought she might during the second interview, but this was not the case. In the classroom, although she enjoyed listening to other students talk about their projects, she chose not to talk. She preferred to work alone, finding the course work easy and keeping up to date on assignments.

Maria did not appear to be particularly interested in the content of the course. I think the knowledge may not have been new in many areas or she was mainly concerned with completing her final two credits and getting into university. She mentioned having more interest in courses that involved art and computers. One of the things she liked to do in her spare time was “going on the computer and just like searching for different things.” She shared that she did not react emotionally to any of the course material and agreed with what her classmates talked about during class.

I had an opportunity to talk a little with Maria about university and the possible supports available on campuses. Maria is a responsible and independent student as was evident during the time that I worked with her.

### *Carla*

Carla often sat in the front of the class and tended to work alone. I noted immediately that she had good attendance and seemed to work on her assignments. I was unsure of her ethnicity, and at first, I did not know if she was or was not an Aboriginal student. During the interview, I had a chance to ask her about her ethnicity. She shared that her stepfather was Métis, but other than him, there was no one Aboriginal within her family.

Carla was quiet in the classroom. While I was in the room, she did not ask many questions or contribute to the class discussions. Carla did not interact much with many of the other students in the classroom. Outside of class however, I often noticed her visiting with other students. Carla was usually at school early and remained over the noon hour. She readily agreed to participate in the study.

Carla had lived in a few different small towns in Canada before moving to this community. She had some difficulty finding a place to live, and this had postponed her return to high school. She told me at the beginning of the interview that she “did not like to live on the street”, which I needed to clarify to ensure that I had heard the correct information. I became very aware of my privileged life and admired the courage she had to return to school. At the time of the study, she was living with a relative and completing some junior level courses in addition to taking the Native Studies 10 course.

Carla liked to do what could be considered typical teenager activities such as watching TV and listening to CDs.

When Carla reflected on her earlier education, she did not recall Aboriginal content being taught in the schools she attended or Aboriginal people living in the communities where she had lived. She enjoyed the learning she was doing within the course because it was a change: “different than learning about people like us, like non-Aboriginal people.” She commented that she “never really knew anything about Aboriginal history and everything. So it’s all new to me, and I enjoyed it. I like learning about new things instead of the same things over and over.”

The reason she offered for choosing to take Native Studies 10 was, “I heard it was a pretty easy class, and I am not good at social studies..., so I figured I would check it out and see if it was any better than social studies, like original social studies.” Carla said she did not know many students at the school. The people Carla did know did not take the Native Studies course.

Carla felt the course was easy and she was learning new content, but nothing that came as a surprise to her. Some of the things she mentioned learning about included, “the Mi’kmaq and the Iroquois Confederacy and the movie, *500 Nations* movie. We are learning new stuff about different places.” Carla mentioned learning about some things that had occurred concerning Indigenous people outside of Saskatchewan: “some of it’s not just Canada, . . . the one that really, you know, interested me was the one in the Dominican.” She enjoyed the research project assignment, and she had decided to look into the Inuksuk. She also liked hearing other students talk about the projects they researched.

Carla mentioned, "I am not much for group work". She shared that she found it difficult to learn if other students talked frequently. Alternatively, she found that sometimes the people she worked with in groups understood the material and helped her understand it. She shared, "Some things are harder to get in your mind. Like some of it confuses me. So it is good that ... the teacher explains things, and makes it easier." She also stated that sometimes she would go home and think about all the new things that she had learned in class. Sometimes she would tell other people about what she had learned, but she explained, "Well, they are not as interested in it as I am because they don't take the class. So it is kind of harder to explain to them."

Carla believed that the course could improve understandings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. She described, "I think that non-Aboriginal people don't really understand them. So like this is a way that we can understand how they lived and what they went through."

Carla and I did not meet for her second interview. Twice we made arrangements, but Carla did not show up. She did not offer me any explanations regarding those missed appointments, and I wanted to be respectful of her rights as a participant, so I did not pursue the matter. In the next semester, I noticed Carla outside the school. She was excited when I approached her. She shared that she just had been hired for a new job. When I asked if I could use the transcripts of our first interview, she took them home, read them over that night, and met me the next day with the transcript release form signed.

## *Jessica*

Jessica is hard working, friendly, and outspoken. She was new to this school and planned to attend another high school next semester. She grew up in this community but had lived elsewhere for a short period. She started her interview by sharing, “I grew up in the ghetto” which she later explained as, “where all like the shootings are and people getting jumped and the stabbing, and you have to be in like before dark.” There was a brief period that she lived in Alberta, but she preferred this community because it is more “exciting.” Jessica is a non-Aboriginal student and in Grade 10. Since she had good attendance and liked to talk about things, I invited her to participate in the study.

In her earlier education, Jessica did not recall the inclusion of Native Studies content within her courses. However, she did mention taking a course in Cree at one of her former schools. She decided to take Native Studies this semester because she felt it was a “better educational course” than the other option, which was an art course. She also shared, “I would like to learn about it.” She had not heard of Native Studies courses prior to attending this school, but after she started the course, she found out that one of her friends was taking the course at a different high school. The only conversation they had around the course was when Jessica asked her friend whether the course that she was taking was “easy”; her friend replied yes.

Jessica kept up with all her assignments. She had good attendance and felt she obtained good support at this school. She also attributed her success to her personal work habits; she mentioned, “I am motivated in school, and most people aren’t.” She preferred one-on-one learning to other types. She shared that she had a hard time concentrating and was easily distracted. She found it difficult to work if there were

other distractions in the classroom. She did not like to watch movies in class because they made her tired, but rather she liked to discuss things. Jessica was also working part-time during the time of this study.

One thing Jessica liked about the course is that it was an open place for discussion. She shared the class was a safe place to talk about things and discuss those things not talked about elsewhere. She gave the example that she can use the term “Indian” in the class whereas if she even said the word on the street, “people would be offended.” Jessica stated, “I like to hear about what other people have to say, and I like when people hear what I have to say.”

Jessica spoke often in class; she wanted to have more discussions and more people involved. She was not particularly in favour of having talking circles because she liked to debate things rather than solely listen to others’ opinions. At times, she felt as if she was under attack because of her “whiteness” and believed she had to defend a point of view by herself when the other non-Aboriginal students did not contribute to the discussions. She shared she did not disagree with what they had learned from the teacher in the course, “but what the people talk, yeah I disagree with a lot of it. With actually most of it.”

When I asked her whether she believed the course could decrease racism, she answered with some scepticism. She did not think racism could end because then everyone would have to think the same or have the same opinions. She declared, “There is like the Native against the white people. Like that’s almost how it is in [this town].” I was surprised by her view that it was the Aboriginal students within the class who held the racist views: “But it is just a lot of them think that because what happened way back

when, they think that it's like affecting, that is all bad right now, and it is not even." Although she believed that racism would not end, she felt that racism had decreased in our society.

Even though Jessica mentioned that racism could not end, she made some comments during the interviews that alluded to her own changes in attitude. For instance, she shared,

I can't quite explain it, but I used to think completely different on the way I look at like Aboriginal people. But now I don't because, I don't know. I kind of don't really talk about it to Aboriginal people about things ... we do in class.

Another time she mentioned that it was whites against the Native in this town, and she said, "Like I used to be like that, and then I started making friends with a lot of Native people, and I started to understand them, and taking this class even made me understand even more."

Jessica felt that the Native Studies course was a positive experience and shared that she would possibly take another one in the future. She thought people should have the option of choosing Native Studies or social studies because "people shouldn't have to learn about things they don't want to. But I think people should recommend taking the class because it is a good class." She suggested there should be other courses besides Native Studies so people could learn about diverse cultures. She stated, "I would like to learn about my own culture and everything, and there is nowhere I can learn about it."

Jessica's perspectives on the course seemed to switch; at times, she would make statements that could be considered stereotypical, which were some of the myths that

the course attempted to address. For example, she stated, "They think so bad about the white man. Like we do so bad for them when actually it isn't. Like when they get so much; like white people don't really get anything." At other times she would reflect on how things had not been right for Aboriginal people in this country and how coming to this thinking was a change for her. She reflected, "I kind of understand on how it is because the way they were treated, and it never really came to me before, but when I hear them talk about it class, then I understand."

Jessica spoke frankly within the classroom and with me. She was enjoyable to work with, as she was open, outspoken, and honest. Sometimes these same qualities were difficult for the teachers to address while teaching because Jessica would need to be reminded to listen rather than talk. She completed the course successfully.

#### *Justin*

Although I had five male participants verbally agree to be in the study, only two of the male students returned signed permission forms. Justin was one of these students. Unfortunately, the other male student did not return to school for reasons unknown to me. I asked Justin to participate in the study because he appeared to enjoy the discussions within the class. At the beginning of the semester, he was attending the course regularly.

Justin had lived in some other communities prior to moving to this community. He has siblings and lives at home with his parents. In addition to his schooling, he works part-time. He has First Nations status and shared that his mother is First Nations too, but his father is of First Nations and European ancestry. In his spare time he enjoyed snowmobiling, sleeping, playing video games, and hanging out with friends.

Justin did not recall any Aboriginal content in his prior courses and shared that he first took a course in Native Studies in Grade 9. He had heard the course was fun and that it had a good teacher, so he decided to take it. Justin shared he “didn’t like social studies much” because “it is too much thinking. I don’t like to think much.” He felt that Native Studies was less thinking, and more based on giving opinions on issues. This was one thing that he liked about the course and was a reason for recommending it for others: “It’s easy. Like it’s mostly your own opinions, and if you like to, I don’t know, express yourself, it should be pretty easy because you just write ... whatever comes to mind.” He decided to take Native Studies 10 at this school because he thought it was a good course at his previous school.

Some of the new things Justin was learning included knowledge about “the treaties, like how those were set, stuff like that. And the *Indian Act*, I never knew nothing about that, like how I got my treaty status and stuff like that. That is pretty interesting.” He did not discuss any of the things he has learned with his family members or friends because “school is just not really that exciting to talk about.”

Justin believed the course had the potential to decrease racism. He mentioned, “Most people just go on what they hear, and like what’s been going around forever is that we’re savages, so they are going to go by that and not have any background on that, but once they do realize we did have a civilized colony and stuff like that, maybe they will treat us a little different.”

Justin probably chose the word “colony” because he had heard the term used within the course. Justin also mentioned that he did not agree with the way the First Nations

people were treated by the government: "Like how we were treated, I really don't agree with that. Like we meant to share the land, not get it taken over by this Queen."

Justin felt the content they were learning at the present time was "keeping him thinking", and he did not have any thoughts about what he would like to learn beyond the content they had covered. He stated that although he felt angry with some of the racist behaviours shown in the video *For Angela*, he did not react emotionally to a lot of the course material: "That movie where the little girl cut off her braids because of them kids, that made me kind of mad. Other than that, it is kind of relaxing. I don't really feel much". Justin did not watch the news frequently, but he did mention to me that there had been an Aboriginal conference occurring at his place of work the previous weekend; therefore, the course may have been affecting his awareness of current events.

Justin often contributed to class discussions, but he seemed to have more difficulty with completing the written assignments. He appeared frequently tired in class. His attendance decreased near the end of the semester; therefore, we did not get to the second interview. The teacher and Justin continued to work together after the semester was over in order for Justin to complete the course requirements for Native Studies 10. I do not know if he completed the course.

*The Teacher: Mr. David*

Mr. David began to teach the subject of Native Studies while working at a different high school that decided to offer Native Studies 20 in the 1990s. He accepted the teaching responsibility "because he had the most interest." Mr. David is of non-Aboriginal ancestry and is from this community, although he had also lived in another province for a period of time. When he began to teach Native Studies 20, he mentioned

that he “found out, often as you do when you go to teach something, that you know far less than you thought you did.” Mr. David did not recall any Aboriginal content included in his own schooling. He shared that he had some awareness prior to teaching the first course because of his interest in history.

Mr. David has now taught Native Studies 10, 20, and 30. He has also completed a Masters degree since teaching that first course of Native Studies 10. He has applied some of the content he learned from his graduate degree in his present teaching: “So right here in my classroom, most of my students are from Saskatchewan, but I like to tie in how colonialism has functioned not only in Canada, but also across the United States and outside of North America.” Mr. David pointed out that despite limitations in some areas of Native Studies content, he can offer a different point of view because of his increased understandings of colonialism within our society. He said,

I feel I can explain to them why these things have happened the way they have. And so I would say maybe my best strength is ... I know white people really well, and I know this is how this came about.

Although Mr. David’s education background is in history, this did not prepare him to teach all aspects of the course. He found his “biggest weakness actually would be those things specific to their world, like in Saskatchewan.” He mentioned that he knew “very little about the present cultural occurrences on reserves or what it meant to be an Aboriginal person in Canadian society at the present time.” He found some of the things that occur in the students’ personal lives the most difficult to address: “you know, no matter how many books you read, you don’t, I don’t have that kind of knowledge.” He also reported difficulties pronouncing some Aboriginal place names or

other words. He commented during the first interview that he would like to take a course in Cree and that “the kids would really appreciate that.” By the time of our second interview, Mr. David had begun his Cree course.

Mr. David was very concerned about the self-concepts of the students he taught. He found this to be one of the challenges of teaching Native Studies to Aboriginal students. He talked about the way he would like to examine colonialism if he was teaching non-Aboriginal students. Mr. David shared,

I think it would be in some ways easier for me if I was at a white middle class school only because then you would kind of be the expert, and you could really kind of rattle their cages concerning ... colonial activity.

He commented, “But when you have Aboriginal children in your classroom, you can’t be so glib because they are still experiencing it in many ways.” He mentioned they have experienced “colonialism their whole lives and their parents and their grandparents did, so it is in their lives, you can’t just sort of skim over, you can’t just sort of throw it out casually.” This also relates to his teaching about residential schools. He reflected he is more cautious within his teaching because the residential schools were a reality for family members of Aboriginal students. He still discusses these areas, but he does so cautiously because talking about the effects of colonialism are different experiences for the people who have experienced colonialism.

Mr. David shared there were some passionate discussions that occurred in classes around the topic of the residential schools and in relation to the death of Neil

Stonechild<sup>4</sup>. Some of these discussions have been quite powerful. He felt that in a white middle class school the content of the discussions would be “shocking” or “controversial” because of what students have told him about their experiences with racism and with the police. He also observed that the students open up when discussing the history of residential schools. He thinks this is an area that interests all students:

For non-Aboriginal students it is an easy way to demonstrate to them ... how the history worked, because again, non-Aboriginal students might wonder, well you know they express it, they really don't understand what the issue is. You know, why the past isn't left in the past, so again it is a very easy thing to explain and recognize that this was a gross injustice.

Mr. David teaches history courses in addition to Native Studies. Mr. David identified two reasons why he thinks that students chose to take Native Studies 10:

I think interest is number one, but a close second, and for some it would be the first reason, they want to get away from history. I think especially non-Aboriginal students, hoping they are going to learn differently and something different than history. As with many adolescents, history is painful experience.

In addition, he stated, “I think they often look at Native Studies as a hopefully interesting alternative to traditional chronological year after year history with a lot of memorization of dates and those types of things.”

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Stonechild, a seventeen year old Aboriginal youth, was found dead due to cold exposure near Saskatoon, SK in November 1990. His friend, Jason Roy, last saw Stonechild alive in the custody of the Saskatoon Police Service. An inquiry into Neil Stonechild's death was held in 2003.

Mr David thought students might find more relevance in a Native Studies course because it is not meant to be a course that focuses solely on the history. Rather, “everything you look at, even when you look at the past, or things like the Royal Proclamation and the treaties, it is always designed... to explain present situations.” He also shared:

I mean whether you are Aboriginal, you are aware of the fact that you are in a white society, and if you are white, you are aware of the fact the Aboriginal population is changing the white society. I think it has relevancy that European history just doesn't have for students.

Mr. David believed there were some advantages to having Native Studies taught as a separate course. For one, knowing that the material would be covered; “whereas under the heading of integration, if you said we are going to take the present course in history and just make one course, I think you are going to run the risk of it not being covered.” Because of his background in social sciences, he would like to see increased teaching of social science subjects; therefore, a mandatory Native Studies class for graduation would be acceptable. He also thought history and Native Studies could be integrated, and ideally would be, but the course should be taught for double the amount of time so that a proper integration would be possible.

Mr. David believed the course is able to combat racism if the students are willing to listen. He shared he gets less resistance in the Native Studies course because:

At this school the majority of the students are Aboriginal, so I think that just partly out of discretion, they [non-Aboriginal students] are not going to voice

that much opposition, and then partly because they are taking the class that they are more willing to listen to those ideas.

One of the factors that Mr. David believed would improve the teaching of Native Studies included increased support for teaching training, but more than just one-day type of workshops. He suggested teachers who are interested in teaching the course could be sent to university for a year to take Native Studies courses. He further suggested that there should be increased Aboriginal teachers teaching the course; although, Mr. David does not believe that Aboriginal teachers should be allocated to teach Native Studies unless they have an interest. He mentioned that Aboriginal teachers could have other teaching interests or teaching areas and putting them in the Native Studies class could be a type of racism in itself. Mr. David would like to “work with an elder – all the time” or else have access to community representatives. He also mentioned previously participating in building in a sweat with his students and thought that this would be something he would like to do each semester if he had the assistance.

The interviews with Mr. David were very informative. He was confident in the classroom. Obviously, he had considered issues around the teaching of Native Studies prior to our discussions.

### Classroom Environment

Over the duration of the study, I had an opportunity to be present in the Native Studies classroom on numerous occasions. The more that I frequented the school, the more I had an opportunity to see how the course was conducted and obtain a sense of the nature of the students as well.

Mr. David stated that things are more relaxed in his classroom. He shared, “you sort of roll the sleeves up a little more and kind of relax, not like normal formalities, at least not here, not in my room anyway.” He used humour to make connections with the students and would sometimes make little jokes to start the class. On the first day of the semester, he memorized the students’ names, which the students found amusing. I also noted that he did not take attendance first thing in the morning as quite often the students came in late. If a student came in who had missed a number of classes, Mr. David sincerely welcomed the student and said it was good to see him or her.

I did not witness any formal statements of rules. Some students would bring things to eat into the classroom and eat or drink at their desks; however, the students requested permission to leave the classroom if they wanted to go to the washroom or make phone calls. Unless there was a lesson occurring, the classroom was quiet. The students were quiet during class time. They acted quite different from my own reflections of high school. I remember trying to visit as much as possible in Grade 10. These students did not engage in conversation with one another that much. Perhaps this was because many did not know each other well. The teacher shared that the students in this school were more transient, even being from different parts of the province.

Mr. David answered all of the students’ questions and did not suggest that any of the students’ questions were trivial. He referred to the fact that many of the students were not strong academically: “This school is different. You know our students generally aren’t strong students. They haven’t been successful in other high schools.” There were also a student teacher and a support person for one of the students involved in the classroom for part of a semester during the course of my study. Since at times

there were three adults present in the room, plus me, the students received ample support for their studies.

The students were involved in a variety of learning activities. Mr. David had the students write reflections in journals that he would read privately. The students also responded to current events from the newspaper in a separate book. The students did one or two research projects during the semester and were encouraged to present their findings in a variety of ways. They participated in some group work. During the second semester, the students went on a field trip, but I did not go along. There were also many opportunities for discussions. On one occasion, the student teacher shared with the class, "This is a safe place to talk about these things." Jessica enjoyed sharing: "You could give your opinion and no one will say anything about it. Like everyone agrees with you, you know what I mean? And people like listen, and I think it is a good class."

The student teacher incorporated talking circles into the course on two occasions. He invited me to participate in the circle on both occasions. It took some effort to get the first circle going. The students moved their desks into circular formation. Rather than taking turns talking, some students wanted to raise their hands and share. A few students dominated the conversation and some said very little. More students contributed to the discussion after some stereotypical statements about First Nations people were mentioned. When the students left for the day, some were laughing and talking. No one appeared angry or upset.

The second time the student teacher suggested the talking circle, the student moved their desks quickly into formation. This time they were more familiar with the format. They talked about a variety of issues around race and racism. When I

interviewed Jessica, she mentioned, "I think we need to have that circle more, that thing, where everyone talks." However, she thought it would be better idea if people raised their hands when they wanted to contribute rather than take turns going around the circle.

Mr. David incorporated videos into the coursework as well. During the first semester, he showed portions of the video *500 Nations* although it was not included within the curriculum because,

I sense the students truly are interested in that, because they don't know that either. They don't know much more than a non-Aboriginal kid. They may have got a bit from movies and Pocahontas and a few things like that. And it deals with who was Columbus? And we just looked at something yesterday, who was Pontiac? So I am using that because in the curriculum guide it talks about leadership and the strength that people were, but I throw it in because it is only half an hour, and I think they just don't know what happened.

Sometimes students asked to watch certain movies during the course. For instance, the students asked to watch *Pocahontas*. Mr. David accommodated the students and turned this into a learning activity by presenting some historical data about her life. Later the students were asked to look at the inaccuracies presented in the film. Mr. David asked students, "How does this film function as an aspect of colonialism?" He said some students found this a difficult concept.

The students also watched videos about the residential schools. I observed the classroom while the students were watching the video *Where the Spirit Lives*. On this day, the students focused intently on the video. At the end of the class, one young girl

who was Aboriginal stated, "Why would you have children if you knew they were going to be taken away from you?" The students then left for break. Quite often, the students would say things aloud while watching the movies. They were not speaking to anyone in particular but rather sharing their thoughts. I found this helpful to gain insights into how they felt about the movies.

I truly enjoyed being in the classroom and interacting with the students, the teacher, the student teacher, and the support personnel. As many qualitative researchers have probably experienced, I felt sad to leave the research setting when the data collection was complete.

## CHAPTER FIVE: EMERGING THEMES AND ANALYSIS

The students in the Native Studies 10 classroom are learning a different view of history that I did not learn until I attended university. I did not have the opportunity to take Native Studies in Grade 10. If I had had the chance, I do not know if I would have elected to take a course where my heritage and issues related to Aboriginal peoples would be discussed. I did not like when we talked about racism in class. Naturally, some of the questions I wanted answered in this research was why the participants elected to take Native Studies 10 instead of History 10 or Social Studies 10, if the course contributed to increased understandings and knowledge, how the participants reacted to learning Aboriginal content and perspectives, and what supports are necessary to teach the course well.

### Native Studies versus Social Studies or History

#### *Reasons for Electing Native Studies*

Students in Grade 10 have the option of taking Native Studies 10, Social Studies 10, or History 10. The high school in which I conducted my research offered Native Studies 10 and History 10. The students chose to take the Native Studies course for various reasons. Maria had taken Native Studies 20 and 30 prior to moving to the city. She mentioned there were no other options in her former high school that was in a First Nations community. Maria shared that she chose to take this course at this high school

because she was “more used to it.” The other three students chose to take Native Studies for different reasons.

Justin took Native Studies 10 because at the school he had previously attended, he had heard the teacher of the course was “fun” and the course was “easy.” He mentioned that he chose Native Studies “because I don’t like to think too much”. He thought Native Studies “is more of your opinions.” Carla also heard that “it was a pretty easy class.” She wanted to see “if it was any better than social studies.” On the other hand, Jessica chose this course as opposed to an art course “because it was a better educational course” and she “would like to learn about it.” Jessica had not heard of Native Studies courses prior to attending this school.

When I asked Mr. David why he thought students chose Native Studies, he felt that it was a combination of interest and a means of avoiding history. He commented, “I think they often look at Native Studies as a hopefully interesting alternative to traditional chronological year after year history with a lot of memorization, data, dates, and those types of things.” Mr. David believed students were looking for something different from traditional social studies or rote memory history courses. Justin and Carla both provided evidence for this speculation. Justin shared that he did not like social studies and Carla stated that she was “not good at social studies.”

I interpreted the students used the term “easy” to mean the course was not difficult academically, in that the students would pass if they participated and attended. For example, Justin shared that the course was easy if students liked to express themselves. Perhaps I would have received a different answer if I asked the students what they meant by the term “easy.”

Although there are various reasons why students elect to take Native Studies 10, there are some disadvantages of having the course perceived as “easy” or teaching the course as “easy.” If the perception of Native Studies is that it is easier than social studies or history, it immediately lowers the expectations of teachers and students. Students who are concerned with getting the best education may opt for other courses in which they will be challenged academically. Non-Aboriginal students could potentially view ethnic-specific courses as easy, which could foster views that support racism and have the potential to marginalize Aboriginal people even more. Some people contend that Aboriginal people already get everything free; course credits should not be added to the list. This viewpoint is reinforced when McMahon (2003) commented, “Students who are members of groups toward whom these courses are targeted are seen as being pandered to while earning easy credits” (p. 263).

Making the course less academically challenging for students does not serve their academic interests. Students need to develop their skills in order to complete further education successfully. Garcia (1987) and Nieto (2004) have identified lowered expectations of certain groups as another form of racism. In my visits, most of the students enrolled in the Native Studies 10 courses were of Aboriginal ancestry. Making courses, including Native Studies, less challenging will not solve the issues of high drop out rates for Aboriginal youth.

However, the Native Studies 10 course may not necessarily be easier than social studies or history, but it may be perceived to be because it is new information or it is a different approach to learning in the social sciences. For example, Carla mentioned, “I

would say it is a pretty easy class. It is fun. I like learning about Aboriginal people. It is different.”

The information in a Native Studies course might be more relevant or contemporary for students because it provides an Aboriginal perspective that they may not have encountered in previous schooling. The content challenges prevailing myths that abound today. The content may also be valuable to Aboriginal students because it positively affects their self-concepts (Tuharksy, 1999). In addition, the course creates opportunities for students to be “agents of change” in dealing with racism (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002a, p. 79). Mr. David alluded to the possible relevance of the course when he shared,

Whether you are Aboriginal, you are aware of the fact that you are in a white society, and if you are white, you are aware of the fact the Aboriginal population is changing the white society, so I think it has a relevancy that European history just doesn't have for students.

He also pointed out that students might see history as “very boring” and “very difficult to understand.” This might entice students to choose a different course, which might not be easier but different. If students perceive history as difficult because of the need for memorization, the possible lack of memorization in a Native Studies course could be viewed as “easy.” However, the Native Studies course demands critical thoughts and justification for beliefs, neither of which is “easy.”

Of the four students, I know three successfully passed the course. The three students who completed the course all attended school regularly. One of the students mentioned she had not had any homework because she got her work done in class. The

other two shared they were keeping up with their assignments. The fourth participant had some difficulties completing written work although he participated in many class discussions.

Because the course was described as easy, it did not mean the students were guaranteed a credit. Unfortunately, there were a number of students who did not complete the course for various reasons. There were a number of assignments students needed to complete in addition to the final exam. I had an opportunity to view the final exam in the second semester. It was composed of four long answer questions that required application of what they had learned during the semester. The questions were of higher-level thinking. I also looked at the marks for the students in this course and realized though participants had described the course to be “easy,” only one student had an “A” going into the exam.

Although I did not have access to overall marks for Native Studies 10 students throughout the province, I could compare the marks at the 30 levels for Native Studies, social studies and history for the June 2002 reporting period. The average of the marks for Native Studies was lower than the averages for both social studies and history (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002b). This could be attributed to a couple of reasons: the course requirements are not as easy as students expect or students who are not strong academically are the students choosing to take Native Studies 30. Of the four students I interviewed for this study, three attended school on a regular basis and worked on their studies. They may not have found the workload difficult because of their organizational skills; on the other hand, other students might have felt overwhelmed by the work if they did not attend the course as regularly.

In the two follow up interviews with student participants, I asked whether the course should be mandatory. When I asked Maria if she thought a Native Studies course should be mandatory at the high school level, she said it should be optional because the content in history or social studies courses was important to learn as well. For the most part, students have been learning the approaches or perspectives of social studies courses throughout their entire schooling; it is the content and perspectives of Native Studies courses that remains optional. Jessica also believed the course should be optional because “people shouldn’t have to learn things they don’t want to.” Students have few choices in what they learn during their K-12 education, so it is interesting that Jessica perceived Native Studies 10 content as discretionary. Her answer also alluded to some of the potential resistance students might feel towards having a mandatory Native Studies course for high school graduation.

If a Native Studies course was mandatory for graduation from high school, there could be negative views towards taking the course. Mr. David mentioned that he encountered less resentment from students towards the incorporation and discussion of Aboriginal content in the Native Studies course because “they chose the class.” He also incorporated Aboriginal content in the history courses he taught. This potential resentment could negatively affect the learning that occurs in a Native Studies course. Schick and St. Denis (2003) noticed resistance from students to a mandatory cross-cultural education course that incorporated First Nations content because the students did not have the option of taking the course. They mentioned there were other compulsory courses students had to take to complete their degrees that did not garner the same reaction. Students in high school may react the same way.

At present, Native Studies courses are not offered in all Saskatchewan high schools. To suggest a course in Native Studies be mandatory for high school graduation would require ensuring that there were teachers prepared in each high school to implement the course effectively. They also would need to be prepared to deal with potential student resistance. Until teachers are well prepared, I would not suggest making a Native Studies course mandatory because the positive benefits of the course may not be realized for students in this setting. Again, some voices may be marginalized. School divisions should provide additional supports in order to prepare teachers to deliver Native Studies courses in their schools.

*Should the Course be Integrated?*

An alternative to having students choose between the Native Studies and social studies courses would be to rewrite the current social science courses to be more inclusive. Not only would this involve increased awareness of Aboriginal content and perspectives for all students, but also it could broaden the range of learning activities in the course. When I asked Jessica whether Native Studies and social studies should be integrated, she thought they should remain separate in order not to create confusion. Maria, also, thought that the Native Studies course should remain separate. Jessica and Maria have most likely not thought about the social construction of curriculum. They have not realized that there are people who make choices about what is taught and what is not taught. Therefore, it would be difficult for them to imagine a change to the entire curriculum. Many people would probably have difficulties conceiving this change. Change requires vision, support, commitment, and time.

Mr. David reflected that ideally, the history of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada would be included within Canadian history rather than taught as a separate course, but he mentioned that until this could be done properly, having a separate course would be preferable. He shared,

I think right now the advantage of having it as a separate course is that it is going to be dealt with in those separate courses, there is no way of it not. Whereas under the heading of integration, if you said we are going to take the present course in history and just make one course, I think you are going to run the risk of it not being covered.

Mr. David mentioned concerns that teachers might not cover the content in-depth because they do not have the necessary knowledge or the necessary interest. He also suggested the course could be taught for double the length of time so there would be time to cover all the material.

For a proper integration into social science curricula, many teachers would need to increase their awareness of issues related to Aboriginal peoples. Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment (1995) has recognized the importance of including Aboriginal content into core curricula since the late 1980s; however, some teachers find this inclusion difficult to actualize. Longman (2005) shared some of the barriers that teachers identified that inhibit integration of Aboriginal content into school curricula including lack of time, materials, community resources, and knowledge (p. 17). Longman shared that “despite the progress made in education, particularly in Aboriginal education, misconceptions continue to exist and may hinder the actualization of the vision for Saskatchewan educators” (p. 3). Longman stated that teachers saw the

integration of Aboriginal content as an “additional teaching responsibility” (p. 3). Teachers need professional development support if they are to learn to integrate Aboriginal content more effectively.

Thomas (2005) also found Saskatchewan teachers required more time and support to implement Aboriginal content into core curricula. Although Thomas found that teachers thought this to be an important initiative, they often believed they did not have the supports necessary to feel confident with the implementation. Therefore, the integration was not done to the extent it should have been. Thomas made numerous recommendations to increase the support that teachers have in integrating Aboriginal content. For instance, she shared that Aboriginal communities must collaborate with education systems in this endeavour and that Colleges of Education must properly prepare teachers to integrate Aboriginal content. She also stated there should be more awareness of protocols for approaching elders and awareness of resources and support people within Aboriginal communities in addition to increased professional development activities for teachers. These perceived barriers could extend to social science courses at the high school level that could lead to an ineffective integration if there were not the required supports available.

Farrell Racette and Racette (1992) asserted teachers of Native Studies “must have knowledge in the subject area and a desire to learn more” (p. 9). When Mr. David first began to teach Native Studies, he realized he needed to learn more. He has developed his awareness considerably through participating in university course work. He had not taken a course in Native Studies prior to teaching his first course. Many other social science instructors may not have a background in Native Studies or

connections to the Aboriginal community. If the course was not taught well, it could continue to marginalize Aboriginal voice and perspectives.

As well, since integration of course material would require a greater discussion of issues related to racism by students, teachers would need to have a greater awareness of racial development theories to support students. Tatum (2000) shared that discussions of race are often avoided in settings where there are diverse people represented. Unless teachers have an understanding of the processes of racial development theories, they might perceive some of the reactions students have towards course content as negative and try to avoid certain discussions. Teachers would need to be better prepared to facilitate discussions related to racism so these are not avoided.

The final report of the Minister's National Working Group on Education (2002) recommended that Canadians respect Indigenous Knowledge at all grade levels and in various curricula:

The integration of First Nations knowledge and wisdom into curricula and pedagogy in education systems, both in First Nations and provinces and territories, will provide First Nations learners with a positive learning environment and encourage student success. In addition, non-First Nations learners will have an opportunity to develop a more respectful and balanced view of Canadian history and culture, with a place for First Nations in it. (p. 18)

There is no reference made to making this recommendation within specific courses and to suggest that Native Studies courses would be the vehicle would be limiting and contrary to the report.

An issue to be addressed in terms of integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives would be how this integration was done. For instance, Farmer (2004) found the ways in which Aboriginal content was included in the Saskatchewan Learning History 30 curriculum guide did not respect Aboriginal cultures, history, and values. The curriculum and activity guides continued to marginalize Aboriginal views while the guides supported a “Euro-Canadian national identity which normalises and naturalises the dominant position of Euro-Canadians within the historical narrative of Canada’s development” (p. ii). The content of a Native Studies course may not be as effective if integrated into existing social studies or history courses because it might be compacted into course opening units or taught from a Euro-Canadian perspective.

If social science curricula at the high school level were rewritten to include Aboriginal history and perspectives respectively, all students would have access to this information. In order for this to occur, teachers would need to be prepared to teach the courses in ways that did not continue to perpetuate the present system of inequity where some voices are silenced and history is shared from a European perspective. At present, Native Studies courses may provide areas where the teachers are knowledgeable in the subject area and Aboriginal students have a place where their identities and values are affirmed and respected. For instance, Aboriginal students in a Native Studies 20 course were positively affected by the pedagogy of the teacher who incorporated traditional approaches to learning:

They had begun to see themselves as capable of taking positive action to change their own lives and others. They had begun to see themselves as ambassadors to

the rest of the world. This recrystallization of their view is perhaps the most striking or significant characteristic of their stories. (Tuharsky, 1999, p. 103)

Maintaining these positive transformational experiences for students who have had their histories marginalized is very important.

Although Aboriginal content is to be included within all Saskatchewan Learning curricula (Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, 1995) this is still not being actualized as evident by the responses of the four students and the teacher. During one of the classes of Native Studies 10 that I witnessed, Mr. David had asked students if things have improved in terms of Aboriginal education. One of the students replied “no” and other than the addition of Native Studies courses, things have remained the same. This answer supported McMahon’s claim that the creation of these type of courses allows schools to “claim to be responding to criticisms without integrating all peoples’ histories into mainstream, compulsory curriculum” (p. 263). I thought the student’s answer was interesting and would have liked to know what other students thought. Unfortunately, as often happens during classroom discussions, the topic then changed.

### Combating Racism

When I asked Mr. David what he thought the goals of Native Studies courses were he discussed his personal aims that included:

First, it would be to increase the knowledge for non-Aboriginal students of Aboriginal history, Aboriginal perspective, Aboriginal people both in the past and the present.... The second one would be to, as a result of the first one, is to have a good understanding or a greater appreciation of all of those things with

the intention I guess of obviously combating racism, making society function on a better level. Then the third and fourth I guess are sort of a bit more from the Aboriginal perspective, trying to give Aboriginal students an opportunity to see that their culture,... their values,... who they are, and their history is respected.

It is interesting to note that although a misconception is that Native Studies is for Aboriginal students, Mr. David primarily mentioned one of course aims was for educating non-Aboriginal students. This purpose relates to the second role of the course that he identified, to combat racism.

All participants agreed the course helped combat racism. When I asked Mr. David about whether the course could improve understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, he replied, "Oh for sure, the simple answer is no doubt about it." One student of Aboriginal ancestry felt it helped non-Aboriginal students understand how Aboriginal people were treated in the past, which is not common knowledge taught within schools. A non-Aboriginal student identified the same thing in addition to mentioning she learned about how Aboriginal people had previously lived. The other student of Aboriginal ancestry felt it helped people understand the history of Aboriginal people prior to colonization. In addition, the course created awareness that Aboriginal peoples had organization in their societies and were not "savages." Two of the participants mentioned sharing what they had learned in the course with friends.

When I asked this question, I was thinking of racism in society towards Aboriginal peoples because this related to my own experiences. There are undoubtedly Aboriginal people who hold racist views towards Caucasian populations, but these views do not have the corresponding power relations to accompany them that are able to

inflict disadvantage (Nieto, 2004; Chartrand, 1992). When I asked whether the course could address racism to Jessica, who lives in a neighbourhood where there is a higher Aboriginal population, she surprised me by responding how she thought the Aboriginal students in the course were not the ones who discriminated against people based on race, thereby implying that Aboriginal people outside of the course did.

Jessica did not think racism would ever end. When, during the second interview, I asked her whether the course could reduce racism, Jessica replied she thought racism would not end, but the course “definitely will help reduce it, like it will help people understand.” Jessica has chosen to take the Native Studies course. This shows she has a willingness to learn. Jessica lives in a neighbourhood with a high Aboriginal population. She has had different experiences than I have had and has perhaps been discriminated against by Aboriginal peoples outside of this course. Her suggestion that racism will not end is not without some effort on her part to learn about other people in her community.

The course divided non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students along the polar points of view of “us” or “we” and “them” or “they.” The students have been socialized to notice “them,” and “us,” and that some people are “others.” For example, Carla shared, “There wasn’t anything that surprised me about them.” She reflected, “I like learning stuff about Aboriginal people. It is different than like learning about people like us. Like non-Aboriginal people.” Jessica also mentioned,

Like Aboriginal peoples, why wouldn’t they want to learn about white people, why wouldn’t they want to learn about our heritage? ... We want to learn about theirs, like it is only fair that they would want to learn about ours.

The two Aboriginal participants also used the terms “them” or “they” when making reference to non-Aboriginal people. For instance, Maria shared, “Well they learn about how we used to get everything taken away from us and the way ... we were treated a long time ago, Natives.” Justin reflected, “Like most people they just go on what they hear and like what’s been going around forever is that we’re savages.” Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students used pronouns to identify themselves and the “other.” Although the participants in the Native Studies courses often identified “them” and “us”, the participants all agreed the course helped reduce racism and increase understandings. If all participants believed learning the course content could reduce racism, all students should learn this content throughout their school years.

#### Reflections on Learning Aboriginal Content

The students, in addition to the teacher, did not recall Aboriginal content included in any of their previous elementary or junior high schooling. Exceptions to this would be the Cree courses that Jessica and Maria had taken and the extra-curricular events that happened at Maria’s previous school. The content of the Native Studies course was new to the students. I wanted to understand how they reacted to the course material and how the material affected them.

Although two of the four participants were of Aboriginal ancestry, they mentioned there were things they had learned that they never knew before. Just as non-Aboriginal students take Native Studies because they do not have a lot of awareness, Mr. David shared, “I think a lot of Aboriginal students don’t necessarily know a lot about their own history or the history of the whole history from an Aboriginal perspective.” They are not to be blamed for this lack of knowledge though. As people

educated within a colonized country, this lack of knowledge was deliberate (Chartrand, 1992).

The content taught in the Native Studies courses is not covered extensively in other courses although it should be part of our common knowledge. Agreements such as the Treaties made between the First Nations and the Crown provided a foundation for the development of Saskatchewan as a province. All Saskatchewan residents ought to have an understanding of the treaty process. Although, there is progress being made in this area through the current work of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner<sup>5</sup>, there are many misunderstandings to counteract. One must ask why all students are not taught about the Treaties or why there are so many myths prevalent about them. The answer could relate to examining whose interests are being served by not providing this awareness to all students. McLaren (2005) informed, “Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated while others clearly are not” (p. 409).

Some of the things participants reported as new knowledge included learning about the Treaties, the *Indian Act*, the Iroquois Confederacy, the Medicine Wheel, traditional governance and leadership, and where the term “Indian” originated. Knowledge of the Iroquois Confederacy and traditional governance and leadership challenges the views that Aboriginal peoples did not have complex societies. Learning about the *Indian Act* involves learning the assimilative policies of the dominant society. Awareness of this knowledge challenges current myths about Aboriginal peoples.

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<sup>5</sup> The Office of the Treaty Commission provides in-service training and resource materials to Saskatchewan teachers in Grades 7 to 12 to integrate teaching of the Treaties into social science courses.

Mr. David mentioned students were interested in learning about the residential schools. Mr. David shared that the teaching of the residential schools “is a way for Aboriginal students to see their past and understand part of the tragedy, and it is a way for non-Aboriginal students to realize... this happened.” When I watched the students view two videos on the residential schools, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students responded with anger and/or sadness to the videos.

For Aboriginal students, the course might provide more self-awareness and therefore might be more relevant. Maria shared that in her prior Native Studies courses she had learned about the reserve and the land. Justin shared that through this course he had learned “how I got my treaty status and stuff like that.” He had not heard of the *Indian Act* prior to taking this course. The students also liked to learn about treaties. Mr. David shared, “they certainly are very curious about treaties and treaty rights, how that functions today, where they came from, so that is usually a good unit to deal with.” This type of knowledge is central to self-determination for Aboriginal peoples. Non-Aboriginal peoples need this awareness as well because there is so much confusion around treaty rights, reserves, and Indian status.

The students all responded positively to learning Aboriginal content. Many mentioned they did not recall learning any Aboriginal content in prior courses. Carla shared, “I never really knew anything about Aboriginal history and everything. So it’s all new to me, and I enjoyed it.” Jessica mentioned that she enjoyed the learning in the course although she would like to learn about other cultures as well. When she asked, “Like Aboriginal peoples, why wouldn’t they want to learn about white people?” her statement illustrated the ways in which present school curricula are viewed as neutral.

Schick and St. Denis (2005) shared, “the normative practices of whiteness are pervasive throughout levels of schooling from administration to textbooks to all manners of interpersonal actions. The absence of racial recognition renders the whiteness - as normative - of most school activities invisible” (p. 300). Jessica did not realize that through the process of schooling, Aboriginal students have been learning consistently about white people; the difference being that this learning was not confined to a specific course.

Students’ remarks portray how the creation of the course has led to beliefs that Native Studies content is separate or an add-on rather than something that should be integral to all Saskatchewan residents’ awareness. It is viewed as something “different.” At the same time, there is little critical reflection as to why there are Native Studies courses and not courses concerning the histories of other peoples. The Native Studies course was created to address some of the harmful effects of colonization. Instead, the courses are often viewed as something special for Aboriginal people without acknowledging the reasons behind the creation of these courses.

When I asked participants whether there was anything they would like covered in the course that the teacher had not covered yet or that they would like to know more about, the students all mentioned satisfaction with the course content. An exception to this would be Maria who had taken Native Studies 20 and 30 before this Native Studies 10 course. She mentioned that she would like to learn more about traditions like the Sun Dance and smudging. She shared that she did not have the opportunity to learn about these things in her previous Native Studies courses.

I did not ask the students if any of their previous teachers had been of Aboriginal ancestry. In hindsight, I would like to know the answer to this question. Mr. David mentioned during one of our interviews: “we just need more Aboriginal teachers; that is the bottom line.” As an employee of an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, I know there are new graduates of Aboriginal ancestry looking for work, and I wonder why these graduates are not hired to the extent they should be within urban centres. Mr. David mentioned the lack of Aboriginal teachers working at his high school as well as teaching Native Studies in other high schools.

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (2000) has previously taken an interest in the number of Aboriginal personnel working within schools. The commission worked initially with twenty school divisions to develop education equity plans. Each of these divisions was required to submit equity reports on an annual basis revealing the number of teachers and students of Aboriginal ancestry within their divisions. One of the reasons for these reports was to increase the hiring of Aboriginal teachers. In the report for 2000-2001, 5.6% of the teachers self-identified as Aboriginal compared with 19.3% of the students within twenty-two participating school divisions. In 2002-2003, the percentage of Aboriginal teachers was 7.9% and the percentage of Aboriginal students was 21.5% in participating schools divisions (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004a). There is a need for more Aboriginal teachers in the school system.

Longman (2005) found there were different perceptions of barriers towards integrating Aboriginal content experienced by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers. These differences could be a result of the specific training Aboriginal teachers have received in Aboriginal teacher education programs or because Aboriginal teachers are

more comfortable with integrating the content because of their heritages. Whatever the reasons, Aboriginal teachers were more confident in integrating Aboriginal content. Thomas (2005) also interviewed a teacher of Aboriginal ancestry who reported he regularly integrated Aboriginal content into all subject areas and experienced no barriers.

Mr. David believed increased Native Studies courses for non-Aboriginal teachers who are interested would improve the learning in a Native Studies classroom. He would like to work with “an elder – all the time” or “someone who lived in ... the Aboriginal community.” He shared,

... I am not comfortable with talking about some of the spiritual, cultural. I feel comfortable with some of the historical points; you know that anthropological point of view. But topics about what is life like on a reserve right now, well I don't know. I have no idea.

Certainly, having a teacher who is Aboriginal is not the only means of having Aboriginal content included in one's course work. Mr. David, who is a non-Aboriginal person, has learned considerably about anti-racist education. In order for increased understanding and communication within our province, we need more teachers like Mr. David in addition to teachers of Aboriginal ancestry.

### Teaching Native Studies

The students reacted favourably to the learning in the Native Studies course. Some of the reasons for this could relate to the pedagogy of the teacher. Mr. David had increased his own awareness of Aboriginal content and perspectives. He respected traditional ways of knowing. He also incorporated different types of learning activities

into the course. Mr. David also, along with the student teacher, provided models of non-Aboriginal people concerned with increasing their own awareness to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. When he discussed his history of teaching Native Studies, he shared with me, "I guess that is interesting how I ended up eventually being here, because I always felt that things that had occurred had not been fair."

### *Incorporating Traditional Learning Methods*

Although this was a Native Studies course, the content and teaching methods did not differ dramatically from other courses I have observed at the high school level. The desks were situated in rows. Mr. David taught at the front of the room. The learning was based primarily on books, lectures, or video technology. There was little inclusion of traditional ways of learning such as learning in context, learning from elders, and learning that related to the spiritual realm. There was also no instruction in Indigenous languages or teachings related to respect for the environment. Although the class was none of these things, Mr. David referred to ways in which he would like the class to be more of these things.

While the course was taught predominantly in a Western context, there were still ways that it reflected traditional ways of learning in Aboriginal communities. For instance, the students learned about the four aspects of the Medicine Wheel. Mr. David connected this lesson to the ways in which schools are now trying to meet the various needs of students beyond the intellectual or mental dimension. The students practiced consensus. During this lesson, Mr. David encouraged them to reflect on the values of traditional leadership and to demonstrate these values during their group work. The students also participated in talking circles with the student teacher.

As for Indigenous languages, Mr. David reflected that students have asked him, “Why aren’t we teaching Cree?” Although the school does not offer Cree language courses, he has since taken up a conversational Cree course. When he was thinking about the possibility of taking a course, he shared that kids would think, “Oh wow, how do you know how to speak Cree?” Perhaps teachers knowing some words and phrases in one of the Indigenous languages of this region would demonstrate respect and could possibly provide some insight into Aboriginal worldviews.

Mr. David also wanted to have an elder or community member available to assist with the Native Studies course. Battiste (2002) advocated, “Canadian educational institutions should view elders, knowledge keepers, and workers who are competent in Aboriginal languages as living educational treasures. These individuals comprise a functioning Aboriginal university based on Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy” (p. 21). Tuharsky (1999) affirmed that elders should be consulted by the education system and have an important role to play for the well-being of students. In addition, Thomas (2005) recommended teachers should be taught the protocols for approaching elders. Mr. David respected the role of elders in the Aboriginal community.

The role of the classroom teacher in providing insight into Indigenous Knowledge is important in a Native Studies course. Tuharsky (1999) found that Aboriginal students were positively affected by the pedagogy of their classroom teacher who incorporated Aboriginal knowledge and teachings in a Native Studies 20 course. Battiste (2002) also called for increased implementation of Indigenous knowledge in schools:

The central purpose of integrating Indigenous knowledge into Canadian schools is to balance the educational system to make it a transforming and capacity-building place for First Nations students. Learning about Indigenous knowledge enables communities to feel authentic, connected, and prepared. (p. 29)

However, part of the issues for classroom teachers, both those of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry, is not having access to this type of knowledge.

St. Denis (2004) shared that Aboriginal teachers should not be expected to be the teachers of language and traditions. Aboriginal teachers may not have the knowledge themselves because their parents and grandparents made decisions not to teach this knowledge to their children so that they could survive in a changing world affected by colonization. Aboriginal teachers may not speak the language of their ancestors. They may not participate in some of the traditional learning activities of their communities. St. Denis stated,

Aboriginal teachers charged with the responsibility of supporting the development of a positive and strong cultural identity in their Aboriginal students must struggle with their own challenges of reclamation and revitalization. In the end, Aboriginal teachers must defend the actions of their parents and grandparents, who struggled to make good decisions for their children, only to be told that they now had to reverse language and cultural loss.

(p. 38)

Placing this responsibility on teachers of Aboriginal ancestry does not hold the dominant society accountable for their role in the lack of Aboriginal students' success in the school system.

Although teachers may not have the knowledge base to implement Indigenous Knowledge in the classroom, there are things they can do to create a more holistic learning environment. Since traditional methods of learning in Aboriginal communities reflect good teaching practices, they would be beneficial for all. For example, there could be increased experiential activities within the course. Examples could be field trips to communities, governance offices, community centres, educational sites, Aboriginal run businesses, etc. The teacher could invite storytellers or community members into the classroom. Events within the community could be attended. The teacher could include time for talking circles. Again, teachers may need additional supports to locate resources in the community.

### *Learning Activities*

Students participated in a variety of learning activities within the Native Studies 10 course. By incorporating different activities, a teacher can meet the needs of diverse students and generate interest. On the first day I participated in the classroom, the students learned about the Iroquois Confederacy and consensus as a form of decision-making. The students were put into groups named after the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. They were told to discuss a topic and then try to reach consensus amongst themselves. After doing this, they were to try to reach consensus among the nations that they represented. Mr. David told the students that if they could come to consensus about what movie to watch Friday, then they could watch one. It was interesting to note the students could not come to consensus and wanted to vote instead. Mr. David allowed the students sufficient time to work on this simulation exercise and the students probably gained much insight into the deliberation and negotiation required in this

decision-making method although they did not come to consensus. Mr. David shared that this was an activity he had created to support the teaching of the curriculum.

Mr. David also encouraged the students to create experiential projects. The students in the Native Studies 10 course could choose a project to research. They were given a list of possibilities and had a variety of ways to present what they had learned. Some of the students researched Inuksuk, Medicine Wheels, sweet grass, dreamcatchers, sweat lodges, traditional uses of tobacco, traditional medicine, and types of dances. The students utilized books from the library and the Internet for the research but probably also asked people they knew. In the first semester, the students had the opportunity to present their projects to the rest of the class. This was a beneficial form of learning. Carla shared, "I like learning something different than everyone else and then having them talk about what they learned." The students did not have to prepare a written report for this activity. They had options of making models or doing presentations.

Experiential learning activities are valuable in the classroom because the students formulate the conclusions themselves. I observed the students as they were working on their individual projects. One male student shared that his project was going to be about the tepee and he did not have to do any research before building a model because he already knew how to build a tepee. He had some small sticks that he gathered from outside and string of some sort from the art room. He was working on tying together the sticks and getting the proper formation. There were some other students helping him. I could hear them discuss just how difficult it must have been to raise a real tepee because they were having difficulties creating a smaller sized version.

The students could have read about raising a tepee in a text but the difficulties associated with this may not have been realized. The discussion among the students was probably more memorable for them.

Mr. David incorporated videos into the coursework as well. Both Carla and Maria talked about the *500 Nation* video during our first interviews. Maria stated, "Like I really like that, I have learned a lot of stuff that I never knew before from that video." Carla also mentioned finding the video interesting. She shared that she thought about the video afterwards and talked about it with others. In all four interviews, students spoke to something they learned from videos.

There are varieties of teaching methods that can be used in a Native Studies course to meet the diverse needs of learners and to generate interest. Mr. David's teaching style facilitated the learning of Native Studies and the success of students within the course. Although there were some areas of the course in which he did not feel as comfortable or have knowledge of, his strengths in history and awareness of the harmful effects of colonialism aided his teaching. By observing within his classroom and talking with him, I also realized some of the possible challenges for teachers of the Native Studies 10 course.

## The Challenges of Teaching a Native Studies Course

### *Concern for Student Feelings*

Mr. David stated that things would be "different" if he taught to a non-Aboriginal audience because he then could surprise them with things they did not know. In relation to non-Aboriginal students, he would know quite a bit more than they would about the history and function of colonialism within this country. With Aboriginal

students, he felt he needed to be more sensitive because some of the topics are more relevant to their lives, as in the example of the residential schools. He noted some of the Aboriginal students had family members who had attended these schools, and therefore their learning experience in relation to the schools would be different.

For instance, one day I observed the students after watching a video about residential schools, one girl asked, “Why you would even have children if they were going to be taken away from you?” I felt disheartened about this statement because the attitude seemed to convey that to challenge the existing hierarchy and oppression was impossible. The bell rang and the student left for the day before a discussion could ensue; unfortunately, I think having the time to discuss this video with students was important.

As well, because of his concern for the students’ self-esteem, Mr. David appeared to feel a little apprehensive about some of the other content covered in Native Studies 10. A video I have used in courses previously is *For Angela* by the National Film Board. I have never considered not using the video and this could be because I have taught only Aboriginal students. During the video, some young boys say derogatory things about Aboriginal people, thereby negatively affecting a young Aboriginal girl. The mother of the girl deals with the situation, and this video has the potential to lead to discussions concerning the implications of racism and ways that it can be addressed. In my first interview with Mr. David, he reported feeling uncomfortable using this video because he wondered how the Aboriginal students within the classroom would react. He reflected,

Those white boys in that are great actors and they are so good it almost doesn't look like they are acting. Because you know you have seen that a thousand times, that kind of hostility, ... arrogance, and ignorance. See, I feel a little uncomfortable showing that because, I don't know, I just do. Because my students are Aboriginal and they are young... How do they view that film?

Justin told me, "We were watching that movie where the little girl cut off her braids because of them kids, that made me kind of mad." I also noted other students in the classroom conveyed anger. Videos can be beneficial because they affect students emotionally. In addition to setting the context for videos, it is important for teachers to debrief after emotional videos, which is not always easy. Mr. David felt the film would be more appropriate for white audiences than Aboriginal audiences.

Mr. David is sensitive to the feelings of the Aboriginal students about some of the content. This is probably because he is white and middle class and wants to respect the experiences of his students. He does not want to assume a position of an authority. Ellsworth (1989), a White middle class feminist scholar, supported this viewpoint when she reflected, "I did not understand racism better than my students did, especially those students of color coming into class after six months (or more) of campus activism and whole lives of experiences and struggle against racism - nor could I ever hope to" (p. 308). Ellsworth also stated, "there are fundamental things each of us cannot know - a situation alleviated only in part by the pooling of partial, socially constructed knowledge in classrooms" (p. 310).

Mr. David mentioned he did not have an understanding of the personal experiences of his students. He shared, "no matter how many books you read, you

don't, I don't have that kind of knowledge." Some of the things that Mr. David had more difficulties talking about included spirituality, what life is like on the reserves at this current time, and the pronunciation of words: "I guess my biggest weakness actually would be those things specific to their world, like in Saskatchewan." As a former teacher of Native Studies, I could relate to Mr. David's feelings of discomfort concerning the inclusion of spirituality within the classroom. He mentioned that the inclusion of elders within the classroom could address some of these needs.

### *Incorporating Spirituality*

The first page of the Native Studies 10 curriculum guide portrays a Medicine Wheel, and this is later referred to as a "holistic teaching philosophy" (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002a, p. 31). One section of the wheel is the spiritual, but how this quadrant is to be developed in the Native Studies course is unclear. The guide states that teachers are not expected to practice or endorse Aboriginal spirituality but rather provide awareness. Perhaps some of the confusion is related to an awareness of traditional ways of learning in Aboriginal communities, which often involved experiential learning. Is spirituality to be discussed or experienced?

Mr. David and I talked quite frequently about the role of spirituality in a Native Studies course. I expressed discomfort in this area during my teaching experience as well, and I shared this with him. I did not have the knowledge base to discuss issues of spirituality in the classroom, and I did not know if it was appropriate to talk about within the classroom. Battiste (2002) shared rituals, ceremonies, and preparations necessary for incorporating some aspects of Indigenous knowledge in secular public schools will broach issues of spirituality. She suggested, "The preparations required for

teaching some parts of Indigenous knowledge represent a categorization dilemma for administrators or educators. If they approach Indigenous knowledge as a way of knowing, this problem may be resolved” (p. 26).

One of the four students that I interviewed said she would like to know more about traditions of Aboriginal people. She chose to write about the sweat lodge for her research project. A written report is quite different from an experience though. Mr. David shared that the class had once built a sweat lodge and then participated in a sweat in it because they were offered the opportunity and support. He stated that this was great and would be something that he would like to do each semester if he had the support. He mentioned that not all of the students participated in the sweat and that not all students are interested in doing these types of activities. Another time, Mr. David invited the students to participate in a smudge within the gym, but not all the students wanted to smudge for various reasons. One student said he or she was a Christian and did not do these things. Another said he or she was from a different nation than the leader of the smudge. There could be difficulties with incorporating this type of learning in the classroom; some students may not want to participate. In Native Studies courses, there are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. There are different nations of Aboriginal students within the classes. There are also diverse beliefs amongst members of nations. Not all students may want to participate in these experiences, but Maria did.

Having this type of learning could enhance the learning for some students within a Native Studies course. I recently read my reflective journal from when I was a university student. The first time I participated in a smudge was during an education class. I did not feel comfortable participating in the smudge. I wrote that for my

instructor to read. Last summer, when I read my journal, I was surprised to read this. Since then, I have smudged many times. Maybe I would not smudge today if I were not taught in the university context.

In sharing circles held in a variety of provinces, Aboriginal youth in custody were asked what would assist their rehabilitations and future reintegration back into the community. Latimer and Casey Foss (2004) reported that Aboriginal youth in custody clearly shared a desire for programming regarding Aboriginal culture and spirituality. However, “There was also some concern expressed by participants that programming is only easily accessible inside custody facilities. Once the participants are back in their communities, they do not always have the knowledge necessary to access community-based programs” (p. 17). It is unfortunate that spirituality is addressed as a means of rehabilitation but never prevention. Perhaps schools could be gateways to this type of knowledge because colonization has affected the teaching of certain traditions, especially through previously forbidding them in the *Indian Act*. If students’ families or communities are not active in sharing this knowledge, students might not know where to access this knowledge. Maria, who was from a First Nations community, wanted this learning.

However, St. Denis (2004) cautioned against the assumption that in order to be an “authentic” Aboriginal person, one would need to participate in spiritual traditions. This could lead to a type of fundamentalist thinking about what it means to be Aboriginal. Spirituality is one component encouraged under the strategy of cultural revitalization: “Cultural revitalization, acting as a system of true beliefs, depends on a construction of Aboriginality as a timeless, unchanging essence” (p. 41). To focus on

this strategy as a means to solve the issues of students leaving the school system is limiting. St. Denis stated, "Cultural revitalization as a strategy to counter inequality actually encourages the minimizing of historical and contemporary effects of racial inequality in Canada. In some respects, a strategy of cultural revitalization encourages the denial of history and socio-cultural change" (p. 41).

The Native Studies 10 curriculum guide advocates for the development of the four aspects of the individual equally - these being the intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions. Dewar (1999), after interviewing teachers of Native Studies, suggested,

In consultation with Aboriginal elders, Saskatchewan Education needs to clarify the manner in which school teachers should examine the issue of Aboriginal spirituality. Aboriginal spirituality is designated an important component of the courses, but there is clearly a need for many teachers to be given more direction and support of this topic. (p. 117)

Both Mr. David and I were unsure as to how to approach this area, and more clarification is required from Aboriginal communities. Each Native Studies teacher would need to negotiate with his/her community how spirituality would be approached within the classroom.

### *Facilitating Discussions*

Teachers of Native Studies need to respond to sensitive discussions. I was present the first time the students participated in a talking circle during the class. During the first circle that the student teacher conducted, it was difficult for the students to understand the importance of listening to others' ideas in addition to sharing their own.

Some students wanted to debate issues. The Native Studies 10 Curriculum guide explained that during talking circles participants are not to respond to the comments another participant has made, but rather respond to the issues being discussed (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002a, p. 34). Some students did not understand this concept and the circle became more like a discussion. The first time the class had a talking circle, one of the students stated some of the myths regarding First Nations people as being factual, and these myths were counteracted by some of the students.

What really surprised me about that day was that many of the Aboriginal students did not say anything nor seem to take offence to these stereotypical comments. As soon as the class was over, the students walked out the door joking with one another with no hints of hurt feelings. Perhaps there were hurt feelings or anger, but the majority of the students decided to remain quiet. I wondered about the lack of anger or response. Anger is not what you would hope for in a class, but the lack of response reminded me of my own response to racist thinking. I just accepted it and did not counteract it until I learned alternatives to many of the myths accepted as truths in society. For me, anger was a start to feeling good about my identity.

Jessica confirmed my observations about the lack of anger when she shared in the course it was appropriate to talk about Indians and topics related to Indians,

You could give your opinion and no one will say anything about it. Like everyone agrees with you, you know what I mean? And people like listen, and I think it is a good class. ... I like to hear about what people have to say, and I like when people hear what I have to say about things like that.

I am not sure if everyone agreed with all of their classmates' opinions, but the students did seem to listen to one another and not take offence. Some of the students responded to the things their classmates were sharing that they disagreed with. The talking circle, if done properly, gives students a chance to share their views in the classroom and demonstrate respect for one another. The statements I witnessed students sharing in the circle that day could have led to resentment or anger, but they did not appear to.

When I asked the students whether they disagreed with anything that their classmates had said in class, Maria and Carla stated no. Jessica, who is non-Aboriginal, said she disagreed with many of her classmates' comments. Justin responded to the questions stating that he disagreed with the entire colonial history, meaning the way that First Nations people were treated, but did not refer to his classmates' remarks.

The next time the student teacher had a talking circle the students readily participated. The topic quickly moved to discussions of racism and some of the content made me nervous because I was unsure of what was going to be shared. Three of the students said they were present during an altercation that had occurred within the community the summer before. As much as I have advocated for discussions within the course, I learned Native Studies teachers should be prepared for what students might disclose during talking circles or discussions. The interview with the classroom teacher reflected this sentiment when he shared that when discussing the case of Neil Stonechild with the students: "you get some shocking statements, really, it is just shocking." He continued to share that he was shocked by some of the things the students tell him about their encounters with the police force.

Discussions may make some students feel alienated. Jessica felt at times that she was the only one speaking from the “white” point of view. Although she said there were other non-Aboriginal students within the course, she thought that they did not say much during the discussions because their friends were Aboriginal. She felt that she benefited from discussions, sharing, “When I hear them talk about it in class then I understand, and I see why they think things like that. And I probably would do the same.” O’Brien (2004) stated “hearing historically silenced voices speak out emotionally about their plight often gives members of dominant groups their first exposure to the lived realities of oppression” (p. 70). These discussions may be a little uncomfortable, but these are opportunities to hear what is relevant to the students and what further lessons could be developed to counter the misinformation.

Discussions give students a chance to learn from one another, but they may be difficult to implement. Students may say things that hurt other students, but this gives the class the opportunity to deconstruct these misconceptions. The person who made the comments may feel hurt when the comments are deconstructed. These discussions would be more difficult in a setting that had Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. On one occasion, the student teacher shared with the class, “This is a safe place to talk about these things.”

The students did not react negatively towards one another’s comments within the classes I witnessed, but if they had, it has the potential to affect student learning negatively. Jessica felt at times she alone defended the non-Aboriginal point of view. Although there were other non-Aboriginal students in the room, they did not talk as

frequently as she did. In this Native Studies 10 course, the non-Aboriginal students were the minority.

Addressing and discussing Saskatchewan racism is not easy. It is easier to have conversations about issues like Apartheid and the American Civil Rights Movement because for the most part Canadians are not implicated within these histories (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). In a Native Studies classroom within the Saskatchewan context, many are implicated in racism by being witnesses, victims, or perpetrators. These roles can shift at different times. “In this Canadian prairies context, it is Aboriginal peoples who form the greatest critical mass to challenge normative practices of a dominant white culture” (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, Context ¶ 3). Teachers of Native Studies need to address the emotional needs of the students for voice and safety but not avoid the difficult discussions concerning race and racism.

### Summary

I valued the time with the participants and what they shared with me. I was grateful to have the opportunity to grow professionally through my discussions with the classroom teacher. Although this thesis is certainly only a small picture of a much greater perspective, I believe I have learned more about the realities of teaching Native Studies to non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Grade 10 students within the Saskatchewan context.

I learned students chose to take Native Studies 10 for different reasons such as student interest, belief the course was easy, and familiarity. All students described the course as easy. Students shared they believed the course had the ability to reduce racism because it exposed them to different points of view and different accounts of history.

For these students, it was the first course to increase their awareness of Aboriginal content and perspectives.

I had the opportunity to discuss in-depth the teaching of Native Studies with another teacher as well as to observe many of the classes he taught. The teacher's willingness and desire to increase his understanding of Aboriginal content and perspectives strengthened the delivery of the course. He incorporated different activities into the course, some of which reflected traditional learning activities. I also gained insight into some of the challenges involved with teaching the Native Studies course such as concern for students' feelings, questions about spirituality, and management of discussions in settings of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth.

The four student participants all reflected positively about the learning in the course. However, the course effectiveness is limited because it is not offered in all schools and not all students take it. With the intent of graduating a group of students who will be prepared to work with one another, the course cannot achieve these goals if not all students participate in the course. Rather than creating a mandatory course in Native Studies, I believe it would be more effective to address the K -12 curricula.

Aboriginal content and perspectives should be included in all courses throughout the elementary and high school systems. Students can learn Aboriginal content in subject areas like science, language arts, and art. Limiting the content to social science courses does not acknowledge the contributions Aboriginal people have made and continue to make in terms of art, science, and literature. Energy should continue to be directed towards integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives at all levels of the curricula in all Saskatchewan schools.

The Native Studies courses are mainly organized around Aboriginal history since contact with Europeans. The courses document the way colonization has affected Aboriginal peoples. If we move away from conceptualizing Aboriginal content in this limited way, we could move to a more integrated approach that would be rich with diverse experiences, voices, and activities. If historical content about Aboriginal peoples is the only content that students access during their school years about Aboriginal peoples, they are being limited. At the same time, this content is important to learn to in order to challenge the myths of meritocracy in this country.

There are questions that warrant further discussion. For instance, why is Aboriginal content limited to Native Studies courses? Why is a more respectful, informed Aboriginal history not included in mainstream curricula? How can we assist students to understand their feelings as they learn this history? How can we incorporate a critical multicultural perspective in schools? McLaren (1995) shared a critical multiculturalism would legitimize other peoples' knowledge. It would questions the assumptions of white and Western superiority. As well, it would give voice to those who have been marginalized. The Native Studies 10 course examined in this thesis has contributed to increased understanding for some students, but we should work towards increased understanding for all.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This study was limited as it only pertained to one context; however, it shared the reflections of four students and the classroom teacher regarding their experience in the Native Studies 10 course. Since the Native Studies courses were implemented in the 1990s, there has been little discussion concerning the effectiveness of these courses. This study can contribute to the discussion because it shared the perspectives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in a Grade 10 Native Studies course learning together. It also highlighted the experience of a Native Studies 10 teacher.

The Province of Saskatchewan has recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. However, the histories of the people and this land go back further than one hundred years. A significant percentage of students in Saskatchewan classrooms are of Aboriginal ancestry. This number is increasing. The denial of a history in Saskatchewan school curricula and the allowance for the perpetration of myths within Saskatchewan do not contribute to increased understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. There are diverse perspectives not included in school curricula to the extent that would honour all inhabitants of our province. Educational leaders can and should provide the supports necessary for teachers to increase their integration of Aboriginal content.

There is a perception that the course work in a Native Studies 10 course is easy. The alternatives to taking Native Studies 10 are History 10 and Social Studies 10. I do not know whether these courses are actually more difficult than Native Studies 10 or

whether because the coursework in a Native Studies 10 class is of a different nature and perhaps more relevant to students' lives, that the course is perceived as easier. There are some dangers involved with identifying Native Studies as less academically challenging than other courses. Students who take Native Studies 10 may choose it because they would like an easy credit and not because they want to learn Aboriginal perspectives and history. Academically orientated students who want to further their educations at the post-secondary level may not realize Native Studies courses are parallel to other social science courses at the high school level and therefore may choose the other courses. If students, parents, teachers, or administrators identify Native Studies courses as easy, it might further marginalize Aboriginal history. The ways of learning in a Native Studies course may be different from that in a social studies or history course, but different should not be equated as easy. Students should not be encouraged to take the Native Studies 10 course because they are not strong academically. Likewise, teachers should not lower their expectations of students in a Native Studies course.

Mr. David, Jessica, Maria, Carla, and Justin all agreed that the Native Studies 10 course helped decrease racism. For this reason, it would be beneficial if more students had access to the content learned in a Native Studies course. It would be beneficial if Native Studies 10 was offered in more high schools in Saskatchewan. Although many First Nations schools offer the course, it was offered in less than 20% of non-First Nations schools in the 2004 school year (Saskatchewan Learning, Student Records, unpublished data, September 21, 2004). The course cannot influence a large number of students if it is not offered in their schools. Native Studies 10 contributes to increased

understanding in our province, but only for those students who participate in the course. All students should learn content like that of Native Studies courses.

Participants in the Native Studies 10 course expressed increased understanding and awareness of Aboriginal history and perspectives. They reported they had not had access to this information previously. Because of this, it would be beneficial to see increased teaching of Aboriginal content within the elementary and high school courses in all areas. This content should not focus solely on the role of Aboriginal people within a historical context or be limited to social science courses. Teaching about Aboriginal people solely in a historical context may contribute to stereotypical thinking about what it means to be Aboriginal today or to beliefs that Aboriginal people are now fully integrated into society or no longer existent. Aboriginal content should be included in all core curricula. This content should include awareness of current culture as well as historical.

Although Aboriginal content should be included in all core curricula, there are barriers, or perceived barriers to integrating this content. Teachers may feel they will say or do something wrong or they do not have enough knowledge to integrate Aboriginal content. Further support for the inclusion of Aboriginal content is needed for all teachers by way of courses, workshops, professional development events, and community participation. Some teachers did not have cross-cultural training when they completed their education degrees. They now must adapt to the changes implemented by Saskatchewan Learning in terms of integrating Aboriginal content. Although integrating Aboriginal content is a professional responsibility of teachers, Longman (2005) found that teachers sometimes viewed this as an “additional teaching

responsibility” (p. 3). Changing the perceptions of educators towards this responsibility requires a common vision, direction, and most importantly, support.

Mr. David also suggested there should be increased support for teachers of Native Studies. Some of these supports could involve working with someone from the Aboriginal community or with an elder. There should also be support for teachers of Native Studies to increase their understandings through further university education. For instance, Mr. David had a background in history and had not taken a Native Studies course prior to teaching his first Native Studies course. Mr. David mentioned financial support for night class tuition or the opportunity to attend university for a year would be beneficial. It is important to give teachers the supports they need to teach the Native Studies courses well. As an example, Mr. David identified some of the challenges of working within the Native Studies class when he had no understanding of what it was like to live today within Aboriginal society. As well, an area that needs clarification for teachers of Native Studies involves the inclusion of spirituality. Since this issue was presented on several times during the conversations I had with the course teacher, it is an area of present concern.

Elders are one form of community support that could assist in classrooms to aid in the integration of Aboriginal content. Elders could also support the role of the teacher in the Native Studies classroom and may perhaps address some of spiritual questions in the course. As traditional teachers within Indigenous communities, elders are a resource for youth. The Native Studies 10 curriculum guide speaks to the protocols for inviting elders; however, teachers might be nervous to begin. Support for teachers could take place by having a list of elders available in the community, having a workshop

concerning the appropriate ways to invite elders into the classroom, and having financial supports available to purchase tobacco and pay for the services.

The universities should offer a curriculum course for teachers of Native Studies that includes strategies for discussing subjects such as racism. Sometimes, because these discussions are difficult to have and to facilitate, the discussions do not occur. It is important to learn how to talk about racism so that students can learn from one another's experiences. In this way, teachers can plan activities or lessons to address some of the misconceptions students possess. At the school I conducted my research, there were opportunities for interactions among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The students could learn from one another's experiences, but these discussions could be difficult to manage. More interaction could alleviate this management challenge.

Not only could a course in Native Studies lend support to talking about racism, but it could also provide direction for the incorporation of different learning activities within the course. A challenge is to take a curriculum guide developed in a Western educational context and meld it to the traditional ways of learning within Aboriginal communities, which would essentially be good teaching for all. These ways of learning could involve learning in context and learning from elders. A methods course could also further develop the inclusion of learning activities such as field trips, simulations, and role-plays to support the learning in a Native Studies course. Mr. David mentioned he thought students take the course to get away from the typical lecture mode of instruction in history or social studies courses. Including experiential learning activities should be encouraged.

An area for further exploration could be to find out whether the teaching of Native Studies in a predominantly non-Aboriginal setting leads to increased interactions with Aboriginal people or the Aboriginal community. Since the vision of Native Studies 10 was, “to graduate a generation of students who will be prepared to interact in mutually respectful ways in a multicultural environment” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002a, p. 2), this level of interaction is important. It is one thing to be aware of history and perspectives; it is another to interact with diverse communities of people.

Students and teacher reflections on course effectiveness were positive. All students mentioned the course had increased their knowledge and understandings of Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal history. In this sense, the course is contributing to increasing awareness. However, since the course is not offered in all high schools and is taken by few students, the course content is not reaching the number of students it should. Although the creation of Native Studies courses have provided an area for this learning, there needs to be more work done to change the entire K-12 curricula to be more inclusive of Aboriginal content and perspectives.

An add-on to the existing curricula will not suffice; as McLaren (1995) shared a critical multiculturalism perspective requires the legitimating of other peoples’ knowledge and affirming the voices of those who are marginalized. Aboriginal history and perspectives should contribute to the foundations of all future curricula. Ideally, the course content of Native Studies courses should be integrated into rewritten social science curricula, but until the teachers are sufficiently prepared to be knowledgeable in the subject area and this integration of curricula is done respectfully, Native Studies

courses provide areas for students to learn a more respectful history in a supportive environment.

However, it is time to look at the content being taught in a Native Studies course and discover ways in which this content can be made available to all Saskatchewan students. We need to explore how we can recognize the history and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples as important for all to learn. We need to challenge the present prevailing discourses concerning whose traditions, knowledge, and histories are shared in Saskatchewan schools. Students need to be taught to question the myths perpetuated in our society. When we are all taught to question the ways we are being limited by racist beliefs, our society will function at a better level. All students should have understandings of the past and present in order to inform future policies. They should have more acceptance and awareness of their own and other cultures, as well as knowledge of racism and ways to combat racism. I believe the next challenge will be to make this content a part of all students' learning so that upcoming generations will have the awareness necessary for working with one another.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Behavioural Research Ethics Board Approval Letter



### UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

<http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics.shtml>

**NAME:** Janet McVittie (Nicole Amiotte)  
Curriculum Studies

**Beh #05-107**

**DATE:** June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your research study "Experiences in Native Studies 10" (05-107). Thank you for making the requested revisions and clarifications.

1. Your study has been APPROVED.
2. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.
3. The term of this approval is for 5 years.
4. This approval is valid for one year. A status report form must be submitted annually to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board in order to extend approval. This certificate will automatically be invalidated if a status report form is not received within one month of the anniversary date. Please refer to the website for further instructions <http://www.usask.ca/research/behavrsc.shtml>

I wish you a successful and informative study.

Dr. Valerie Thompson, Chair  
University of Saskatchewan  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

VT/cc

Office of Research Services, University of Saskatchewan  
Room 1607, 110 Gymnasium Place, Box 5000 RPO University, Saskatoon SK S7N 4J8 CANADA  
Telephone: (306) 966-8576 Facsimile: (306) 966-8597  
<http://www.usask.ca/research>

## Appendix B: Letter to Parent/Guardian of Native Studies 10 Student

Dear Parent/Guardian of Native Studies 10 Student,

Re: Research Study regarding Native Studies 10: Reflections of Native Studies 10.

I am a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. I am researching the Native Studies 10 curriculum as a part of the completion my Master's thesis degree. Information from this research may provide insights into how to make the delivery of Native Studies 10 more effective. There are no foreseeable risks in this study.

I have been observing in the Native Studies 10 classroom at \_\_\_\_\_ and making field notes. The next part of the research process involves interviewing individual students. The study will explore students' insights into a Native Studies 10 course. The research study is optional and is not a part of your child's Native Studies 10 course work.

I would like your permission to invite your son/daughter to participate in the interview component of the study. If you agree that you son/daughter may participate (by signing this letter), I will then ask him/her is s/he would like to participate in the interviews. If both you and your son/daughter agree, then your son/daughter may participate.

In order to protect your child's interests, I will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. I will interview \_\_\_\_\_ twice to discuss her/his observations of taking the course Native Studies 10 on two different dates. Each interview will last from around thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews will be audio-recorded. At any time during the interview, he/she may ask that the tape recorder be turned off. He/she may discontinue the interview at any time during the process if he/she so chooses.
2. I will transcribe and analyze the tape. I will give your child a smoothed version of the transcripts with false starts, and repetitions removed to make it more readable. Later, I will check with \_\_\_\_\_ about his/her responses in the transcriptions. He/she can add, delete or change information to reflect what he/she intended to say. I will ask him/her to sign a Letter of Consent for the Release of Transcripts.
3. The data collected for this study will be kept in a secure place by my supervisor Dr. Janet McVittie and will be held at the University of Saskatchewan for five years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.
4. I acknowledge that \_\_\_\_\_ can withdraw at any time without penalty; \_\_\_\_\_ marks or academic standing at \_\_\_\_\_ will not be

affected if he/she chooses to withdraw. If \_\_\_\_\_ withdraws, the data collected from interviews and tape recordings will be destroyed and not be used.

5. The confidentiality and anonymity of your child will be protected through use of a fictitious name.

I will use the results of the study for a thesis. Later, the data from the study might be published as an article in a journal or presented at a conference. A two page summary of the report will be sent to yourself and your son/daughter when the report is finished.

If you have questions about your child's participation or his/her rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) or you can contact me, Nicole Amiotte, graduate student, Department of Curriculum Studies, at 934-2200 or my supervisor, Dr. Janet McVittie, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582.

I understand that the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science has approved this research project on June 20, 2005. I understand the guidelines and procedures described above, and I agree to allow my child to participate. I am aware of the nature of the study and understand what is expected of my child, and I also understand that he/she is free to withdraw at any time throughout the study. I will retain a copy of this letter for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Guardian's signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Researcher's signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix C: Teacher Participant Consent Form

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I appreciate your participation in the research study, Reflections of Native Studies 10. The study will explore your experiences teaching Native Studies 10 through two interviews. There are no foreseeable risks in this study. In order to protect your interests, I will adhere to the following guidelines.

1. I will interview you to discuss your perceptions of your experience teaching the course Native Studies 10.
2. I will interview you twice for one hour or less per session, and each interview will be audio-recorded. You may discontinue the interview at any time during the process if you so choose.
3. I will transcribe and analyze the tape to discover the patterns and themes discussed. I will give you a smoothed narrative version of the transcripts with false starts, repetitions, and paralinguistic utterances removed to make it more readable. Later, I will check with you about your responses in the transcripts. You can add, delete or change information to reflect what you want to say. I will ask you to sign a Letter of Consent for Release of Transcripts.
4. The data collected for this study will be kept in a secure place by my supervisor Dr. Janet McVittie and will be held at the University of Saskatchewan for five years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.
5. I acknowledge that you can withdraw at any time without penalty or without loss of services at the University of Saskatchewan. If you withdraw, the data collected from interviews and tape recordings will not be used.
6. The confidentiality and anonymity of you will be protected through use of a pseudonym.

I will use the results of the study for a thesis. Later, the study might be published as an article in a scholarly journal or presented at a conference. A two page summary of the report will be sent to you when the report is finished.

If you have questions about your participation or your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) or you can contact me, Nicole Amiotte, graduate student, Department of Curriculum Studies, at 934-2200 or my supervisor, Dr. Janet McVittie, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582.

I understand that the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science has approved this research project June 20, 2005, and I agree to

participate. I am aware of the nature of the study and understand what is expected of me and I also understand that I am free to withdraw at any time throughout the study. A copy of this letter has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant's signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Researcher's signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix D: Student Participant Assent Form

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I appreciate your agreement to participate in the research study: Reflections of Native Studies 10. The study will explore your insights as a student taking a Native Studies 10 course. The research study is optional and is not a part of your class Native Studies 10. There are no foreseeable risks in this study. In order to protect your interests, I will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. I will interview you twice to discuss your observations of taking the course Native Studies 10 on two different dates. Each interview will last from around thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews will be audio-recorded. At any time during the interview, you may ask that the tape recorder be turned off. You may discontinue the interview at any time during the process if you so choose.
2. I will transcribe and analyze the tape. I will give you a smoothed version of the transcripts with false starts, and repetitions removed to make it more readable. Later, I will check with you about your responses in the transcriptions. You can add, delete or change information to reflect what you intended to say. I will ask you to sign a Letter of Consent for the Release of Transcripts.
3. The data collected for this study will be kept in a secure place by my supervisor Dr. Janet McVittie and will be held at the University of Saskatchewan for five years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.
4. I acknowledge that you can withdraw at any time without penalty; your marks or academic standing at \_\_\_\_\_ will not be affected if you choose to withdraw. If you withdraw, the data collected from interviews and tape recordings will be destroyed and not be used.
5. The confidentiality and anonymity of you will be protected through use of a fictitious name.

I will use the results of the study for a thesis. Later, the data from the study might be published as an article in a journal or presented at a conference. A two page summary of the report will be sent to you when the report is finished.

If you have questions about your participation or your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) or you can contact me, Nicole Amiotte, graduate student, Department of Curriculum Studies, at 934-2200 or my supervisor, Dr. Janet McVittie, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582.

I understand that the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science has approved this research project on June 20, 2005. I understand

the guidelines and procedures described above, and I agree to participate. I am aware of the nature of the study and understand what is expected of me, and I also understand that I am free to withdraw at any time throughout the study. I will retain a copy of this letter for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant's signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Researcher's signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix E: Transcript Release Form

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I appreciate your participation in the research study: Reflections of Native Studies 10. I am returning the transcripts of your audio-taped interviews for your inspection. I will adhere to the following guidelines, which are designed to protect your anonymity, confidentiality and interests in the study.

1. Would you please read and recheck the transcripts for accuracy of information? You may add or clarify the transcripts to say what you intended to mean or include additional comments that will be your words. You may also delete any information that you may not want to be quoted in the study.

2. I will use the results of the study for a thesis. Later, the study might be published as an article in a scholarly journal or presented at a conference. Except for the researcher in the study, your participation has remained confidential. Your name or any identifying descriptors will not be used in the thesis or in any scholarly articles or presentations.

3. In accordance with the University of Saskatchewan Guidelines on Behavioural Ethics, the tape recordings and transcriptions made during the study will be kept in a secure place by my supervisor Dr. Janet McVittie. After completion of the study, the tapes and other data will be kept for five years at the University of Saskatchewan and then destroyed.

4. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If this happens, the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand the guidelines above and agree to release the transcripts to the researcher. A copy of the transcript release form is provided for your records.

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

\*As a research participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) if you have any questions about the study or you can reach me, Nicole Amiotte, graduate student, Department of Curriculum Studies, at: 934-2200 or my supervisor, Dr. Janet McVittie, Department of Curriculum Studies 966-7582.

## Appendix F: Student Participant Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself, such as where you grew up, who is in your family, what you like to do in your spare time.
2. Prior to taking Native Studies 10, what did you learn about Aboriginal peoples in elementary school and junior high?
3. Why did you elect to take Native Studies 10 instead of the other social science courses?
4. Did you hear anything about this course prior to taking the class from other students? If so, share what you heard.
5. What would you tell another student who is considering to take this course?
6. Describe something you have learned that you did not know prior to taking Native Studies 10.
7. What areas of the course are you interested in learning about, or more about?
8. How do you think the course affects student attitudes?
9. Were yours or other students' views challenged in the course? How or why?
10. How does the course affect your understanding of current issues in Saskatchewan?

## Appendix G: Teacher Participant Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about your experience teaching Native Studies in the high school, for instance, how often you have taught the course, how you came to teach the course, what knowledge about Aboriginal peoples you had prior to teaching the class.
2. What do you believe are the aims of incorporating Native Studies in the high school?
3. What are your thoughts concerning the Native Studies 10 curriculum in terms of the content?
4. Share times in your own education when you had opportunities to learn about Native peoples.
5. Why do you believe students elect to take this course?
6. Tell me about a class that you felt went “well” in Native Studies.
7. Have there been times when the learning and teaching is more difficult in the classroom? If so, what are the challenges?
8. Describe the effectiveness of the course in changing students’ attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples.
9. Is there anything that you think is necessary to improve the learning that occurs in a Native Studies classroom?
10. How do you provoke meaningful discussions amongst your students?