

GLOBALISING IMPERATIVES AND TEACHING IN A CROSS CULTURAL CONTEXT:  
TEACHERS' WORK IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES LOCATED IN SASKATCHEWAN

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
In the Department of Sociology  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

By

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## ABSTRACT

A growing body of literature has drawn attention to the ways in which contemporary education reforms are changing how teachers perform their work, but less attention has been paid to what this means for particular social contexts, including the schools and communities attempting to improve learning for Aboriginal peoples. Teachers are increasingly subject to the dynamics of the global economy, and citizens' expectations that public schools can solve social and economic problems. Governments have demanded too much from schools and educators given their capacity to be both more productive in education, and to provide more social care than before to Aboriginal students and families, while at the same time achieving the improvement of educational attainment for Aboriginal children and youth. Educational researchers suggest there is evidence that global-productivity and local-community imperatives are contradictory objectives in educational change. Despite the resources and attention given to Aboriginal education, and a more recent resurgence in support for elementary and secondary schooling, teachers have known for some time that citizens' expectations are goliath in comparison to the actual resources that schools have at their disposal for educational improvement. In contrast with the lack of attention given to educators' perspectives in literature on school reform, teachers are identified in critical analysis within the sociology of education as key agents crucial to the actualisation of educational improvement for Aboriginal peoples. This thesis draws on data from a number of studies pertaining to teachers' work in Aboriginal communities, conducted between 2002 and 2005, to determine:

- What do teachers, working in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan, identify as the main factors driving their work?
- According to teachers, how are the main factors driving their work affected by policies to improve education for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?
- How, if at all, are educators managing to balance the seemingly oppositional policy and program logics of productivity and community while attempting to achieve educational improvement for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?

Informed by teachers' perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal communities, I argue that teachers working in cross cultural contexts, and where governments share jurisdiction over education with Indigenous peoples, may undergo changes in their professionalism which situates them as cultural mediators in the community. Teachers may mediate between the competing demands of governments, parents, students, and even the demands of competing policy and program logics intended, when combined to improve Aboriginal peoples' educational outcomes.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Terry Wotherspoon, Dr. Bernard Schissel, Dr. Li Zong, Dr. Keith Walker, Dr. Jerrold Kachur, Dr. Michael Collins, Lori Giles, Dr. David Hay, the research participants, Helen Doherty, and Vince Doherty for their support in completion of this thesis.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Helen E. Doherty

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan

My thesis is built around the potential contradictions that exist in teachers' work as schools are drawn into competing logics associated with community inclusion and economic productivity. I address these issues by drawing on teachers' perspectives on their work in communities seeking to enhance educational attainment for Aboriginal children and youth. My exploration of how teachers understand the transformation of their work roles through what is considered in the literature as a "new" professionalism addresses at the same time variations in geographic/jurisdictional contexts in which teachers are expected to provide effective learning experiences and outcomes for students whose home and educational situations reveal highly divergent social and economic circumstances. Informed by teachers' perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal communities, my analysis contributes to an understanding of what educators actually need to do in order to improve education for Aboriginal students, and what this means for the governments, communities, and families with whom they work, as well as what it contributes to an understanding of teachers' work in the global economy.

### 1.2 Grounding the research questions in educational literature

A growing body of literature has drawn attention to the ways in which modern education reforms are changing how teachers perform their work. Less attention has been paid to what this means for particular social contexts, including the schools and communities attempting to improve learning for Aboriginal peoples (Wotherspoon 2000, 2006; Wotherspoon and Doherty 2002). Teachers are increasingly subject to the dynamics of the global economy, and citizens' expectations that public schools can solve social and economic problems (Smyth et al. 2000; Saskatchewan 2001, 2002; Wotherspoon 2004, 2005, 2007). Governments have demanded too

much from schools and educators, given their capacity to be both more productive in education, and to provide more social care than ever before to Aboriginal students and families, while at the same time achieving the improvement of educational attainment for Aboriginal children and youth.

Educational researchers suggest there is evidence that productivity and community imperatives are contradictory objectives in educational change (Whitty 1997; Boyd 1999; Wotherspoon 2004, 2007). Despite the resources and attention given to Aboriginal education, and a more recent resurgence in support for elementary and secondary schooling, teachers have known for some time that citizens' expectations are goliath in comparison to the actual resources that schools have at their disposal for educational improvement (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002; Naylor 2002; Wotherspoon 2004, 2007). In contrast with the lack of attention given to educators' perspectives in literature on school reform, teachers are identified in critical analysis within the sociology of education as key agents crucial to the actualisation of educational improvement for Aboriginal peoples (Wotherspoon 2000, 2006; Wotherspoon and Doherty 2002; Smyth et al. 2000; Robertson 1993, 2000).

Three questions guide my inquiry about teachers' perspectives regarding how they perform their work to improve education for Aboriginal students following the introduction of federal and provincial initiatives to improve productivity and social care in schooling. The research questions are:

- What do teachers, working in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan, identify as the main factors driving their work?
- According to teachers, how are the main factors driving their work affected by policies to improve education for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?
- How, if at all, are educators managing to balance the seemingly oppositional policy and program logics of productivity and community while attempting to achieve educational improvement for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?

The findings are significant to scholars' discussions in education literature that address the relationship between community and productivity imperatives in strategies for educational

improvement, especially those dealing with cross-cultural or marginalised students. Further, the thesis results are relevant to applied policy discussions in Saskatchewan that seek improved education outcomes for Aboriginal students by combining community and productivity rationales in the “new” school strategy for educational change. Of course, the project conclusions connect the theoretical and applied discussions about education equity policy for Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan by providing scholars and policy makers with teachers’ insights into how Aboriginal education policies oriented to community and productivity have affected the main factors that drive teachers in their work with Aboriginal communities, and how this in turn has prompted educators to change the ways they perform their work in an attempt to achieve education equity for Aboriginal students. The data in this study lend support to the idea that if governments wish both to improve Aboriginal peoples’ participation in the labour market and to strengthen support for education within Aboriginal communities through the development of social capital, then policy makers will need to listen:

- to teachers about the real challenges they face in the improvement of education for Aboriginal students,
- to Aboriginal families who encounter barriers to their engagement with learning and in preparation of their children for schooling, and
- to the evidence which suggests that government investment in learning for Aboriginal peoples is significant, but insufficient given what really needs to be done in order to improve schooling for Aboriginal children and youth.

### 1.3 Research site and design

The province of Saskatchewan is ideal in several crucial respects for extending and more fully developing existing research on teachers’ work in Aboriginal communities. My research has been conducted in conjunction with a project initiated by Terry Wotherspoon in his study of *Teachers’ Work in Aboriginal Communities located in Saskatchewan and Manitoba*. First, the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan has worked with Aboriginal groups, teachers, and other stakeholders to improve education for Aboriginal children and youth since the early

eighties. Second, Aboriginal people compose a significant percentage of the total number of people living in Saskatchewan; Saskatchewan is one of several provinces in Canada that contains a significant percentage of the total First Nations population, and Saskatchewan has more school-age children of Aboriginal ancestry living off as opposed to on reserve compared to other provinces. Third, as noted select scholars identify Saskatchewan as an innovator in education equity despite Canada's poor record in addressing Indigenous peoples' human rights concerns. Fourth, Saskatchewan has inter-jurisdictional partnerships with Aboriginal education authorities, and a labour market partnership agreement with the federal government that is relevant to education equity for Aboriginal peoples.

These factors make the province a desirable locale in which to investigate how teachers understand and experience their role in implementing mandated change to improve education equity for Aboriginal peoples. Saskatchewan, unlike other Canadian provinces also has a collaborative working relationship with teachers' professional associations which means teachers are more likely to share their views, and the federal, band, and provincial governments involved may be open to considering the utility of the research findings. Of course, this is not a reason to avoid doing such research, but it is an incentive to conduct the study knowing that the research findings might actually be used to improve teachers' working conditions and education with Aboriginal peoples.

Saskatchewan is also working toward the development of community networks to support learning, inform education policy evaluation and development, and as conduits through which schools can be held accountable for education spending. Further, Saskatchewan has simultaneously retained a degree of authority in its central determination of broader community education policy and objectives while entrusting schools and educators to meet these goals, and manage schools on a day-to-day basis. Accessing the views of teachers' working in Aboriginal schools in Saskatchewan, as opposed to elsewhere, is likely to provide educational scholars and policy makers with information from a province known for education equity as well

as a government that has combined community and productivity initiatives in its reform of school.

This study is a case study of teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan; case studies seek to learn something about one particular social instance in order to garner information useful for application in other social settings. Survey, focus group, and interview data were collected in two phases between 2002 and 2005 using a case study strategy enriched by considering differences and similarities between multiple research sites and sources. Multiple methods of collection were also used, including a self-administered survey of teachers working in Aboriginal communities, focus groups with educators, and interviews with key non-teaching educational practitioners. Methodological triangulation was achieved by measuring teachers' perspectives using the survey and focus group methods. As indicated, this research consults multiple sources of information and includes more than one method of data collection, but it derives its core data from the focus groups with teachers. Focus groups were conducted, representing teachers' views from Northern, rural, urban, and band schools in Saskatchewan.

#### 1.4 Contributions to academic and applied work

There are many reasons for conducting research on a particular topic, ranging from arguments that it is controversial, under-researched, practically applicable, theoretically useful, of curiosity, preliminary, or unique. All of these situations apply to the case of teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan. Wotherspoon argues that research of this kind has analytical utility to understanding teachers' work in Aboriginal communities because "teaching in cross-cultural settings is most commonly analyzed in conjunction with factors related to pedagogy, empowerment, cultural differences, or teacher training"; by contrast, "less attention has been paid to the ways in which these elements interact within the complex workplaces that schools represent as the sites in which teachers' labour is performed"



(Wotherspoon 2000, 2). Research on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities is more socially significant, given the changes that Aboriginal communities and First Nations are undergoing as a part of Canadian society.

The relationship between the federal, provincial, and First Nation governments in Canada has changed (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a; Wotherspoon 2007; Hiller 2006). First Nations are forging ahead with self-government, including assertion of their inherent jurisdiction over education (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005, 2008; Battiste and McLean 2005; Monture-Angus 1995). Aboriginal people have identified education as the primary means through which they will solidify their independence and complete decolonisation (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Castellana, Davis, and Lahache 2000; Assembly of First Nations 2007a). Teachers are fundamental, in addition to Aboriginal families and communities, to improving education for Aboriginal peoples (Monture-Angus 1995; Wotherspoon 2004, 2007; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005). Consequently, this research is socially significant, in that it contains the capacity to compliment and improve existing policy and programs, meant to create meaningful change with Aboriginal communities.

This study is further theoretically relevant in that it contributes to literature, drawn from many countries, on teachers' work (Robertson 2000; Smyth et al. 2000), and information on educational change in cross cultural contexts (Robertson 1999; Wotherspoon 2000). Specifically, the focus group data reveal that teachers working in cross cultural contexts where governments share jurisdiction over education with Indigenous governments may undergo changes in their professionalism which situates them as cultural mediators in the community. Teachers may mediate between the competing demands of governments, parents, students, and even the competing demands of policy and program logics intended to improve education for Aboriginal peoples when combined.

The study also highlights educational improvement in Saskatchewan and follows up on the assertion that the province is a leader in the development of education equity (Wotherspoon

2006). In this way, Saskatchewan, as Wotherspoon anticipates, claims to be seeking a balance between policies, programs, and initiatives which are oriented to community and social justice, and those that embody the influence of individuals and private property on education reform (Wotherspoon 2007). In addition to the analytical, social, and theoretical contributions, this research is practically significant because its findings can be transferred to other instances of teaching in cross cultural contexts through comparison to relevant academic and policy literature (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Holliday 2002; Krueger and Casey 2000; Merriam 1998; Yin 2003).

### 1.5 Description of chapters

In this chapter, I set out the thesis statement, summarize the literature, introduce the research questions that guide this study, describe the research site and outline the research design, and explain the structure of this thesis. Chapter Two is a review of literature relevant to the development of the questions that guide this research, and a further examination of key theoretical concepts useful in the discussion teachers' perspectives. In Chapter Three, the research design and associated methodological materials addressing the where, at what times, and how teachers' perspectives were gathered and analysed are outlined including the following: the case study strategy, definition of a "case," time and place of collection, sampling method, triangulation, methods of data collection, characteristics of the survey sample, description of the research sites, analysis strategies, validity, reliability, and generalization, ethics, and the limitations of this study. The focus group data are described in Chapter Four along with teachers' responses to the survey on Teachers' work in Aboriginal communities. Analytical statements developed in Chapter Four for each research site are compared with each other and with those developed from the survey responses in Chapter Five. In addition, aggregate analytical statements developed from comparing the survey and focus group data are also compared in Chapter Five with data from interviews with non-teaching educational

practitioners. Chapter Six constitutes a brief overview of this thesis followed by policy and research recommendations developed from the findings.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One, the content and structure of this thesis were reviewed. Chapter Two examines literature relevant to a discussion of teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan, and outlines the logic of the questions that guide this research. Accordingly, this chapter is organized into four major sections. The first deals with the context of educational improvement and teachers' work. The second addresses the historical and inter-jurisdictional constitution of Aboriginal education in Canada. The third, examines the reform of teachers' work in Aboriginal schools located in Saskatchewan. The final section outlines the questions that guide this research. Chapter Two sets the foundation for Chapter Three which contains an examination of how the collection and analysis of data in this thesis were conducted to develop responses to the research questions.

### 2.2 The context of educational improvement and teachers' work

#### 2.2.1 The context of educational improvement

Educational improvement in Canada and abroad is set within the context of more general movements by liberal welfare-states to address changes in the social and economic conditions of their operating environments (Clarke, Gewirtz, and McLaughlin 2000; Rice 2001; Tomlinson 2001; Olssen 2002; Reid 2002; Torres 2002; Daun 2002; Howlett and Ramesh 2003; Heck 2004; Wotherspoon 2007). Liberal welfare states commonly ensure the well-being of their citizens by administering specific types of programs and services that differentiate them from other states, and types of welfare states, such as: means-tested assistance, universal transfers, and modest social insurance plans (Myles and Pierson 1997; Esping-Andersen 2000; Pierson

2001). Many scholars have framed environmental changes as “new” times emphasising both crisis and opportunity, while others have stressed structural continuity and connections with previous models of social welfare (Sayer and Walker 1992; Robertson 1993; Wells et al. 1998; Fergusson 2000; Pierson 2001; Sears 2003). Despite differences, social researchers generally agree that governments within nation-states have been, albeit to varying degrees globally and across Canada, de- and re-regulating social welfare systems (Whitty 1997; Dale 1997; Seddon 1998; Smyth et al. 2000; Troman 2000; Robertson 2000; Henry et al. 2000; Hall 2004; Wotherspoon 2007). Globalisation theorists argue that nation-states have become little more than a mediating body for private global interests given the loss of control over national economies, and the simultaneous increase in the autonomy of local governments and communities (Codd, Gordon, and Harker 1997; Henry et al. 2000; Smyth et al. 2000).

By comparison to these findings other scholars highlight the ways in which nation-states have retained control by re-organising social systems, such as education, in order to use national fragmentation to their advantage (Watkins 1993; Dale 1997; Whitty 1997; Robertson 2000). Canada has, similar to the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, reorganised its social systems by 1) devolving responsibility for managing social programs to local governments and individual institutions; 2) including private for-a-fee corporations, non-profit and volunteer sector organisations, and traditional public institutions in mixed economies of welfare; and 3) re-conceptualising social services as individual benefits rather than social goods through an emphasis on personal choice and responsibility (Watkins 1993; Smyth 2001b; Ball 1997; Robertson 2000; Clarke, Gewirtz, and McLaughlin 2000; Rice 2001). The reaction of nation-states to national fragmentation has obliged local governments and communities to absorb the shock of social and economic changes in the operating environments of liberal-welfare states while ensuring the continued involvement of central governments in the funding, regulation, and provision of social services (Watkins 1993; Dale 1997; Wotherspoon 2007; Jenson and Saint-Martin 2003).

Of concern to many people, is the potential for devolved and mixed systems of welfare to erode the universal, in preference for the particular determination and provision of social care (Strike 1998; Angus 1993; Watkins 1993; Banting 1995; Pierson 2001; Reid 2002). In response, proponents of devolved and mixed systems have highlighted the universal aspects of these models including, that central governments set broader social policy and program objectives and determine the mechanisms for ensuring accountability (Dale 1997; Soucek 1995; Robertson 1999; Whitty 1997; Rice 2001; Taylor 2001; Wotherspoon 2004, 2007). In addition, supporters of mixed and devolved systems of social welfare stress the necessity that governments in plural societies, such as Canada, be responsive to the distinct needs of socially differentiated and culturally diverse communities (Strike 2001; Daun 2002; Hiller 2006; Wotherspoon 2004; Saskatchewan Education 1998; Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992, 1994a; Saskatchewan 2002; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008).

Proponents of such changes further argue that the potential exists for devolved and mixed education systems to make schools forums of civil society. In this work, civil society is understood as “the social space where private individuals contribute directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, to the public good by means of voluntary association. By associating voluntarily, formerly unconnected and un-associated individuals transform themselves into socially connected ones. They emerge from the sphere of private individuals into public space, which they attempt to order according to shared standards of civility” (Meyer 2001, 120-121). Extending the definition, one can define the function of civil society as to “provide discursive forums outside the sphere of government” and further to “build consensus and advise government” of the peoples’ will (Strike 2001, 36). As such, schools contain the potential to become forums of civil society where moral and normative disagreements are resolved, and governments receive advice from particular voices about educational goals and information to facilitate the continuous improvement of learning in society (Meyer and Boyd 2001; Meyer 2001; Strike 2001).

### 2.2.2 Productivity

Consequently, educational change in Canada has been driven, in part, by both the need for Canadians to become economically competitive, and to reconstitute previously marginalised cultural groups as workers and consumers, within the context of a globally integrated economy (Smyth et al. 2000; Smyth 2001; Robertson 2000; Henry et al. 2000; Reid 2002; Wotherspoon 2007). Historically, non-Aboriginal Canadians excluded First peoples from economic participation by means of the Indian Act, and attempted to assimilate Indigenous groups using residential schools (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 2004; Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003; Wotherspoon 2004). Currently, governments in Canada endeavour to facilitate healing by enabling Aboriginal peoples' full participation in the labour market and developing their capacity to be economically self-sustaining and competitive in the global economy (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2007; Canada and Saskatchewan 2005; Saskatchewan Learning 2004b; Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis Relations 2007). Canadians are not only concerned about the rising cost of public education in Canada but also with the increasing cost of learning and other programs for Aboriginal peoples (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2007, 2008). Canadian governments frame the value of additional short-term investments in Aboriginal education, and peripheral social programs in terms of long-term savings, based on the notion that schools will prepare students for employment, and thus solidify the economic independence of Aboriginal communities (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2007, 2008).

Federal and provincial policies regarding Aboriginal peoples and education rely heavily on the contentious view that learning is primarily a means to prepare students for employment, and that there is a strong connection between the development of human capital and economic competitiveness. Human capital theory posits the notion that "education is an investment in human resources" and that particular types of economies require people with specific skills and motivations. Further, individuals with skills suitable to the type of economic development

required, for example industrial or knowledge based, in a particular society will facilitate advances and contribute to economic development/competitiveness. Human capital is reflected in “contemporary reforms and ideologies that emphasize competitiveness, human resource development, and the need to match skills with jobs” (Wotherspoon 2004, 24-25).

By comparison with sentiments about the connection between education and economic productivity, researchers argue that schools can not be responsive to the labour market’s immediate demands, education is more generally defined and less relevant to economic competitiveness than on-the-job technical training, and many occupations already require more education than is actually required to do the job (Wotherspoon 2004, 2006). Within the context of these research findings, standard education, life-long-learning, and even learning established to create workers for the new knowledge-based economy, seem less relevant to economic productivity than, say, the cost of workers in Canada (Moody 1997; Tilly and Tilly 1998). Despite the fact that there is no discernable cause–effect relationship between the quality of education and Canada’s economic competitiveness, many Canadians still expect that schools will be primary agents for improving their productivity and solving social and economic problems, such as those found in Aboriginal communities (Canada and Saskatchewan 2005; Willard 2001; Wotherspoon 2004, 2007).

At the same time that Canadians are investing a great deal of faith in education, they seem conflicted about the rising cost of schooling and, although they desire the benefits of learning they appear reluctant to raise taxes in order to pay for them (Willard 2001; Wotherspoon 2006). Consequently, school administrators are obliged to apply an economic rationale to contain spending and secure returns on investments in education by, for example, redistributing spending from inefficient and ineffective programs to those that are demonstrably productive (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat 2004, 2008; Saskatchewan Ministry of Finance 2008a, 2008b; Saskatchewan Learning 2005c). Put simply, educational administrators endeavour to ensure that education spending is clearly connected to the achievement of



educational objectives (Saskatchewan Ministry of Finance 2008a; Boyd 1999; Saskatchewan Learning 2005c). Educational administrators argue that initiatives to increase productivity, both the efficiency and effectiveness of education programs and activities, are complementary to social justice initiatives based on the notion that being productive means achieving established educational goals, such as improving education outcomes (Boyd 1999). Despite concerns regarding the relationship between education-economic competitiveness and productivity-social justice, some Aboriginal leaders, such as Chief Clarence Louie of the Osoyoos Indian Band, recommend achieving social justice by putting Aboriginal people back to work, and schooling as primarily preparation for employment (MacDonald 2007; Assembly of First Nations 2007a, 2007b).

### 2.2.3 Community

It may be reasonable to assume that some connection exists between productivity and social justice (Battiste 2005; Battiste and McLean 2005), but one might ask how well the re-commodification of Aboriginal people in the “new” economy, incorporation of Aboriginal people into the labour market, fits with more general conceptions of social justice for First peoples in education. By comparison to the discussion about productivity and economic outcomes, Aboriginal leaders in Canada and others have historically conceptualised social justice in schooling more broadly, based on community control, provision, and inclusion rather than narrowly as a means to employment (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations 1972; Battiste 2005; Battiste and McLean 2005; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a; Monture-Angus 1995). Advances in technology have aided Aboriginal people in advancing the cause of First peoples’ control of education for Indigenous students by facilitating their networking to gain the support of those involved in the global human rights movement. Specifically, such global networks have aided First peoples in lobbying Canadian governments to address the deplorable and declining social conditions in

many Aboriginal communities, and the need to improve education for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Consequently, contemporary educational change is also driven by the technological and social conditions of governments' operating environments, specifically the social conditions in Canadian Aboriginal and other communities.

Aboriginal and other scholars have also extended discussions of community control in education with specific concerns about social justice, in terms of access, treatment, and outcome (Wotherspoon 2004; Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003; Riordan 2004; Castellana, Davis, and Lahache 2000). Community initiatives facilitate community control over learning and also promote inclusion, a sense of belonging, and in some cases, an ethic of care (Boyd 1999; Saskatchewan Education 1996; Saskatchewan Learning 2005b). Aboriginal peoples living on reserves are more likely than First peoples living in urban areas to attend a school operated by an Indigenous government or community. However, Aboriginal people living in urban settings also have opportunities to participate in education systems which are intended to facilitate their involvement in decision making and leadership. One such example, Community Schools in Saskatchewan are meant to address human rights issues in education, as well as other social concerns such as poverty, by replacing closed institutional schools with open learning-communities (Saskatchewan Education 1996; Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). Educators and other community members extend learning and social care beyond the doors of the school and into the lives of Aboriginal families (Saskatchewan Learning 2005b). Despite positive aspects of community learning, the way in which care is developed in school communities determines the extent to which community education represents a divergence from traditional models, and an actual opportunity for democratic community involvement and meaningful change (Angus 1993; Boyd 1999).

Educational scholars suggest that the potential for community schools to create meaningful change is based largely on success in re-shaping school environments, in terms of democratic participation and teachers' willingness to shed traditional-bureaucratic forms of

professionalism in favour of community-based evaluation of teaching and learning (Boyd 1999; Crowson and Boyd 1998). Teachers are employed in such schools to facilitate the development of consensus regarding educational but also shared cultural values, the actualisation of a democratically determined learning agenda, and the realisation of care for those involved in learning in order to increase educational success rates. Researchers and policy makers anticipate that a firm consensus regarding academic expectations of students, discipline in the school-community, and how teachers should behave while instructing students will result in an inclusive academic environment. People involved in the school-community, are then able to extend both academic and social care to each other in the achievement of learning by realising the benefits of their collective strength or social capital. Social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or in other words, to membership in a group-which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a (credential) which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Bourdieu 2004, 21). Educational administrators suggest that the key to success in community education is learning to balance expectations about educational performance with those regarding social care (Boyd 1999).

#### 2.2.4 Teachers’ work

Despite all the attention that Canadians give to school reform and educational improvement for Aboriginal peoples, relatively little consideration is paid to teachers’ perspectives regarding the context of their work in Aboriginal communities, and how productivity (better performance/outcomes) and social justice (community control/social care) imperatives interact and influence the ways in which educators perform their work, and what this means for attempts to improve learning for First peoples. Wotherspoon argues that literature on teaching in cross-cultural settings reflects this deficiency more generally, in that educational researchers

focus far too much on factors, such as curriculum and pedagogy, relative to the general lack of concern that scholars have for schools, as sites in which multiple factors combine to shape how teachers work (Wotherspoon 2000). Like-minded researchers, such as Robertson, Smyth, and Ball, have theorised the centrality of teachers' perspectives regarding their work, in understanding how contextual factors influence the ways in which teachers perform their work, and the connection between teachers' labour processes, and success and failure in educational change (Robertson 1993, 2000; Smyth 2000; Ball 1993; Davies and Lahache 1995).

Critical theorists in education conceptualize teachers as autonomous professionals or non-traditional petit-bourgeoisie because they own and employ cultural capital in teaching, a form of craft based work, to obtain those things that they need to survive another day (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Bourdieu 2004; Connell 1995). In contrast, educators are also depicted as workers, proletariat, because they sell their labour power in the use of cultural capital to state education authorities in exchange for a wage (Robertson 2000; Wotherspoon 2004; Lawn and Ozga 1988). Cultural capital can exist in an embodied, objectified, or institutionalized state as; "long lasting dispositions of the mind and body" and in the form of "cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.)" and set apart as education credentials or a guarantee that an individual possesses certain cultural capacities (Bourdieu 2004, 17-21).

The conceptualization of teachers as proletariat stands on the argument that they are engaged in an unequal relationship of exchange in which they receive less than the value of their time and ability in transforming nature (Veltmeyer 1986; Marx [1867] 1990). The difficulty in this is that teaching is multidimensional, involving both technical and interpersonal aspects and reliant in many ways on the preparedness of students to learn as well as their active engagement in the teaching process (Wotherspoon 2000, 2004; Apple 1985; Connell 1985b). In this regard, the products of teaching and the result of educators' efforts to improve education for Aboriginal peoples are less evident than automobiles directly off an assembly line.

In much of the literature on teachers' work, writers are preoccupied with the control of teachers and their autonomy in the classroom. Teachers exercise autonomy in their work through such means as collective and individual resistance, utilisation of individual and collective forms of non-traditional capital, frequent control over their work (Hall 2004), and their occupational status as a strong lobby group in Canada (Wotherspoon 2004; Kanu 2005; Apple 1988; Smyth 2001; Ball 1993; Robertson 2000; Apple and Weis 1983). Teachers are able to resist the formal requests of education authorities, policy makers, administrators, parents, and community members alike by refusing to change or limiting the affects of reform on schooling. Consequently, teachers are able to empower students in the educational process by acknowledging their perspectives but they can also marginalize them through exclusion, and reproduce relations of domination-subordination (Battiste 2005; Battiste and McLean 2005; Wotherspoon 2000, 2004; Wotherspoon and Doherty 2002). As a result, teachers' resistance is perceived by many involved in learning as both desirable and undesirable depending on how it affects the education outcomes of students (Castellana, Davis, and Lahache 2000; Wotherspoon 2000, 2006, 2007).

By comparison to teachers control over learning, other groups such as parents, students, community members, educational administrators, and corporations are comparably powerful, in that they can erode or augment teachers' autonomy, and also remove teachers altogether from their position of privilege within the educational bureaucracy (Robertson 1993; Angus 1993; Ball 1993; Taylor 2001). Evidence of this is striking in Aboriginal communities in Canada, where teacher certification and association with teachers' professional groups, is often less necessary than the support of Elders and other community members, such as parents, band counsellors, or the Chief (Redwing Saunders and Hill 2007; Battiste 2005; Battiste and McLean 2005; Wotherspoon 2006, 2007; Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003; Monture-Angus 1995). For teachers, this means that changes in their work in band and public schools which are located in Aboriginal communities can be understood as connected to, and a reflection of a

more general shift in educational professionalism in Canada and globally (Wotherspoon 2006; Hargreaves 1994b).

As a consequence, teachers are encouraged to re-frame their status as professionals by confronting the frequent mismatch between their interests and those of the people they serve in Aboriginal communities (Battiste 2005; Battiste and McLean 2005; Boyd 1999; Robertson 2000). Educators, in the process, are obliged to set aside their assumptions about what is good for students in favour of democratic processes that are inclusive of Aboriginal parents' points of view regarding teaching and education more abstractly (Boyd 1999; Wotherspoon 2006). In this respect, Aboriginal communities are able to influence the amount of discretion teachers have in schooling, and the ways in which teachers perform their work (Robertson 2000; Smyth 2000). Of concern to scholars is that this further complicates teaching, an already contradictory form of work, in that education is meant to foster students' resistance to dominant ideas, but also to shape pupils by transferring knowledge they will need in order to participate in society (Apple 1998; Wotherspoon 2004, 2006; Hargreaves 2003; Davies and Lahache 1995).

#### 2.2.5 Summary for the context of educational improvement and teachers' work

Educational improvement is conducted within the broader context of the changing liberal welfare-state which is increasingly subject to external global and internal local pressures. Consequently, educational policy makers and administrators are preoccupied with concerns about both productivity (efficient and effective programs and activities) as well as constructing social justice with previously excluded groups of people (community inclusion and social care). Although, policy makers and communities alike perceive policies and programs intended to achieve productivity and social justice as compatible, educational researchers assert that such endeavours, when combined, rarely result in the achievement of educational improvement. As both semi-autonomous workers and front-line creators of productivity and social justice, teachers are at the centre of educational improvement with historically marginalised groups of

peoples. Consequently, teachers' perspectives about their work in Aboriginal communities will likely result in insights regarding the relationship between productivity and community, and what actually needs to be done in order to improve education for Aboriginal people. In section 2.3, Aboriginal education in Canada is discussed prior to addressing core concepts relating to the reform of teacher's work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan.

## 2.3 Aboriginal education

### 2.3.1 Aboriginal peoples and education in Canada

Three major groups constitute the Indigenous population in Canada including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. The 2006 census, which includes a question on Aboriginal identity, reports that, of all First peoples in Canada 60% are First Nations, 4% are Inuit, 34% are Métis, and the remaining 2% are of mixed Aboriginal identity (Statistics Canada 2008). The Indigenous population in Canada is further differentiated by social and cultural differences, such as gender, socioeconomic status, class, ethnicity, legal-status, and language (Wotherspoon 2004). Aboriginal peoples have a significant bond, despite the differentiation within and between First communities based on their shared experience of oppression and empowerment (Battiste 2005).

Indigenous peoples in Canada have a common relationship with education defined by historically situated instances of marginalisation, and contemporary initiatives to develop education equity for Aboriginal peoples (Castellana, Davis, and Lahache 2000; Battiste 2005; Battiste and McLean 2005; Wotherspoon 2007). Given the utility of education for First peoples, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) privileges education as the most important challenge facing Indigenous people in Canadian society today (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). First Nations, Inuit, and Métis recognise their shared experience with respect to education in Canada, but they have chosen to forgo a pan-Canadian solution in favour of individual education agreements (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008). The

decision to negotiate individual arrangements with the federal government is supported legally, given that Aboriginal peoples have jurisdiction over education for all Indigenous persons within their respective ethnic groups.

The inherent right of First Nations to self-government, jurisdiction and control, and protection by the Canadian government is secured by the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The federal government more recently recognized First Nations' right to self-government in the Constitution Act of 1982; consequently self-government is guaranteed by the constitution (Hiller 2006; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a). In particular, First Nations have inherent-jurisdiction over the education of First Nations people, within their respective ethnic groups both on and off reserve (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a; Battiste 2005; Battiste and McLean 2005). Jurisdiction is generally the right to exercise authority in the development of policies and laws as well as the right to control financial and other resources (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a) The federal and provincial governments have constitutionally-based jurisdiction over education, as established by the British North American Act of 1867 (later renamed the Constitution Act of 1867). More specifically, the federal government assumes jurisdiction over First Nations' education by means of the Indian Act of 1876. In contrast, territories exercise delegated-jurisdiction over First Nations' education; delegated jurisdiction is derived from an Act of federal parliament (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a).

Difficulties exist in progress toward decolonisation when First Nations' inherent-jurisdiction intersects with those of provinces and the federal government. As a result, First Nations, the federal government, and provinces have been identified by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) as stakeholders in First Nations and Aboriginal education. With respect to many First Nations, policy instruments for exercising jurisdiction over programs, services, and daily life beyond the shadow of colonisation have yet to be fully realised. By comparison, a number of First Nations have developed trilateral agreements with their respective federal and provincial partners to govern education. One early success that First peoples had in asserting



their jurisdiction over education occurred when the Sechelt Indian Band negotiated the Sechelt Indian Band Self Government Act of 1986. As a result, the Sechelt Indian Band exercised its inherent jurisdiction over education and provided a model agreement for other First peoples in Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a).

In addition to self government acts, First peoples have a variety of options in exercising their jurisdiction over education including the unilateral exercise of jurisdiction, developing modern treaties, implementing existing treaties, and enabling legislation based on trilateral (bilateral) agreements with other governments. Exercising jurisdiction through trilateral agreements between First Nation, provincial, and federal governments is somewhat useful for moving Aboriginal peoples toward individual control over Aboriginal education. Trilateral agreements are weak because too much time is involved in their negotiation, and upon completion, they return control to INAC (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002b). First Nations are concerned that upon expiration of agreements control will be turned over to the provinces, and that INAC will no longer be responsible, so they have argued for this clause. There is a risk, however, in that such agreements are situated well within a more general strategy to return control completely over to First peoples, although the federal government might fail to do so. Despite concerns, trilateral agreements are strong in that they allow for incremental capacity building, achieve immediate community control, cover First Nations on and off reserves, may be inclusive of other Aboriginal groups, and involve all governments who share jurisdiction (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a).

Aboriginal people have accomplished a great deal with regard to reinstating their control over, and improving Aboriginal education since publication of the RCAP (Battiste 2005; Battiste and McLean 2005). Improving Aboriginal education is increasingly important given the growth rate and average age of the Aboriginal relative to the non-Aboriginal population in Canada. The Aboriginal population grew by 45% in Canada between 1996 and 2006, approximately six times faster than the growth rate of the non-Aboriginal population during the same period. In addition,

50% of Aboriginal people in Canada are under the age of 24, the Indigenous population is younger, on average than the non-Indigenous population in Canada (Statistics Canada 2008). In addition to demographic motives, improving Aboriginal education is more importantly a means to establish long-desired healing with First peoples. Establishing social justice in education for Aboriginal peoples requires that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and provincial governments, such as Saskatchewan, work with First peoples to ensure that education is culturally inclusive and community controlled (Assembly of First Nations 2006; Stavenhagen 2005; Battiste 2004, 2005).

### 2.3.2 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is involved in the funding and regulation of elementary and secondary education in First Nation communities (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008). Federal involvement is tempered by a number of factors, such as self-government, and the need to improve program outcomes, transparency, accountability, and reporting. First Nations also have differential capacities to operate, evaluate, and improve their own education programs. INAC in association with First Nations communities endeavor to provide education programming comparable to the programs and services delivered by the provinces (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002b, 2008).

First Nations control is ensured through the devolved model of service delivery which facilitates responsiveness to local needs, helps develop a band's capacity to deliver, evaluate, and improve its own education programs, and promotes sound management practices. The growth rate and relative age of the Aboriginal population means that program delivery is increasingly costly but contains benefits for all Canadians (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002b, 2008). Canadian governments anticipate that the growth rate and relative age of the Aboriginal population constitute a competitive advantage for Canada in the global economy (Canada and Saskatchewan 2005). As noted before, short-term increases in the cost of on-

reserve education and other programs will be balanced over the long-term by forecasted savings (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002b, 2008). Highlighting the contributions of and future economic opportunities for First peoples, as well as economic logics is meaningful, but it should not overshadow the social justice benefits that stem from funding Aboriginal education.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) acknowledges both economic and social rationales in its policy documents for educational investment, and restates its commitment to educational improvement for Aboriginal peoples annually (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002b, 2007, 2008). The federal government more specifically, intends to support increased educational attainment and skills development by delivering culturally relevant education, skills training, and work experience for youth, and financial support for secondary students.

Investments peripheral to, but supportive of education are also being made, such as increased spending on child and family services, and the provision of social programs based on provincial standards. INAC acknowledges and is aware of the connection between social investment, educational success, and increased economic well-being and independence. Following this, the federal government anticipates that education and social initiatives will meet, in part, Aboriginal peoples' need for social justice, and lead to increased economic participation and well-being (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002b, 2005, 2008).

In setting out to achieve Aboriginal education, INAC identified some of the challenges associated with band operated and federal schools, specifically the dilemmas of negotiating inter-jurisdictional relationships (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005). INAC seeks to balance or align the priorities of First Nations with the requirements of funding, such as eligibility and comparability with provincial models (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002b). INAC identified areas that need investment or work in their Education Action Plan, for example: recruitment and retention of high-quality teaching staff, parental and community engagement, special education needs, review of the funding formula, and establishing First Nations regional education bodies to provide individual schools with school-board-type services. INAC also noted

that individual First Nation governments are partners and administrators. Further, they are useful in measuring progress toward INAC's goals with respect to learning (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008, 2005, 2002b). In addition, INAC considers the provinces key stakeholders or partners in Aboriginal education, and the success of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth.

### 2.3.3 The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan

As suggested earlier, Indigenous peoples increasingly constitute a greater share of Canada's and Saskatchewan's work force and school age population (Wotherspoon 2004). People of Aboriginal heritage, measured in the 2006 Census (Statistics Canada 2008) using a question about self-identity and Aboriginal ancestry, compose approximately 4% of the Canadian population, a figure greater by comparison with the United States (2%), but lower in contrast to New Zealand (15%). Approximately 60% of the Aboriginal people in Canada are First Nations, and of this population, roughly 13% live in Saskatchewan. The First Nations population grew by 29% between 1996 and 2006 in Canada, but only by 25% during the same period in Saskatchewan. Despite this, the First Nations population in Saskatchewan is relatively young, with an average age of twenty, compared to twenty-five for Canada as a whole.

Aboriginal school age children and youth are an integral part of Canadian society both on and off reserves (Canada and Saskatchewan 2000). The 2006 Census found that approximately 48% of First Nations people in Saskatchewan live off reserve compared to a figure of 60% for Canada in total. Children compose a greater percentage of the on-reserve population (34%), and a smaller percentage (31%) of all First Nations people living off reserve in Canada. By contrast, children compose a greater share of the First Nations population living off reserve and a smaller percentage of those residing on reserve in Saskatchewan (Statistics Canada 2008). Aboriginal peoples live in substantive numbers both on and off reserves, reinforcing for governments that Indigenous education is an inter-jurisdictional challenge.

Further, Aboriginal education is increasingly a significant urban concern given the number of First Nations' children living off reserve.

The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan has been involved in education equity for Aboriginal people, at least more formally, since 1984 or arguably earlier with the development of the Native Curriculum Review Committee in 1982. Further, the government of Saskatchewan launched the Community Schools program, to be discussed in the next section of this thesis, in the early eighties to address the needs of urban "at risk" First Nation and Métis youth (Saskatchewan Education 1996). Despite these efforts, the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan was obliged to make additional investments in equity for Aboriginal students, following a report by the Human Rights Commission of Saskatchewan in 1985 (Saskatchewan Education 1998). Subsequent to these developments, the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan transformed the Native Curriculum Review Committee into the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC).

The AEPAC formulates recommendations for the Minister of Education with respect to provincial programs, initiatives, and policies pertaining to Aboriginal Education. In addition, the AEPAC releases action plans covering four areas key to educational improvement for Aboriginal peoples including 1) cultural affirmation and school climate, 2) shared decision making, 3) core curriculum actualization, and 4) life long learning (Saskatchewan Learning 2007c, 1; Saskatchewan Learning 2005a). The AEPAC is composed of member partners from governments, universities, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, First Nations, cultural centers, the community in general, and non-university education programs (Saskatchewan Learning 2007c). The AEPAC is generally inclusive of the Aboriginal education community, in part to ensure that the principles of Aboriginal education continue to be developed in Saskatchewan.

The AEPAC defines the principles of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan as (Saskatchewan Education 2000, 4):

- Aboriginal world view is a valid way of knowing and understanding the world
- accountability is essential to progress
- communication throughout the system, is key to the achievement of common goals
- quality and authenticity are essential considerations in all Aboriginal education policy and program initiatives
- all people must have equitable opportunities to succeed, coupled with respect for individual experiences and knowledge

The AEPAC maps progress towards these goals by making recommendations and developing indicators for roughly five year periods at a time (Saskatchewan Education 2000). A selection of the recommendations and indicators made by the AEPAC in 2000 are discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis along with research findings.

The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan has been successful with Aboriginal education to the extent that Indigenous equity initiatives have fostered broader education reforms in Saskatchewan public schools. The Ministry of Education's success with community based education initiatives in Aboriginal communities provided the framework for Saskatchewan's "new" school program, and in doing so improved education for all students (Saskatchewan 2001). The government in Saskatchewan has also been successful with Aboriginal education, given recent recognition by the AEPAC that there is growing momentum for Aboriginal education equity in public schooling.

#### 2.3.4 Summary for Aboriginal education

Aboriginal people identify their relationship with education in Canada as historically marginalising but also assert that learning embodies opportunities for Indigenous peoples' empowerment in contemporary Canadian society (Assembly of First Nations 2007a; Battiste 2004; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). Despite the improvements in learning that governments and Aboriginal people have made since the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Indigenous leaders believe that much remains to be accomplished to achieve

education equity for First peoples (Assembly of First Nations 2006). First Nations, the provinces and the federal government share jurisdiction and thus responsibility for improving education equity for Aboriginal children and youth. Teachers were identified in the last substantive section of this chapter, section 2.2, as central to processes of educational improvement for Indigenous students. In the next part of this chapter, the reform of teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan is discussed as part of a broader paradigm shift in learning, as more recently evident in the creation of "new" schools by the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan.

## 2.4 Educational improvement in Saskatchewan and teachers' work in Aboriginal communities

### 2.4.1 "New" schools and Aboriginal education

The Ministry of Education responded in 2001-2002, with a fresh strategy to address the growing expectations and demands on public schools. Referred to as School Plus, the approach was intended to expand the human service mandate and change the learning environment in public schools. The School Plus framework was further designed using the principles of community education, and lessons already learned by existing Community Schools in Saskatchewan. Under the School Plus model, all schools were to become Community Schools, and existing Community Schools were to retain additional funding based on the number of "at-risk" students attending the communities' school (Saskatchewan 2001).

As noted, the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan initially utilised Community Schools to address the needs of First Nation and Métis students. It is worth noting that Community Schools also served non-Aboriginal students of lower socioeconomic status. Community Schools bring together the various supports and programs from the community that students need in order to achieve success in education. The learning programs and school environment are geared toward cultural inclusion, and Community Schools are intended to address the experiences and realities of students' lives. The principles of community schooling in Saskatchewan include sharing leadership and decision making responsibilities, responding to

students' and families' needs, coordinating school-linked services and making services, such as health, available in the school, and recognising the value of and promoting life long learning. Overall, the intent is to improve educational attainment of students by strengthening the relationship between the community and school, and by empowering students and families within the learning environment (Saskatchewan Education 1996; Saskatchewan Learning 2005b).

School Plus may be perceived as a re-branding of Community Schools or a means to avert the common misconceptions and stigma attributed to Community Schooling. Although this is a significant idea, School Plus is more accurately depicted as a fundamental shift in educational philosophy and programming in all public schools. In particular, schools that traditionally operated within a centralised and closed education system are obliged to become part of a decentralised and open system of learning. This paradigm shift is not only complementary to existing Community Schools in Saskatchewan, but also the model of partnership building being utilised by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada in conjunction with most First Nations. Many First Nations operate their own schools independently but also have a need to develop networks with other First Nations, and the federal government in order to acquire what has been termed by INAC "school board" or "district type" services (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008).

Aboriginal education is compatible with Community Education philosophy to the extent that Community Schools and School Plus are designed to be representative of local cultures (Saskatchewan 2001; Saskatchewan Education 1996). However, if few or no Aboriginal people live within a school-community, Aboriginal perspectives are less likely to be included than if First peoples compose a significant portion of the community population. As a result, school communities may need to emphasis inclusion and multicultural education rather than representation in order to fulfill the requirements of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan. The AEPAC requires that both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students be exposed to Indigenous



history, knowledge, and perspectives as a requirement of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2005a).

The government of Saskatchewan subscribed in 1994 to multicultural education and, through this, cultural diversity in schooling (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994a). Indigenous content is included in the curriculum but, as will be discussed later, educators may not cover everything prescribed by the curriculum given a lack of time or a desire to adapt the curriculum to students' needs. This stresses the centrality of teachers and their work to ensuring that the requirements of Aboriginal education are met and that schools become community based and inclusive learning environments (Saskatchewan Education 2000; Saskatchewan 2001). To be discussed in the next section, teachers are at the centre of educational change given that the School Plus task force highlights that the goal of changing schools requires teachers to perform their work differently.

#### 2.4.2 Reshaping teachers' work in Saskatchewan

Teachers in Saskatchewan underwent a formal change in service with the introduction of the expanded human service mandate in 2001-2002, as reflected in the School Plus strategy (Saskatchewan 2001). As indicated, the School Plus mandate incorporated Community School philosophy, and also re-affirmed teachers' responsibilities as defined in an earlier Community Schools document (Saskatchewan 2001). Community Schools are based on community education philosophy including elements such as responding to the complete needs of the student, close involvement of community and families in teaching and learning, shared decision making and responsibility for education, the practice of life-long learning, and the coordinated delivery of support services such as health, justice, family, and recreation (Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005b). Teachers' responsibilities, as set out in the Community Schools document (Saskatchewan Education 1996, 26) are to:

- develop a knowledge of the community within which they are working

- develop meaningful and challenging programs within Saskatchewan’s Core Curricula that respond to the needs and realities of students’ lives
- work cooperatively and collaboratively [with everyone] to achieve excellence in the learning program and meet the needs of students
- develop effective communications and liaison with parents and the home
- have commitment to ongoing professional development in the areas of enhanced parent and community partnerships, cultural responsiveness, community education and development
- play an active part in the development of the Community School Plan and processes for renewal

Despite the clarity that policy literature, such as the excerpt from the document above, lends to defining teachers’ responsibilities, there is evidence to suggest that teachers are being asked to undertake “other-than-teaching tasks.” Educators, researchers, and policy makers have connected pressure on teachers to undertake “other-than-teaching tasks” with changes in society, community education, and students’ needs (Saskatchewan 2001). The Task Force on the Role of the School attempted to clarify educators’ responsibilities in light of their troubles and outline their responsibilities in association with the expanded human service mandate in Saskatchewan schools. The Task Force was specifically concerned with what teachers’ role would be in relation to the development and delivery of integrated and school-linked services. School-linked services are those that are accessible through the school and often service providers visit the school periodically. In comparison, integrated services are those that are delivered through the school and providers work on site with educators, families, and students. In the document, they described the impact of changes in society on education and teachers in terms of growing expectations and demands. The Task Force argued that growing expectations and demands of schools were likely intensifying teachers’ work (Saskatchewan 2001).

The Task Force illustrated the evidence of growing expectations and demands with excerpts from their communications with teachers, administrators, parents, and others who revealed that teachers have less time for instruction and are being asked to complete tasks for

which they have not been trained. These responsibilities include primarily human service work such as mental-health, behaviour management and modification, social work, and meeting other basic needs. One respondent described these as other-than-schooling needs or tasks that relate to building and maintaining students' preparedness to learn. The jobs listed in the report also relate to more traditional notions of teaching but on an expanded scale, such as working with students who have a wide range of special needs in a class large enough to make this a formidable difficulty. In addition, one respondent depicted the context of teachers' work in this regard as, to do this without "adequate support, unremitting criticism, and unrealistic expectations from the community." It was clear in the School Plus report in 2001 that teachers needed help and that, as one participant noted, "all of these factors (and many others too) have reduced the emotional resources of teachers" (Saskatchewan 2001, 72).

The Task Force found it impossible to escape the notion, "that the role of the teacher must be clarified if public education is to fulfill the mission and expectations we as a society have created for it." The Task Force report concluded that, "it is vital within this expanded environment for teachers to attend to teaching and learning" and as well "if we want teachers to do much more, then inevitably there will be less teaching and learning, and there is evidence to suggest that has already begun." The authors recommended "that within the expanded human services environment created by School Plus, the paramount role of the teacher should be that of educator." Interestingly, an educator's role was not defined in the document more specifically than "one that focuses on instruction, learning, and the goals of the curriculum" and "teachers have a referral function, and they will also need to confer with other professionals, parents, and community service personnel" (Saskatchewan 2001, 72-4).

#### 2.4.3 Shifting paradigms: Teachers' work in Saskatchewan and associated concepts

A report by the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan, published in 1992 outlines the traditional and evolving paradigms relevant to community education, Aboriginal education, and

what would become School Plus. Elements of the traditional and evolving paradigm are listed under the headings curriculum, instruction, and the school environment. Changes in teachers' work relations and working conditions are most evident under the heading school environment. Under changes to the school environment, traditional education is described as competitive, managed at the system level, entails the supervision of students, and uses hierarchical structures. In contrast, the evolving paradigm includes cooperation, school-managed sites, the empowerment of learners, and professional/collegial structures (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002; Saskatchewan Education 1996, 1997, 2000; Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992, 1994a; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005b).

Educational change in Aboriginal communities is complex and differentiated across Canada, and from one jurisdiction to the next, but there are a number of striking similarities. Literature produced by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan reflect these similarities by discussing the key concepts and principles of Aboriginal education. For example, both governments are preoccupied with devolved systems of management, responsiveness to students' and families' needs, the development of partnerships with stakeholders and other service providers, and the development of community engagement with learning. These principles illustrate similarities in trends toward the improvement of education with Aboriginal people including both First peoples who live off and on reserves in Saskatchewan. Of interest in discussing these principles in the following section of this thesis is the potential that the principles contain for actual change. As noted earlier in this chapter, educational researchers highlight the often mismatch between plans for educational improvement and changes that actually occur.

#### 2.4.4 Devolved systems of management: Hierarchical or democratic?

Education systems are increasingly devolved encompassing the release of significant decision-making power and control over planning by central authorities to local divisions,

schools, and/or communities. Despite an increase in local control and participation, broad policies and strategies are determined by the central authority and funding is linked by governments to key strategies for achieving learning goals. Further, it is difficult for educators and parents to develop general policy regarding school, students, or teaching, especially if local decisions do not conform to district, provincial, and/or federal policy (Robertson 1993; Angus 1993; Ball 1990). By comparison to the notion that devolved systems of management pose a real change, schools have been self-managing in terms of day-to-day operations and decision-making, and core groups of parents have been involved in orchestrated and informal ways for some time (Demain 1993; Lareau 1989).

Critics are further sceptical about devolved models of decision making and argue that they are just as restrictive, if not more, compared to previous practices and so are not an authentic form of decentralisation or change. As an illustration, strategies to replace hierarchical structures with shared decision-making may result in no more than shared responsibility or what is described as devolving the power to plan hierarchically. This is contrasted with devolving the power to plan democratically, which involves collaborative decision-making that is not contrived, but unpredictable and spontaneous (Grundy and Bonser 2000; Hargreaves 1994a, 1994b; Hartley 1993). Studies regarding changes in education have indicated that shared decision-making is often better understood as educator-manage-educator processes, a form of control exerted by a central authority (Robertson et al. 1992). As a result, the involvement of professional associations or band councils in developing standards and participation by educators on school committees may be perceived as insufficient to claim a lack of hierarchy (Grundy and Bonser 2000; Demain 1993).

In addition to questions regarding control and authentic involvement in decision making, devolved systems of management are also critiqued because they often accompany administrative interest in accountability and continuous improvement. Administrative interest in accountability and continuous improvement are evident in the ongoing development, and

evaluation of educational programming through measuring achievement or outcomes. Many educators perceive evaluation initiatives as costly and argue that they take time and resources away from teaching and learning. Further, scholars suggest that data obtained during evaluation could possibly be inaccurate or fabricated; in short, they may be less productive overall than more traditional methods of “improvement” (Wotherspoon 2004, 2007; Ball 1997). Despite the possibility that devolved and inclusive decision-making structures may just be managerial devices rather than democratic reforms, teachers, parents, and community members in Aboriginal schools have a real opportunity to create change that is meaningful in their community (Hartley 1997; Woods and Jeffrey 1996; Saskatchewan Learning 2005b).

#### 2.4.5 Service partnerships: Integrated or school-linked

Integrated and school linked service partnerships existed prior to their formal introduction via education policy, as illustrated in the Community Schools and School Plus strategies, but arguably in more informally ways (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). Integrated human resource services are delivered by non-education, primarily government agents working on site and in the school. In contrast, school-linked services are those that are made available and coordinated by educators through the school. A number of services provided in or through schools in Saskatchewan include adult education, nutrition, culture, justice, health, social, family, and recreation (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994b).

The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan began to explore and develop coordinated and collaborative approaches to service delivery in 1992. School-linked and integrated services were meant to better meet the holistic needs of students including social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, physical, and general well-being. The Ministry of Education recognized that all of these needs were strongly related to educational achievement, and that schools could contribute in responding to meet these needs. The integrated and school-linked models were legitimized because of the need for such services, the lack of existing coordination between government

professionals, the services were perceived as a more efficient use of resources, and the services fulfilled the need for preventative programming (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992, 1994b; Saskatchewan Learning 2007f).

Beyond addressing other-than-schooling needs or the preparedness of students to learn, integrated and school-linked services reduce duplication and eliminate programs which individual communities are not using. In this way, differentiation is a means to reduce waste and respond to the varied needs of students efficiently while at the same time maintaining core programming and services needed everywhere. Embodied in the school-linked and integrated initiative though is a potential for inequality based on the location and socioeconomic make up of communities. The demographics of a community are likely to determine the variety and extent to which services and supports exist and can be accessed. This could result in differing quality and variety of services between schools, divisions, regions, and/or jurisdictions.

Factors associated with the successful delivery of integrated or school-linked services include partnerships and collaboration, broad-based community support and participation, accountability through program evaluation, non-categorical or flexible funding, shared planning, decision-making, resources, and evaluation (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994b). More generally, the success of integrated service delivery in Saskatchewan schools depends largely on the willingness and ability of other government agencies to become involved. Of specific interest to educators, is the number and variety of personnel that can be allotted to schools, whether the professionals will work in the schools or simply be available periodically to work with students, the clarification of roles and responsibilities between educators and other professionals, the amount of funding available to accomplish integrated service delivery, and questions regarding professional ethics with respect to confidentiality and information sharing.

Under the School Plus model, educators are expected to refer students to and facilitate the involvement of other professionals, and be available for group consultation. Of concern, is

the possibility that teachers may be left alone without adequate support to meet the mandate of community schooling and/or students' and families' needs. Consequently, the sustainability of the "new" school model in terms of service partnerships depends on the degree to which the community is engaged with learning, and the involvement of parents, professionals, and other community members. For band schools, the situation is somewhat different given that funding is obtained through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The federal government is giving more attention to the state of Aboriginal communities than it had before resulting in the potential that students' preparedness to learn will be improved. In particular, funding for clean and accessible water, early child development, and safe housing has been improved along with additional investments in education programs and services (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008; Canada and Saskatchewan 2005; Health Canada 2007).

#### 2.4.6 Community engagement: Inclusion or responsibility

Inclusion can be understood as "processes that engage a broad cross section of community members" (Saskatchewan Learning 2005b, 11) including parents or those historically excluded such as Aboriginal people. In addition to involving people as collaborators, inclusion is also a means to encourage shared responsibility and a strategy to achieve equity. In community education policy reports, parents are described as partners who are actively sought and who have a key role in creating student success. The framework asks parents to take responsibility for "providing the necessary nurturing and support their children need to participate effectively in school," to "be actively involved in their children's learning and participate in school programs and activities to the extent they are able," and to "participate in the development and implementation of the Community School Plan and process for ongoing renewal" (Saskatchewan Education 1996, 13-14; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 13-14).

The reports (which are well-known and often repeated by teachers, researchers, policy makers, and politicians) indicate that parental involvement in and support for teaching and



learning is fundamental to the achievement of educational improvement for children (see for example Lareau 1989; Monture-Angus 1995; Riordan 2004; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Saskatchewan Education 1996, 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005a). Despite this awareness, an equal understanding and concern about the inability of people to participate in and to provide support for education is often absent from planning literature. However, the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan does acknowledge the existence of barriers to parental participation by suggesting that families, “be actively involved....To the extent they are able” (Saskatchewan Education 1996, 26; Saskatchewan Learning 2004, 34). Despite plans for parental participation, significant barriers remain and limit the growth of parental participation in teaching and learning. If structural barriers to parental participation are not removed, then how are excluded families to be included in teaching and learning?

Community engagement has the potential to become an unproductive form of shared responsibility in which the primary basis for engaging parents and community members is to access their labour and financial resources to meet students’ basic learning needs. An increased reliance on school fees, donations from the community, parents’ labour power, and fundraising to sustain basic education programming has become an addiction and means of escape from addressing the crisis of inadequate funding for education. For example, some schools are able to raise thousands while others are only able to raise hundreds of dollars per-year to support basic education programming (Wotherspoon 2004). The location and socioeconomic composition of communities could become a basis of inequality if community engagement is used as a bandage for inadequate funding. If the funding issue is not addressed, educators and researcher anticipate that differentiation of the quality and extent of basic education programming between schools, divisions, regions, and jurisdictions will occur. Shared responsibility without equal processes of parental control such as shared leadership also constitutes an inauthentic form of community engagement.

#### 2.4.7 Responsiveness: Social justice or the quasi-market?

Responsiveness can be simply understood as “instruction, programs, and services that meet the diverse and changing conditions of children, youth, families, and communities” (Saskatchewan Learning 2005b, 14). Specifically, it is an educational philosophy that orients teachers to adapt the curriculum, their instructional methods, and the school environment to the differing and changing needs of students. Student diversity, understood as individual differences is one principle of the adaptive dimension. Family constructs, the home environment, and social and cultural factors are grouped under another dimension termed, social and emotional development. Educators are encouraged to evaluate the social and emotional development of the learner, in addition to other characteristics such as self-concept and cultural identity, to determine the appropriate adaptations required for optimal learning (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992).

On the surface, it appears that teachers are being asked to replace family functions or to work beyond the credentials of a professional with only a Bachelor of Education, and perform tasks that only a qualified psychologist is accredited to undertake. However, educators’ ability to be authentically responsive to students’ needs, in the social justice sense of the term, is intricately tied to integrated service and community engagement which include other professionals and parents in schooling. This is evident in that guardians, parents, community members, and other professionals are identified as collaborators and essential partners in responding to students’ needs. Partnerships increase access to community resources and expertise, improve school programming and educational experiences, and the ability of the community to support programs and services. Similarly the Ministry of Education states that collaborators can contribute to or help teachers in the processes of adapting the curriculum, instructional methods, or learning climate (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992). The inclusion of community members, parents, and other professionals is a core part of

the Community Schools and School Plus policies and programs (Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005b; Saskatchewan 2001, 2002).

Adapting the technical and personnel supports in the “new” school environment to students’ needs involves facilitating the delivery of interagency services and the involvement of human service professionals in conjunction with parents. Educators’ responsiveness to students’ needs by adapting the curriculum, instructional method, or learning environment are intended to be limited in scope and, thus, outcome. If adaptation alters the foundational objectives of the approved curriculum, then it has moved beyond the adaptive dimension into modified or alternative programming. Teachers are then empowered to exercise their professional judgement and to make decisions regarding the accommodation of students’ individual needs, but must do so within existing boundaries or approved objectives of the curriculum and/or instructional goals (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992). In this respect, one might conclude that education may be packaged and delivered in different ways, as long as the curriculum or instructional goals are not altered in the process, and that the adaptive aspect of education is a space in which students can work with educators to ensure that their needs are met.

Subsequently, educational institutions and teachers are increasingly confronted with market-based principles in education planning, such as being asked to develop and deliver learning “products” that are considered desirable by a consuming public (Kachur and Briton 1998; Kachur 1999a, 1999b; Riordan 2004; Smyth 2001; Wotherspoon 2007). Market based-principles are also evident in education planning as mixed systems of learning become normative and public educators are obliged to compete with private and other (religious or cultural) service providers to attract and retain students. Consequently, teachers and public institutions may actually be responsive to students’ and families’ needs or they may just end up selling, along with the other service providers, a homogenous educational product in a variety of different “packages” (Riordan 2004; Reid 2002).

Schools and educators are under additional stress from those groups who are taken to be the end consumers of the learners they produce, such as business, government, and tax payers more generally. Of course this stress has always existed to varying degrees, but its current emphasis heightens the imperative that schools do better in accomplishing their goals and be responsible to an ever widening range of consumers. Educational researchers liken this social phenomenon to the birth of quasi-markets in education, and more generally to the transformation of people in society from citizens into consumers (Kachur and Briton 1998; Kachur 1999a, 1999b; Wotherspoon 2004, 2006; Riordan 2004; Reid 2002; Robertson 2000; Smyth 2001). In addition to schools competing for consumers in a quasi-market, they are also beginning to look like market-places in which parents obtain educational products.

#### 2.4.8 Summary for educational improvement in Saskatchewan and teachers' work in Aboriginal schools

Researchers, both globally and locally in Canada are concerned about the relationship between strategies for school improvement and the actual outcomes of educational change (Whitty 1997; Boyd 1999; Wotherspoon 2004, 2007). Unlike governments in the United Kingdom and Australia, Saskatchewan is perceived by some as a role model in the development of education equity. Educators and academics alike, though often critical of school reform, seem to be impressed with the possibilities for social justice embodied by educational improvement initiatives in Saskatchewan (Robertson 2002; Wotherspoon 2006). In contrast, Canada is not regarded as a leader in learning overall in Aboriginal education and rates low by international standards when considering social factors, such as child poverty (Assembly of First Nations 2006; Wotherspoon 2004; Canadian Council on Social Development 2006). It is worth noting then that Aboriginal education is as complex and differentiated across Canada and between jurisdictions, as are the strategies for educational improvement in Aboriginal schools.

## 2.5 Working to address the research questions that guide this study

### 2.5.1 The research questions

Teachers in Saskatchewan have expressed concern that they are being asked to accomplish tasks beyond their role as educators, that they are increasingly stressed and emotionally drained, and that they are not receiving adequate support (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002; Wotherspoon 2004, 2007). The reform of educational institutions in Saskatchewan is primarily exemplified by the addition of an expanded human service mandate (Saskatchewan Education 1996; Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994b; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005b, 2007a, 2007f). Renewed emphasis on the expanded human service mandate of schools is intended to support teachers and parents in preparing students to learn, specifically by reducing the influence of background on achievement (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008; Canada and Saskatchewan 2005; Saskatchewan Learning 2007d, 2007e, 2007a). This has entailed, to varying degrees, the creation of community-organised schools in which attempts are made to eliminate differences between students with the expansion of child care functions, feeding programs, social and family services such as mental health, and other programs (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005b, 2007a).

- What do teachers, working in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan identify as the main factors driving their work?

Educational organisations are sites of both crisis and transition, and spaces for the regulation and reproduction of social relationships in society (Wotherspoon 2004; Apple 1985). Education has been historically marginalising for Aboriginal peoples, but holds possibilities for empowerment in contemporary Canadian society (Assembly of First Nations 2007a; Battiste 2005; Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005). Teachers are perceived as key agents of social change as front line creators of, and resisters to education reform (Wotherspoon 2000, 2007; Robertson

2000). The contradictory character of teaching, containing both elements of autonomy and control for the worker, enables educators to empower or reproduce students' position within broader society (marginalisation) (Wotherspoon 2004; Smyth 2000). For these reasons, it is important to examine and include teachers' perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan (Wotherspoon 2006, 2007). Specifically, teachers' perspectives regarding Aboriginal education initiatives in Saskatchewan and their work in Aboriginal communities are a means to enhance progress towards educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth.

- According to teachers, how are the main factors driving their work affected by policies to improve education for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?

Educational change across Canada is complex and differentiated within the context of broader movements by liberal-welfare states to address changes in their social and economic operating environments (Daun 2002; Heck 2004; Wotherspoon 2007). Educators in Saskatchewan are being asked to be productive in education within the context of "new" school management initiatives, such strategies intend to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and activities. Governments are increasingly conceptualizing spending on education as an investment and expect teachers and schools to create a return for the investment by developing the human capital of communities, and thus enhancing Canada's economic competitiveness (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008; Canada and Saskatchewan 2005; Jenson and Saint-Martin 2003).

Simultaneously, teachers are also being asked to improve schools for Aboriginal people by fostering the development of social capital in school-communities, and the democratic inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in teaching and learning (Saskatchewan Learning 2005b, 2007c; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008; Saskatchewan 2002). Educational researchers are concerned given evidence to suggest that economic and community imperatives are incompatible when combined in plans to improve schooling for marginalised students (Boyd

1999; Whitty 1997; Wotherspoon 2006). In addition, teachers are alarmed by citizens' expectations of public education in Canada despite recent increases in funding for Aboriginal education and "at" risk students (Wotherspoon 2004, 2007; Naylor 2002). Scholars are interested in how teachers, within the context of Aboriginal communities, are balancing the seemingly oppositional logics and practices of economic and social justice reform while attempting to improve learning for Aboriginal peoples (Wotherspoon 2006, 2007). This prompts the third question that guides this research:

- How, if at all, are educators managing to balance the seemingly oppositional policy and program logics of productivity and community while attempting to achieve educational improvement for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?

## 2.6 Conclusion

Canadian politicians anticipate that educators will play a vital role in helping to rectify Canada's human rights record with First peoples, and strengthen the social and economic well-being of local communities. In response to these expectations, policy makers and educational managers in Saskatchewan, and federally, have recalibrated learning to improve productivity and community in Aboriginal schools. With respect to management initiatives and Canadian's expectations, educational researchers are alarmed because there is evidence to conclude that productivity and community imperatives in educational improvement strategies are incompatible. Educators share this concern given that education reforms include contradictory objectives but also because goals are often unrealistic, given the social and economic contexts of learning in Aboriginal communities. Accessing teachers' perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal communities, those communities located in Saskatchewan, will result in information regarding the relationship between productivity and community in Aboriginal education, and what educators actually need to do in order to improve education for Aboriginal students. The research design, including the data collection and analysis strategy used to address the questions that guide this thesis, are explored in Chapter Three.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

Based on the discussion of educational literature in Chapter Two, teachers' perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal schools will likely contribute to an understanding about what actually needs to be accomplished to improve education for Aboriginal students, and the types of resources required to achieve the task of educational improvement in Aboriginal schools. The intent of this chapter is to outline the general research design, and the strategy employed to collect and analyze teachers' perspectives in developing responses to the guiding research questions. This chapter entails a description of the case study strategy, the definition of a "case," the time and place of collection, sampling method, triangulation, methods of data collection, characteristics of the survey sample, description of the research sites, analysis strategies, validity, reliability, and generalization, ethics, and the limitations of this study. Setting out the methodology of this study here will provide a foundation on which to describe and discuss the data in Chapters Four and Five.

### 3.2 Guiding research questions

As determined in the second chapter, this study is guided by three questions formulated following a review of documents regarding teachers'<sup>1</sup> work, Aboriginal education, and educational improvement in Saskatchewan:

- What do teachers, working in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan identify as the main factors driving their work?
- According to teachers, how are the main factors driving their work affected by policies to improve education for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?

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<sup>1</sup> The words participants, respondents, educators, teachers, staff, instructors, and discussants are used throughout this thesis to make reference to the same group of people.



- How, if at all, are educators managing to balance the seemingly oppositional policy and program logics of productivity and community while attempting to achieve educational improvement for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?

Data to address the research questions were collected in two phases between 2002 and 2005 using the single analytical case study strategy with embedded units. I combined this general strategy with triangulation, to be discussed later, including multiple methods of data collection and sources of information. First, data were collected through a preliminary survey on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities. The research drew from analysis of open-ended questions, and general information from the survey in order to establish the context for the structured section of the focus groups (see Chapter Four). Second, semi-structured focus groups, depending on participants' wishes, were undertaken with educators. This thesis takes its core data from these focus groups, and supplements its findings with a related focus group conducted for a research project on Community Schools in Saskatchewan<sup>2</sup>. Third, interviews were held with select non-teaching educational practitioners who had experience with and knowledge about teachers' work in Aboriginal communities.

### 3.3 Case study research

The case study is the process and product of an empirical inquiry concerned with a contemporary or historical instance (Merriam 1998; Stake 2003; Yin 2003). The phrase "case study" is evoked when a scientist intends to highlight what can be learned from a particular instance (Stake 2003). The case approach is distinguishable from variable-dominated processes of research because it places one case at the center (Ragin 1992). Case study strategy is regarded as a rigorous key to understanding complex social issues and processes, and suitable for answering how and why questions (Stake 2003; Yin 2003; Heck 2004). Multiple

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<sup>2</sup> The Community Schools project covered similar issues, used the same method of collection, fell within the boundaries of the case, and focus groups were conducted by the same moderator. The focus group borrowed for use in this study was derived from a school and division included in the survey sample.

methods of data collection are commonly used in case research though one method of data collection often provides the core data (Ives 1986; Stake 2003; Yin 2003; Heck 2004).

Yin (Yin 2003) presents four general types of case studies, with the studies divided according to whether they contain one or more than one case and whether they are holistic or use embedded units in analysis. This research is a single case study design with embedded units for use in analysis. There are few reasons to justify the examination of one case when contemporary convention is to compare at least two; this study deals with both a unique case and one which is revealing (Yin 2003). The case is unique because Canadian provinces differ markedly in their delivery of education and development of equity initiatives with Aboriginal peoples. The study is also one of a very few preliminary studies addressing teachers' views regarding their work in Aboriginal communities located in any jurisdiction.

### 3.4 What is a case?

A case is anything, an empirical object or ideological construct, contained within some bounded system on an individual or structural level. For example, a student, teacher, incident, educational organization, professional association, or country is a case. In contrast, a doctor may be a case but "his doctoring probably lacks the specificity, boundedness, to be called a case" (Stake 2000, 436). A consequence of dealing with a bounded system or particular, Merriam asserts, is that you can "fence in what is to be studied" (Merriam 1998, 28). She further notes that one test for assessing the boundedness of a topic is to ask how finite the data collection is; if there is no end, then the phenomenon does not qualify as a case (Merriam 1998).

A great deal of the discussion regarding the definition of a case is preliminary and scholars still disagree on a specific definition (Stake 2000; Ragin and Becker 1992). For the practical purposes of this work, I have utilized the above description of a case in a general way to "fence in" what is studied. Criteria are used to identify the boundaries of the case and to aid

the researcher in the selection of participants. The criteria are outlined in the section on sampling and relate to the research questions previously posed. The next section addresses where and when the study took place in order to initiate an examination of the specificities of the case.

### 3.5 Place and time of study

A survey and focus groups were carried out on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan and Manitoba between 2002 and 2005. The survey data include respondents from Saskatchewan and Manitoba but the focus groups and interviews are solely from Saskatchewan. The survey was conducted over a two year period, from 2002-2003, first in Saskatchewan and then Manitoba. Approval was needed from three to four levels of bureaucracy before the surveys could be sent to teachers. This required a great deal of communication and often information was sent to several administrators at each level. Most school boards met periodically and needed to approve the research prior to having an ethics application filled out and approved by an additional research or ethics committee. The researcher was able to contact each school individually to solicit participation, once the ethics application was approved. This often involved multiple explanations or contact with many decision makers, in addition to follow-up letters, faxes, and phone calls. Few similarities in both protocol and process were found across divisions, bands, schools, and the provinces.

Over three thousand surveys were sent, with a response rate of 11% (344 completed surveys). This relatively low overall rate reflects the complex logistical procedures associated with approval and distribution of the survey across diverse jurisdictions. The sample included ten schools under First Nations jurisdiction, and seventeen provincial school districts in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, involving at least 224 schools of various types and levels. Open-ended responses from the survey were coded and added to other survey information for use in

the structured portion of the focus groups (see the summary of survey data made available during the focus groups in Chapter Four).

Approximately 25% of survey respondents indicated on an attachment to the questionnaire that they wanted to be involved on a focus group. The researchers identified clusters of participants from varied locations and jurisdictions who wanted and could be involved in the discussions. The selection of participants and focus group sites is discussed in the section on sampling in this chapter. The focus groups were initiated in 2003 upon completion of initial analysis of the surveys and completed in 2005. The interviews were conducted alongside the focus groups from 2003-2004. Supplementary data were drawn from a Community Schools project which started in 2004, and the selected data were drawn from a school included in the initial survey on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities. In total, five focus groups (including one supplementary) were eventually conducted involving twenty nine educators. Of the twenty nine teachers who participated in the focus groups, six (20.68%) were confirmed to be of Aboriginal ancestry. One band-controlled school in Manitoba was dropped from the sample because other sites in that province were not able to participate. The remaining four focus groups from Saskatchewan entailed twenty five educators, of which five (20%) were known to be of Aboriginal heritage.

Five interviews were also conducted with non-teaching educators though only three are used in the thesis. The three interviews were selected because the participants' occupations represent specific theoretical cases, including manager, middle-manager, and labour representative. Three interviews were also conducted with non-teaching educators. All three of the non-teaching educational practitioners were teachers at one time and have extensive experience working in the Canadian education system. The various roles they have as representatives of teachers, managers, and the people of Saskatchewan give them insight into contemporary issues in educational change. The non-teaching educators were also selected because of their knowledge of Aboriginal education initiatives in Canada and the importance of

teachers' work. In addition, two of the three non-teaching educational practitioners interviewed are of Aboriginal ancestry. Their views are compared to teachers' responses in Chapter Five of this thesis.

### 3.6 Triangulation

This study applied multiple-triangulation to fully ground the interpretive aspect of the research, as a means to enhance the breadth and depth of understanding secured in this thesis. For the purpose of this research, triangulation means combining "methodologies in the study of the same phenomena" (Denzin 1989, 234). Three of four forms of triangulation were used in this project, including data, methodological, and theoretical triangulation. Reporting on an aggregate level, perspectives regarding teachers' work in Aboriginal communities were sampled from multiple data sources, for example by participant type (teachers, manager, middle-manager, and labour representative), by time (the data were collected at various times between 2002-2005), and by space (within the case by geographic space or rural, urban, Northern, and band-controlled Saskatchewan).

Methodological triangulation was achieved by using both the survey and focus group methods of data collection to access teachers' perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal schools. The methods were used to shed light on the subject of teachers' work in Aboriginal communities, but at different levels, surface or in depth, according to the utility of each means of inquiry. The methods were selected in order to achieve a balance between their strengths and weaknesses. The methods are examined later in this chapter. As is conventional in case study research design and methodological triangulation, the core data were derived from one method, in this research it is the focus group, the survey was intended to add dimensionality to the data (Denzin 1989; Yin 2003).

Theoretical triangulation was used by the researcher, who kept competing theoretical propositions and frameworks in mind when approaching the collection and analysis of data.

Although the third research question considered two contradictory propositions, the remaining questions contained the possibility that a wide range of theoretical frameworks would be useful in collecting and interpreting data. The spirit in which theoretical triangulation was employed in the research was akin to analytic induction or considering the potential that a theory may come out of the data (Kirby and McKenna 1989). However, the result of theoretical triangulation in this study may be more aptly put as having “widened” the researcher’s “theoretical framework as empirical materials” were interpreted (Denzin 1989, 241).

### 3.7 Sampling methods

A non-probability sampling method was used to select divisions, schools, and participants for the study. Criteria sampling involves establishing boundaries for research in order to limit participation and target the desired discussants. Four criteria were used to screen possible survey and focus group respondents. First, the respondents had to be from Manitoba or Saskatchewan in the case of the survey and, eventually, Saskatchewan in the case of the focus groups and interviews. Second, the school division had to have an ongoing education equity initiative for Aboriginal people. Third, the school had to belong to a division with learners of Aboriginal heritage representing at least 5% of the student population. Fourth, subjects needed to be educators broadly defined to include counsellors, resource specialists, and school leaders. The criteria satisfied the objective to select a sample of teachers who work with students of Aboriginal heritage in communities where equity initiatives are ongoing.

Possible communities of participants were determined using data from the Human Rights Commission of Saskatchewan (Human Rights Commission of Saskatchewan 2000) on the number of teachers and students of Aboriginal ethnicities working and learning in Saskatchewan school divisions. The data covered a ten year period up to 1998-1999 and included only divisions with approved education equity programs. School divisions on the list were contacted for participation in the survey and focus groups. Divisions not on the list were

contacted and screened according to the criteria prior to requests for their participation. As noted, 25% of the survey respondents from participating divisions and schools indicated they wanted to be involved in a focus group (not every division on the list received from the Human Rights Commission of Saskatchewan participated in the research nor did every school in participating divisions take part).

For the purpose of the focus groups, maximum variation sampling was added to ground collection in the different dimensions of the case. Network sampling shaped the final sample to some extent given access was obtained through the principal or other contacts. Finally, convenience sampling limited the focus group portion of this study to Saskatchewan even though a cross case comparison with Manitoba was desired. Criteria and maximum variation sampling were also used to select the non-teaching informants and, of course, convenience sampling shaped the outcome for this group as well. It is commonly accepted that convenience sampling should never be used as the primary sampling method in qualitative research; however, it is recognized that it has some bearing on most research (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Holliday 2002; Krueger and Casey 2000; Merriam 1998; Neuman 1997).

Clusters of focus group participants from rural, urban, and Northern locations in Saskatchewan and band-controlled jurisdictions were identified. The schools contacted were purposefully chosen in order to maximize variation in location and jurisdiction. The logic was to seek out the diverse experience of teachers working in unique dimensions of the case. In doing so, the researcher could determine which factors exist across all instances of the case and which do not. The internal replication or analytical generalization between dimensions serves to strengthen reliability; reliability is defined later in this chapter. Location and jurisdiction constitute distinct dimensions of teaching and learning in the case of Saskatchewan Aboriginal communities. The selection of these unique sites did not limit the data because they already existed as a part of the identified data-rich sites.

Key practitioners were selected because they had some connection to the community as an administrator, public official, or association representative. Further, they were asked to participate on the basis of their extensive experience with education equity initiatives in Canada and Saskatchewan. All of the participants were teachers at one time or another and had knowledge of contemporary issues related to education reform and teachers' work. A list of possible informants was constructed by conducting a search of people related to educational organizations in the provinces. The list was narrowed according to the selection criteria. As mentioned earlier and again below, the possible respondents in this category eventually self-selected in or out of the research much like the educators.

The difficulty with research involving multiple levels of access is that the sample is determined by single administrators, division boards, and principals before arriving at the teachers. The teachers also selected themselves in or out of the research based on their life constraints, networks, or ideological preferences. Given this, the sample is controlled, but not determined, by the researchers in setting criteria and in planning for maximum variation. To some degree, all samples are limited by convenience where ethical guidelines are being followed and logistics are of concern. As noted earlier, qualitative conventions recognize that most samples are subject to convenience but qualitative best practices do not prescribe the use of convenience sampling as the primary sampling technique. Extreme or critical case sampling, types of theoretical sampling, could be used to extend the theoretical constructs derived from this thesis in future work on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities.

### 3.8 Methods of data collection

As stated earlier in this chapter, this study utilises methodological triangulation or more than one method of data collection to gather teachers' perspectives (Yin 2003). The focus group and survey methods were used to receive data from teachers, though not a contributing factor to methodological triangulation, the interview method was used to collect information from the



non-teaching educational practitioners. The responses to a number of open-ended questions as well as other information were taken from a survey on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities. Participants' views and frequencies, such as the number of rural schools involved, served as starting points for the focus group discussions. The researcher also conducted interviews with non-teaching educational practitioners to access an alternate source of information, and to possibly corroborate teachers' perspectives. The survey, focus group, and interview methods complement each other and are suitable in combination with the case study research strategy.

Most methods can be conducted in a structured or unstructured fashion though some methods are truly limited to one or the other. The difference is really between asking questions about what the reviewed literature determines is important or alternatively seeking what the participant thinks is important (Denzin 1989; Neuman 1997; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Silverman 1993). The research in this thesis attempted to access both existing literature on the subject and participants' concerns. The survey included specific and open-ended questions while the focus groups and interviews were carried out in what is termed a semi-structured way; combining pre-determined lines of questioning with general prompts to encourage the participants to discuss what they perceived to be relevant.

### 3.8.1 Strengths, weaknesses, and use of the survey method

Surveys are ideal for collecting surface information and standard responses when dealing with a large number of variables. The survey used in this study was helpful in narrowing the focus and establishing preliminary concepts for in depth consideration. Surveys are not useful in dealing with an individual case because they are, first, variable oriented and, second, only able to scratch the surface of complex social processes and issues (Rubin and Rubin 1995). In addition to a number of tables highlighting responses in the areas of community and school, student population and needs, curriculum and funding, Aboriginal education initiatives

and teaching, and workplace and training; data from a number of open-ended survey questions were coded and tables developed for use in the focus discussions.

The open-ended questions were used to guide the structured section of the focus group and to return information to participants. Data from the open-ended questions were transcribed and a preliminary analysis of the data was completed by identifying key words and phrases, which were then grouped into categories. The categories were described or given a thematic label, such as family involvement or recreational activities. The concepts reflected some aspects of previously held theoretical frames and assumptions while also adding fresh insights. The preliminary coding, presented in a paper at a meeting of the Canadian Association of Sociology and Anthropology, enabled feedback which aided recoding to allow the order and number of times a theme was mentioned to be added to the tables.

### 3.8.2 Strengths, weaknesses, and application of the focus group and interview methods

Focus groups were employed in the research in order to shed light on existing data, to access collective perspectives on complex social issues, to gather information on a relatively new case, and to determine informants' insights into topics, and to generate descriptions. The interview guide used in the focus groups for this study, recognised and recommended in methods texts, was both structured and unstructured (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999; Krueger and Casey 2000; Madriz 2000; Stewart and Shamdasani 1990; Yin 2003) (see Appendix "A"). Focus groups and interviews share in general the same strengths and weaknesses through their use of the guided (or not) conversational technique (Yin 2003).

The guided conversation is strong because it is flexible, fluid, and often results in data rich in depth providing insight into complex social processes. Discussions allow for the immediate identification of contradictions, opportunities to work out, clarify, and reflect on what has been stated. The collective interview is strong in that it reduces misrepresentation because peers are present to challenge what has been said. Alternatively, the individual interview is

strong because it allows the subject to reveal information that they would not otherwise (Denzin 1989; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Silverman 1993; Yin 2003).

The conversation method is considered weak because it does not limit the biases of the researcher and the participant like the survey. If the interview is not taped or filmed, and then transcribed for accuracy, it may be inaccurate due to poor recall (Maxwell 1992). This is especially true if field notes are used as the sole means of accounting for what has been said. The other dilemma is that the respondent may try to determine and then regurgitate what s/he expects the interviewer wants to hear (Kirk and Miller 1986). The individual and collective interviews in this study were taped and transcribed for accuracy in reporting and recall.

An additional problem is that the interview is a time consuming method of collection requiring many more resources than self administered surveys. They are also more difficult than surveys to achieve because anything could go wrong at each step of the process. Lack of experience often leads to difficulties, such as failure to obtain enough interviews, failure to arrive on time reducing data collected, interviewees fail to show, the researcher ends up with poor recordings, the batteries fail and interviews are lost, and good interview skills, unlike other methods, are learned through trial and error. Texts on the subject tend to be vague especially in relation to the unstructured or semi-structured types. The instrument is not fabricated prior to, but during, research, meaning that others cannot correct deficiencies. Finally, interpersonal skills are necessary to gain the trust of the respondents, establish credibility, navigate the discussions, make everyone feel included and represented equally, and to eventually cover the inquiries or get the data one set out to collect (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Yin 2003).

A single category focus group model was used with a double layer built in for analysis around location and jurisdiction. The focus group is single in design because only one audience, educators, was targeted; typically what varies is the audience in layering but the researcher chose to layer using location and jurisdiction. Often, focus groups are run until theoretical saturation has been reached but, in this study, maximum variation was used in sampling the

embedded units. The focus groups were organized on site for all but the Northern unit, in which the “piggy back” method was used to set up this group due to geographical constraints.

The major weakness with the focus group method is the lack of control the researcher has, especially when using the unstructured style (Krueger and Casey 2000). Comparatively this method generates rich description and accomplishes the exploration of complex issues. Furthermore, it is useful for generating conceptual categories and hypothesis (Krueger and Casey 2000; Morgan 1998; Stewart and Shamdasani 1990; Yin 2003). An additional weakness is that the unstructured section makes it difficult to determine the validity of the information being given. Moderators become more important in the focus group context given the variety of talkers ranging from dominant, shy, and ramblers to mention a few; knowing how to manage these individuals is important to successfully using the collection strategy (Krueger and Casey 2000; Morgan 1998; Stewart and Shamdasani 1990).

### 3.9 Characteristics of the survey sample

In all, 344 educators from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, constituting 11% of the surveys sent, participated in the survey on *Teachers' work in Aboriginal communities*. The survey also includes seventeen schools under provincial and ten of First Nations jurisdiction from across Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Of all the schools in the survey, 60.6% are located in an urban center, 27.9% operate in a rural<sup>3</sup> area, and 11.5% are on a First Nation's reserve.

Half of the participants teach in schools that serve students from kindergarten to grade ten, while the remainder work in schools offering education from grades six to nine (1.5%), eight to 12 (32%), and K to 12 (16.5%). The majority of respondents in the survey are employed by schools with between 151 and 999 learners (74.5%). The remaining teachers work in either a larger school with over 1000 pupils (11.8%) or a smaller school with up to 150 students (13.7%).

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<sup>3</sup> The Northern location was developed for the focus groups; survey data for Northern sites are contained in the urban responses.

Just under a third of educators (31.5%) suggest that children of Aboriginal ancestry compose more than 60% of the learners in the school where they are employed. Similarly, just over a quarter (27.1%) of participants note students of Aboriginal heritage constitute between 22% and 59% of the pupils in the school where they work. By comparison, the “lion’s share” (41.4%) of respondents assert that Aboriginal learners make-up less than 21% of the student population where they teach.

A small number of teachers (3.6%) suggest that the children in the school where they work are mostly affluent. In contrast, the majority of educators indicate that the pupils where they teach are either of mixed/middle income (52.7%) or poor/very poor (43.7%). Further, none of the respondents from band-controlled or rural schools characterize the majority of students in the school where they work as affluent.

Consistent with the gendered character of teaching in Canada, 66.1% of the survey participants are female and 33.9% are male. Of all the educators in the survey, the majority teach on a full-time (90.9%) or continuing (93.9%) basis. Females constitute 73.3% of the part- and 66% of the full-time teachers, while males compose 26.7% of the part- and 34% of the respondents working full-time. Despite the gendered composition of the sample, males and females are as likely to be employed as teachers on a full-time basis (M = 92.8% and F = 90.1%).

Of all the participants, 10.2% self-identify as Aboriginal, of which 38.2% are First Nation and 61.8% are Métis. Female respondents compose 85.7% and males constitute 14.7% of the teachers who self-identify as Aboriginal; males of Aboriginal descent make-up 1.5% of the entire survey sample. Survey results made available to focus group participants beyond those discussed here are summarized in Chapter Four.

### 3.10 Description of research sites

Saskatchewan covers an area of 651,900 square kilometers in western Canada bordering Alberta, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. The land is roughly covered by forest (50%), farm land (33.3%), and fresh water (12.5%) (the remaining 4.2% is not accounted for in the source). The principal industries are agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and tourism. The population is just below one million of whom about 44% or 437,871 residents lived in the two largest centers (Regina and Saskatoon) in 2001 (Tourism Saskatchewan 2006). During the period in which this research was conducted, the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan amalgamated many school divisions reducing the number from eighty-two in 2003-2004 to just twenty-eight in 2005-2006. The number of students during this period fell from 174,263 to 167,132 and the number of schools from 767 to 753. These figures do not include independent schools, and so do not represent an overall provincial total (Saskatchewan Learning 2006a).

Saskatchewan is derived from the Cree word *kisiskatchewan* meaning “the river that flows swiftly” (Tourism Saskatchewan 2006). There are 143 First Nations communities in Saskatchewan covering approximately 618,815.9 hectares of land (approximately 1% of the land area in Saskatchewan). The communities are, on average, 4313 hectares exceeding the national average for Aboriginal communities in Canada (roughly 1176 hectares) (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2006). There are approximately fifty-six band-controlled schools and many more education centers in these communities (Saskatchewan Learning 2006b). The number of students of Aboriginal ancestry is increasing across Canada (Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003). Saskatchewan is home to approximately 12% of the Aboriginal people in Canada and Aboriginal people make up approximately 15% of Saskatchewan’s population (Statistics Canada 2008). The government of Saskatchewan anticipates, based on data from the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, that by 2012, one in three students in the K to 12-system will be of Aboriginal heritage (Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis Relations 2007).

The four research sites for the focus group portion of the study are designated in the analysis as Northern, rural, urban, and band. The first focus interview included educators from across Northern Saskatchewan; they were invited to participate during a conference. The second focus discussion was conducted in a rural school; designated in the study as any school in a community, excluding a First Nations reserve, with a population less than 4,999 people. The third focus conversation was undertaken in an urban school, defined in the study as any school in a community, with the exception of a First Nation reserve, with a population of more than 5000 people.

The final site, band, was selected according to the educational jurisdiction it fell under as well as its location on a First Nation's reserve. The school was located in one of the many First Nations communities in Saskatchewan which have their own educational facilities. The size of First Nations in Saskatchewan varies but most fall under the rural designation or have less than 5000 people. Each research site reflects a varied dimension of teaching and learning in Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan.

### 3.11 Processing and analysis of data

As noted in section 3.6 of this chapter, multiple forms of triangulation were used in the collection and analysis of data in this thesis. The means by which inferences are developed in this research is through comparison, specifically by comparing information derived from multiple research sites, sources, and methods of collection, and while keeping in mind the utility of a range of interpretive frameworks. Data triangulation was undertaken by collecting data from different locations and conceptual categories of people or persons, and forms a basis for comparison in the analysis. Methodological triangulation, using more than one method of data collection to gather teachers' perspectives regarding their work, facilitated the interpretation of data by allowing for a comparison of two known sets of conclusions, teachers' perspectives about a particular issue, as a means to identify a third and unknown set of conclusions, the

research findings about a particular issue (Denzin 1989). Theoretical triangulation, approaching collection and analysis with more than one or two theoretical frameworks in mind, was utilised in the collection and analysis of data to “hear and interpret” what participants were asserting, despite the researcher’s preference for one interpretive framework over another. The data are illustrated in this thesis in the form of survey tables or excerpts from the focus groups and interview transcripts, and described in rich and thick detail.

There are four levels of comparison in the analysis: within focus group sites and survey alone; between the focus group sites including the survey; between sources (teachers and non-teaching educational practitioners), and between the data and literature. The comparison of data derived from the survey, interview, and focus groups with the literature is conducted throughout, and when in outlining responses to the research questions (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Merriam 1998; Yin 2003). The first level of analysis is conducted in Chapter Four while the last three are accomplished in Chapter Five. The data were recorded and transcribed into Microsoft Word for access and organization during analysis, to serve as a case database, and to be used in establishing a chain of evidence (Kirby and McKenna 1989; Yin 2003).

Each focus group and interview was subjected to open, axial, and selective coding during the first stage of the analysis. Simple pattern identification was also used to highlight the core relations between data categories (Kirby and McKenna 1989; Merriam 1998; Yin 2003). The transcribed interviews were given an identification tag, and then manually broken into “bibbits” or naturally occurring excerpts using Microsoft Word. The excerpts were given sub-tags following the interview tag (for example, TRS-23 means “the rural site-excerpt 23”; TRS is the interview tag and 23 is the sub-tag). The interview tags and sub-tags are similar, for example “MM-32” reads as “middle-manager-excerpt 32.” The use of tags and sub-tags allowed for the division of the excerpts into category files according to their properties; properties are characteristics of bibbits or put simply “specific themes.”



The data were initially open coded to identify the properties contained in the excerpts. A second pass was completed to conduct the axial coding, missed properties were identified and the overall list of properties was refined. The bibbits were copied into category files with other excerpts which shared common properties (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Kriby and McKenna 1989; Merriam 1998; Neuman 1997). The final coding pass, selective, entailed refining, dropping, or adding new categories depending on if they are too narrow or broad (Merriam 1998). Identifying and tagging bibbits which fall in more than one category, cross referencing, finished the final coding of the data. Cross-references are early indications of the relations between categories and core relations begin to stand out when clusters of cross references within a category are identified (Kriby and McKenna 1989; Merriam 1998; Neuman 1997).

The first level of analysis produced a summary of main points for each research site and the survey following a rich and thick description of the focus group and survey data in Chapter Four. The second stage of analysis was accomplished in Chapter Five through the analytic comparison of data, the summaries developed in Chapter Four, from multiple research sites and the survey (Neuman 1997). The third phase of analysis, also completed in Chapter Five, is composed of a comparison between the educators and non-teaching educational practitioners (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Merriam 1998). The fourth phase of analysis involved comparing data in general, the analytical statements, and research findings to literature relevant to teachers' work. The explanation building strategy was used in this phase of the analysis to flesh out substantive findings (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Kriby and McKenna 1989; Merriam 1998).

### 3.12 Validity, reliability, and generalization

Validity is measured in this research by how well the data represent what the respondents have stated; descriptive validity was ensured by transcribing audio recordings of the discussions. Reliability is achieved in this study through the use of triangulation and

interview protocols (though they are non-standard). Generalization is considered only in terms of how useful the concepts derived from this work are in making sense of other cases or instances particular to other cases through linkages with relevant academic and policy literature (Denzin 1989; Kirk and Miller 1986; Maxwell 1992; Merriam 1998; Neuman 1997; Silverman 1993; Yin 2003).

Alternative models for qualitative design are also considered in this research; they prompt the researcher to justify his/her findings by being transparent, communicable, and coherent in the collection, analysis, and presentation of data. Transparency was achieved by describing how the data were interpreted, illustrating how the findings were identified, and seeking validation with regard to these processes from peers. Communicability was constructed by ensuring that the themes and constructs outlined in the study were understood by, and meaningful to other researchers and the participants themselves. Coherence was accomplished by having the case description, and the ideas used in building the case study, fit together without any idea-based difficulties (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Holliday 2002; Krueger and Casey 2000; Merriam 1998).

### 3.13 Ethics

The study was conducted with ethics approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan. Approval for the survey was given on November 8, 2001 and for the focus groups on September 17, 2002 (BSC 2000-84 and BSC 2001-84). The research was also approved by the board of directors or other designated body in each school division which participated. Many school divisions also required the researcher to fill out applications for review by their own ethics committee. Upon obtaining approval from the committees above, the researcher needed to gain the cooperation of each school principal. Only after satisfying four levels of gatekeepers was the researcher able to ask individual teachers if they would like to participate.

The participants were provided with an explanation of research and statement of informed consent form (see Appendix “B” for the forms and also Appendix “C” for the Community Schools materials). The forms were tailored to the specific method, explained prior to collection, and respondents were given an opportunity to seek clarification. The forms were separated from the data and secured according to guidelines set by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan.

Respondents are not identified in the analysis or the presentation of data. Names, places, dates, and common language or slang have been changed to eliminate any possibility of identifying the site or speaker. Information has been left out of the study in the instance that it was not possible to protect the confidentiality of the participant. All other requirements set by the ethics committees were met and the guidelines outlined in the *Tri-Council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans* were followed (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada 1998).

### 3.14 Limitations

The data constitute empirically recorded teachers’ reflections regarding their work with students of Aboriginal ethnicities. The analysis is not meant to be taken as objective nor are the responses final or the findings complete. Participants’ views were gathered between 2002 and 2005, and so are only reflective of what the respondents thought at that time, and about the particular educational context they were referring to, for example a single instance of teaching in rural Saskatchewan. Consequently, the data cannot be generalised to other time periods or instances of teaching in other places, such as another instance of teaching in rural Saskatchewan during the same period.

Saskatchewan, the federal government, and First Nations have changed following the collection period, of course, while continuing to grow the capacity of schools in Aboriginal

communities to address their challenges and sustain their successes. Despite progress in Aboriginal education, high school graduation rates for Aboriginal peoples, as a whole across Canada, are not improving as quickly as governments desire (Auditor General of Canada 2004). In addition to highlighting the context of teachers' work within the collection period, the findings in this thesis are of continuing relevance given the ongoing need to be effective, efficient, and innovative in making progress toward the achievement of the improvement of educational attainment for Aboriginal children and youth.

The contribution of this work is further realized, in what can be learned about teachers' work in Aboriginal schools from the data, and possibly the transferability of the theoretical constructs achieved in this study. Limitations derived from the influence of the researcher, often defined as conceptual baggage (Kriby and McKenna 1989) have been accounted for through the development of transparency, communicability, and coherence throughout this study, and through peer review of this research.

### 3.15 Conclusion

Chapter Two produced three guiding research questions from a review of literature relevant to teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan. In Chapter Three, the research strategy, intended to address the research questions, was outlined along with 1) the time and place of collection, 2) forms of triangulation used in this project, 3) the sampling method, 4) methods of data collection, 5) description of the survey sample, 6) description of the focus group research sites, 7) the analysis strategies, 8) how the research meets validity, reliability, generalization, and ethical requirements, and 9) the limitations of this work. The survey and focus group data collected in this study are examined in Chapter Four and illustrated in the form of tables and focus group excerpts. In Chapter Five, teachers' perspectives derived from the rural, urban, Northern, and band focus groups are compared with each other, and with teachers' responses to select survey questions. In addition, the survey and

focus group data are compared with the views of non-teaching educational practitioners in Chapter Five. Also in Chapter Five, the preliminary research findings are fleshed out within the context of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, and substantive responses for each guiding research question are outlined.

## Chapter Four: Describing the focus group and survey data

### 4.1 Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe information collected during the focus groups outlined in Chapter Three. Focus groups were conducted to gain insight into teachers' perspectives on their work with students of Aboriginal ethnicities in urban, rural, Northern, and band-controlled schools in Saskatchewan. A secondary objective is to review data from Wotherspoon's survey on *Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities* made available to participants during the focus discussions. This chapter is divided into five major sections. The first section covers select dimensions of the survey data made available to respondents at each location. The remaining four deal with educators' responses at each research site, regarding Aboriginal education, family, and teachers' work situation.

### 4.2 Survey data made available in the focus groups

#### 4.2.1 Discussion of the survey data

Results from the 2002-2003 survey on *Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities*, introduced in Chapter Three, were taken to focus group participants in order to share findings, structure discussion, and elicit detailed description regarding the subject. The majority of educators had little or no interest in reviewing the findings, and preferred to expand on what they had already reported in the initial survey. For this reason, the survey data (N=344) were covered to varying degrees from one focus group to the next. Survey results made available to respondents, beyond the characteristics of the sample discussed in Chapter Three, are described here before turning to findings from the focus groups presented in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Table 4.1 Selected Characteristics of Teachers' Work

4.1a Average hours in a typical week	Full-time	Part-time
Instruction	22	15.7
Extra curricular activities	5.1	4.7
Supervision	3.0	1.9
Preparation	8.3	4.9
Other*	6.2	3.8
<b>Total # of hours</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>31</b>

\*Other activities listed are shown here according to those reported most to least often: Administration and related meetings (138), meeting with parents (40), student related activities such as marking (17), resource specialist (10).

4.1b Working conditions (responses are presented in the form of a row percentage)

Question	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Uncertain	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	N/A
I have adequate preparation time	50.7	7.7	40.6	.9
I have sufficient time for students with difficulties	35.8	9.6	54.2	.3
My workload is too heavy to do my job well	23.7	15	59.9	1.5
The level of funding to the school is adequate	28.5	18.8	52.4	.3
Financial rewards satisfactory	38.5	15.1	45.5	.9
I am satisfied with teaching overall	86.2	6	7.5	.3

4.1c School community

Teachers in community well respected	70.7	18.7	9.7	.9
Parents supportive of teachers	64.4	22.3	13.2	0
Students respect me as a teacher	91.3	5.1	3	.6
I feel accepted by others who work in school	91.5	2.8	3.7	1.9
Staff work together to meet goals	77.8	11.4	10.5	.3

Labour process and regulation scholars (Smyth et al. 2000; Robertson 2000) as well as the School Plus consultation group in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan 2001), and educational researchers in Canada (Hall 2004) are concerned that teachers' work is being intensified. Academics writing about teachers' work indicate that a variety of factors, including the number of hours teachers work in a typical week (Naylor 2002), are used to determine the extent to which teaching is intensified. Studies conducted across Canada between 1995 and 2000 provide evidence to suggest that full-time teachers in Canada work anywhere between forty-seven and 53.3 hours, on average, in a typical week (Smaller et al. 2000). Consistent with an existing study of teachers' work in Saskatchewan (Gallén, Karlenzig, and Tamney 1995), the full-time survey participants reported that they work, on average, 44.6 hours in a typical week (Table 4.1a). Given the data in Table 4.1a, it is possible that teachers' work in Saskatchewan and Manitoba was intensified by, based on work hours alone, a rate of just over 4.5 hours, on average, in a typical week.

Educators are unique in that they often express satisfaction with their occupational choice while simultaneously voicing concerns about their working conditions, and the state of public education in Canada (Wotherspoon 2004). Table 4.1b illustrates the complexity of teachers' views in this regard in that just over half of the survey participants strongly agreed/agreed with the statement "I have adequate preparation time", and just over 86% with the phrase "I am satisfied with teaching overall." In contrast, just over half of survey respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement "the level of funding to the school is adequate" and almost 55% with the prompt "I have sufficient time for students with difficulties." Despite concerns about their working conditions, just over 59% of the educators in the survey disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement "my workload is too heavy to do my job well." The data in Table 4.1b reflect participating teachers' mixed messages who both suggested that they are able to do their job well despite challenges, but also that they do not have enough time to help students with difficulties.



Contemporary literature on teachers' work (Hall 2004; Smyth 2001b, 2002; Robertson 2000) suggests that collegial school environments are the prescribed ideal in Canada and globally. Scholars with an interest in collegiality argue that the "new" professionalism is complex (Hargreaves 1994a, 1994b; Sykes 1989, 1999) encompassing both the empowerment and subordination of educators (Densmore 1987; Ozga 1995; Hodkinson 1997; Whitty 1997). As shown in Table 4.1c, over two-thirds of teachers in the survey stated that their work is collegial and they feel accepted and recognised by others in their community. Further, just over a half to three-quarters of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the statements "I have autonomy to meet goals," "I have influence over my own work," and "I receive adequate support from administration." By comparison, just under two-thirds of the survey participants strongly agreed/agreed that "teachers should be unionised" (Table 4.1d). The data in Tables 4.1c and 4.1d, understood within the context of literature on "new" professionalism, indicate that survey participants perceived teaching as a contradictory form of work involving support and autonomy, but also the need for representation as workers.

The participating educators were urged to identify Aboriginal education programs that exist in their school, division, and/or teaching (Table 4.2a). The wide range and different combination of activities utilized by educational communities in the sample may be due, in part to the varied needs and location of learners. As will be discussed later in this chapter, several teachers from the Northern focus group (as illustrated in TNS-214 [page 113]) reasoned that students in the North live within and learn daily about their heritage sites, and therefore may have no need to visit them. Over 50% of the survey participants mentioned the following programs in declining order: visits by community members (66.4%), Elder visits (62.8%), anti-racism (54.6%), Aboriginal crafts (54.3%), and Native studies (53.1%). By comparison, 71.8% of all respondents working in First Nations' jurisdictions placed emphasis on Aboriginal language classes and visits by community members. Scholars writing about decolonisation and education

Table 4.1 Selected Characteristics of Teachers' Work cont...

4.1d. Professionalism

Question	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Uncertain	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	N/A
I have autonomy to meet goals	72.9	20.7	5.2	1.2
I have Influence over own work	63.5	22.3	14.1	0
I receive adequate support from admin.	73.9	11.1	12.6	2.4
I look forward to work	82	10.8	6.6	.6
Teachers should be unionised	64.8	21.6	11.4	2.1

Table 4.2 Aboriginal Education Initiatives and Resources

4.2a. Percent of schools that offer select Aboriginal programs by geography

Type of Program	Urban	Rural	First Nation	% of Total
Native studies	45.3	68.8	66.7	53.1
Elder visits	60.5	66	69.2	62.8
Regular Elder program	17.5	31.2	15.4	20.3
Visits by community members	64.1	70.1	71.8	66.4
Aboriginal language classes	27.3	28.6	71.8	32.7
Anti-racism	61	42.8	41	54.6
Native spirituality	25.6	19.8	17.9	23.3
Aboriginal crafts	56.5	46.7	56.4	54.3
Visits to Aboriginal heritage sites	55.1	32.5	28.2	46.9
Nature programs using Indigenous knowledge	34.1	31.2	30.8	33
*Total Cases	223	77	39	339

\*Total number of cases for each column and program including "no" responses.

suggest that teaching Aboriginal students to speak their own language is an essential part of decolonisation, and necessary for initiatives intended to improve education for Aboriginal peoples (for example Stairs 1995). The data in Table 4.2a reveal that participating teachers thought that community engagement, anti-racism, and cultural curricula are core components of public Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

As illustrated in Table 4.2b, the survey participants agreed/strongly agreed with the prompts “I have access to an Aboriginal consultant” (77.2%), “I have sufficient in-service on Aboriginal culture” (64.2%), and “the school has sufficient programming” to meet the general (64.2%) and social needs (53.7%) of Aboriginal students. In this respect, survey respondents expressed that schools and teachers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are addressing Aboriginal students’ needs. By comparison, the teachers in the survey had mixed feelings about the resources that were available to meet the needs of all students, and about the adequacy of in-service that had been offered on Aboriginal students’ needs. For example, 47.8% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed compared to 32.9% who disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement “I have sufficient in-service on Aboriginal students needs.” Further, 47.2% of participants strongly agreed/agreed compared to 36.8% who disagreed/strongly disagreed with the phrase “the school has sufficient resources to meet the needs of students.” As shown in Table 4.2b, the educators in the survey reported that they do not have enough resources to meet students’ needs or adequate in-service seminars on Aboriginal students’ needs.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Aboriginal education initiatives in Saskatchewan require that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students be exposed to the history, knowledge, and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples (Saskatchewan learning 2005a). Further, school districts and teachers have some degree of autonomy in how they meet the requirements of Aboriginal education. For example, educators may vary course content according to local students’ needs through the adaptive dimension of the curriculum (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992; Saskatchewan Learning 2007f). As reflected by Table 4.2c,

Table 4.2 Aboriginal Education Initiatives and Resources cont...

4.2b. Teachers' perspectives on Aboriginal education resources

Question	Strongly Agree/Agree	Uncertain	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	N/A
I have access to an Aboriginal consultant	77.2	8.9	12.7	1.2
I have sufficient in-service on Aboriginal students' needs	47.8	18.7	32.9	.6
I have sufficient in-service on Aboriginal culture	64.2	14	19.7	1.2
School has sufficient resources to meet the needs of students	47.2	15.4	36.8	.6
resources to meet the needs of Aboriginal students	42.2	23.2	33	1.5
programming to meet needs of Aboriginal students	64.2	14	19.7	2.1
programming to meet the social needs of Aboriginal stu.	53.7	22.1	22.4	1.8
Aboriginal stu. have learning difficulties because of culture	41.7	27	30	1.2

4.2c. Aboriginal education initiatives

Question	Extensively	Moderate Amount	A Little	Not At All	Uncertain/Do Not Know
I modified my teaching for Aboriginal students	21.8	48	23.3	4.5	2.4
The district requires new content for Aboriginal students	5.8	23.9	21.8	36.7	11.8
The district/school requires new techniques for Aboriginal students	2.7	17.5	25.1	44.4	10.3
I feel competent to determine what is best for the students I teach	39.9	48	9.6	1.8	.6
I consult parents and Aboriginal community members about curriculum	5.2	22	25.6	42.7	4.6
Aboriginal students' needs and interests are the same as other students' needs and interests	18.5	40.1	27.1	10.9	3.3

just over a third of survey respondents stated that their school district does not (36.7%) require new content for Aboriginal students, while just over a fifth of participants reported that their school district requires a little (21.8%), or a moderate amount (23.9%). Further, participating educators were most likely to report that they modified their teaching only a moderate amount (48% of all participants who responded), compared to those who indicated they modified their teaching for Aboriginal students either extensively (21.8%), a little (23.3%), or not at all (4.5%) (Table 4.2c). The data in Table 4.2c show that survey participants thought that their school districts require some, but not fundamental changes to course content and instruction to meet the requirements of Aboriginal education.

The data in Table 4.2b and 4.2c lend support to the position of many scholars writing about Aboriginal education who assert that the involvement of community members in learning facilitates the accurate identification of students' and families' needs, and clear communication between Aboriginal communities and teachers about local culture (Mackay and Myles 1995; Saskatchewan Education 2000; Saskatchewan 2001; Saskatchewan Learning 2007a). As revealed in Table 4.2c, just under half of the educators in the survey indicated that "I feel moderately competent to determine what is best" for my students while just over one-third said that "I feel extensively competent" in this regard. As illustrated in Table 4.3a, the survey respondents stated that they obtained most of their education on Aboriginal people and their culture from informal learning as opposed to university level or other accredited training in Native studies, Aboriginal language, or cross cultural studies. By comparison to the confidence reported by teachers in the survey regarding their ability to determine what is best for students and their lack of formal training on Aboriginal culture, the data in Table 4.2b suggest that survey participants were unsure about Aboriginal students' needs. The data in Table 4.2b and 4.2c reflect that educators in the sample were reliant on Aboriginal communities to identify students' needs, and to accurately interpret and include local Aboriginal culture in schooling.

Table 4.3 Aboriginal Education Initiatives and Teachers' Work and Training

4.3a Extent to which teachers have participated in select training and in-service opportunities

Type	Extensively	Moderate Amount	A Little	Not At All
University Native studies	11.9	20.4	16.3	51.4
Other Native studies	4.6	15.4	23.9	56.1
Aboriginal language training	2.3	4.2	12.4	81
Other Aboriginal language training	2.6	4.6	18	74.8
University cross cultural	7.3	24.4	34.6	33.7
In-service Native studies	9.7	26.4	32.7	31.1
In-service on Aboriginal social issues	7.1	33.5	36.3	23
In-service on Aboriginal students	7.7	35	36.2	21.1
Personal reading on Aboriginal issues	15	38.3	35.9	10.8

4.3b. Please comment on how, if at all, *your own teaching* has been affected by the introduction of Aboriginal education programs and services?

Themes	# of resp. (N = 308)	% of total	Rank by order of first response*
Personal/professional development	72	23.4	1
Promotes cultural understanding	53	17.2	2
Little to no impact on class (by subject or practice)	46	14.9	3
Integrated into current curriculum/pedagogy	28	9.1	5
More resources/resource people available	26	8.4	4
Increased community involvement in class	21	6.8	6
Boosted Aboriginal students' self-esteem	16	5.2	8
Used as an add on/students miss regular programming	15	4.9	7
Practice inclusion of all cultures	13	4.2	6
Extra work/increased preparation time	7	2.3	9
Not enough time with regular demands/preparation	6	1.9	9
Reduced racial tension/solved inequity	4	1.3	10
Less work	1	.3	11

\*Ordered according to the first theme mentioned (excludes multiple responses by the same educator)

Despite significant successes in Aboriginal education across Canada, representatives of First Nations and governments argue that more could be done to accelerate progress toward the improvement of education for Aboriginal people (Assembly of First Nations 2006; Saskatchewan Learning 2005a; Auditor General of Canada 2004). The survey participants were asked, through a series of open-ended questions, to identify key successes and challenges in their work to improve education for Aboriginal children and youth. As shown in Table 4.3b, survey respondents revealed that Aboriginal education initiatives had affected their teaching by promoting “personal/professional development” and “cultural understanding,” and/or they had “little to no impact on class.” By comparison, participating teachers were least likely to mention that Aboriginal education programs and services had affected their teaching by reducing “racial tension” or solving “inequality” (Table 4.3b). The data in Table 4.3b reveal that survey participants believed that Aboriginal education initiatives had, in many cases improved teachers’ and students’ understanding of Aboriginal culture, but in other instances they had not changed classes.

Scholars generally agree that social phenomena, such as instructional techniques (Stairs 1995) and socioeconomic status (MacKay and Myles 1995) have a bearing on students’ educational outcomes. Participating educators were asked to consider “what major factors in your school facilitate the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children/youth.” As presented in Table 4.4a, the survey participants most often discussed Aboriginal initiatives, resources, and staff commitment, and least often mentioned expectations of students and meeting basic needs. Based on the data in Table 4.4a, it appears that survey respondents made a distinction between, on the one hand, Aboriginal education initiatives and educators’ commitment, and on the other hand, expectations of students and the provision of social care to Aboriginal students and their families. As shown in Table 4.4a, participating teachers reported that Aboriginal education and educators’ attitudes, factors internal to their schools facilitate educational improvement for Aboriginal students.

Table 4.4 Factors Related to the Achievement of Educational Improvement for Aboriginal Children/Youth

4.4a. In your view what major factors *in your school facilitate* the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children/youth?

Themes	# (N = 455)	% of total	Rank*
Aboriginal consultant/resources/in-service/programming	123	27	1
Staff commitment/pedagogy/cultural inclusion	112	24.6	2
First Nation staff/anti-racism/positive role models	59	13	3
Enough funding/district and school mandate	44	9.7	5
Community co-operation-school/Aboriginal representative	41	9	6
Parent involvement/education awareness	40	8.8	4
Basic necessities for community members/home situation	20	4.4	7
None	9	2	8
High expectations of students	7	1.5	9

4.4b. In your view, what major factors *in your school inhibit* the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children/youth?

Themes	# (N = 416)	% of total	Rank*
Parent attitude (not involved)/lack of support from home	73	17.5	2
Funding/lack of time/class and school size/teacher turn-over	65	15.6	1
Curriculum/few Aboriginal programs/ not enough in-service	61	14.7	3
Socio-economic status/lack of attendance/transient families	59	14.2	4
Student culture/substance abuse/attitude/pregnancy	47	11.3	5
Teachers lack of cultural understanding/skills/pedagogy	44	10.6	5
Racism/few Aboriginal teachers/few positive role models	35	8.4	6
None	25	6	5
Too easy on Aboriginal students	8	1.9	7

\*Rank by order of first response: Ordered according to the first theme mentioned (excludes multiple responses by the same educator)



Aboriginal education literature addresses the connection between residential schools, educators' attempts to generate parental involvement in and support for learning, and the real challenges that many Native families face in their attempts to increase their involvement in education (Mackay and Myles 1995; Stairs 1995). The survey participants were prompted "what major factors in your school inhibit the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children/youth". As reflected in Table 4.4b, participating educators regularly focused on a lack of parental support, working conditions, and availability of teacher training opportunities. In contrast, the survey respondents rarely mentioned low expectations of Aboriginal students, racism, and too few Aboriginal educators. As illustrated in Tables 4.4a and 4.4b, participating teachers listed a lack of parental involvement and support for learning, and poor working conditions as major factors inside their schools that inhibit the improvement of education for Aboriginal peoples.

Debates regarding the functions of schools and families and their intersection with the task of education are ongoing, but some scholars argue (Riordan 2004) that these social institutions share responsibility for students' educational outcomes (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). Survey participants were urged to identify "what major factors in addition to the school facilitate the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children/youth". As noted in Table 4.4c, participating educators most often listed Aboriginal programming/cultural activities, parental support, and community involvement. By contrast, the survey respondents least often cited employment, community resources, and meeting the basic needs of home and community. The data in Table 4.4c reveal that participating teachers identified parental and community engagement with education as major factors outside their schools that facilitate the improvement of education for Aboriginal students.

Discussion about the roles of teachers, parents, and students in educational improvement are situated within the context of more general thinking about the individual and structural sources of social failure (Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003). Individual explanations of

Table 4.4 Factors Related to the Achievement of Educational Improvement for Aboriginal Children/Youth cont...

4.4c. In your view, what major factors *in addition to* the school facilitate the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children/youth?

Themes	# of resp. (N = 435)	% of total	Rank by order of first response*
Aboriginal programming/cultural activities/anti-racism	68	15.6	4
Parental support/involvement	67	15.4	1
Community involvement in education	63	14.5	2
Community extra curricular programs	59	13.6	3
Funding for school programs from social services etc...	58	13.3	5
Positive role models/values-beliefs/motivation/attendance	52	11.9	6
Leadership from district/band	36	8.3	7
Employment/post-secondary training opportunities/ resources in community	30	6.9	8
Meeting basic necessities of home and community	1	.2	9
None	1	.2	9

4.4d. In your view, what major factors *in addition to* the school inhibit the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children/youth?

Themes	# of resp. (N = 415)	% of total	Rank by order of first response*
Attitudes-values of family-community/parent substance abuse/support	135	32.5	1
Socio-economic status/transient family/attendance	88	21.2	2
Racism (school, community, curriculum)/no role models	59	14.2	3
Life-style/substance abuse/attitude	56	13.5	4
Poor management/culture/lack of tough justice	22	5.3	6
Lack of cultural understanding (students and teachers)	19	4.6	5
Funding to school/reserve education/extra curricular	18	4.3	7
Crime (prostitution and gangs)	13	3.1	8
None	5	1.2	8

\*Ordered according to the first theme mentioned (excludes multiple responses by the same educator)

failure are considered deficient by many critical scholars (for example Schissel 1997) because they blame the victim as opposed to recognising the influence of constraining social structures on students' educational outcomes. To complete the open-ended section of the survey, participating educators were asked "what major factors in addition to the school inhibit the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children/youth". As shown in Table 4.4d, the survey participants most often discussed family attitudes and addictions and socioeconomic status, and least often mentioned issues such as crime or educational funding. The data in Table 4.4d indicate that participating teachers highlighted parents' attitudes and addictions, and socioeconomic status as major factors outside their schools that inhibit the improvement of education for Aboriginal pupils.

#### 4.2.2 Working with the survey responses

Literature reviewed in Chapter Two regarding the improvement of education for Aboriginal students invests a great deal of faith in the idea that changing school environments, including how teachers work will result in the achievement of the improvement of educational attainment for Aboriginal children and youth (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). This assumption is reflected by participating educators' survey responses in Tables 4.1c, 4.1d, and in 4.1a. In contrast, the data in Tables 4.2b, 4.2c, and 4.4a are more relevant to a discussion about how teachers' work has changed within the context of Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Specifically, the data in these tables highlight the ways in which teachers were responding to governments' demands to improve Aboriginal peoples' educational attainment rates, and also to meet Aboriginal students' and families' needs.

The data in Tables 4.2c, 4.2b, and 4.3a reveal that the survey respondents were confident in their ability to determine what is best for students, but also that they lacked sufficient knowledge of Aboriginal students' needs. The data in Table 4.3a also reveal that the survey respondents acquired most of their information about local cultures from community

members, and learned about Indigenous peoples through informal learning. The survey data in these tables lend support to the conclusion that educators working in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan and Manitoba were reliant on community members for information about local cultures and Aboriginal students' needs. Further, the survey data in these tables are evidence that educators in Saskatchewan and Manitoba may be re-shaping their professionalism, in part to adjust to their lack of cultural knowledge about local Native peoples.

The Ministry of Education (Saskatchewan Learning 2005b) and the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Learning 2005a) released reports during the course of this research which suggest that some progress is being made to develop and sustain the involvement of Aboriginal parents and community members in schooling. Consistent with the claims made by the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan, survey respondents believed that schools and educators are managing, to some extent, to authentically actualise cultural curricula in the classroom. However, survey participants also reported that they need more in-service on Aboriginal students' needs and additional support from parents and community members to improve students' educational performances. The data in Tables 4.4a, 4.4b, and 4.4c indicate that survey respondents believed that much work remains to be done to achieve sufficient parental engagement and support for learning. The data in the open-ended questions reveal that the survey respondents thought that barriers to increasing parental involvement stem from a combination of structural constraints, for example socioeconomic status, and individual behaviour such as parental attitudes.

The survey data in Tables 4.2a and 4.3b support the conclusion that progress had been made prior to the survey in terms of the introduction of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan and Manitoba more generally. With regards to changes in the curriculum, the survey responses prompt concern about the degree to which Aboriginal people who live off reserve have access to language courses. Language figures central in processes of decolonisation, and is one basis

on which First Nations will maintain their distinctiveness within contemporary Canadian society. Data from the focus groups are examined in the remainder of this chapter, starting with a discussion of the urban focus group data in section 4.3, as a means to prepare for a comparison of data from the focus groups, with the survey and interview data in Chapter Five.

#### 4.3 The urban focus group

The urban school, a designated Community School, is located in a new or refurbished building and is well cared for, inviting, and bright. The urban focus group participants indicated in 2003-2005 that they serve a primarily Aboriginal student population from families of mostly a lower socioeconomic status. The urban focus group respondents appeared exhausted and they were thoughtful in their response to the research.

##### 4.3.1 Aboriginal education

The urban focus group participants referred to the requirements of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan, such as cultural inclusion (Saskatchewan Education 2000) when they presented their concerns about teachers' knowledge. The data excerpt TUS-66<sup>4</sup> illustrates the sentiment of many urban focus group respondents who asserted that Native content in Saskatchewan's curriculum need to be fully developed and the messages clarified. A few of the teachers present for the urban focus group appeared preoccupied with the ability of some educators to accurately interpret and authentically include Aboriginal culture in schooling. The group interview quote TUS-68 reflects the conclusion of several participating urban instructors who reported that urban schools in Saskatchewan require more teachers with knowledge of Aboriginal culture. Based on TUS-66 and TUS-68, one might conclude that some of the educators who responded to the urban focus group would probably agree that the recruitment of instructors with training on Aboriginal culture, would likely help urban schools meet the requirements of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan by facilitating cultural inclusion.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the label reads "the urban site-excerpt 66"; see page sixty one in Chapter Three for details regarding the data labeling system.

RESPONDENT: [discussion about Aboriginal content in the curriculum] Many are unsure of the message. Curriculum needs work (TUS-66).

RESPONDENT: We need more teachers who have knowledge of Native culture and language (TUS-68).

The School Plus consultation group suggests that the stigma attached to Community Schooling in Saskatchewan stems from the assumption that most students attending Community Schools are from families of a lower socioeconomic status (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). In contrast, the data extract TUS-72 presents the feeling of a few urban focus group participants who argued that the negative ideas about Community Schools are rooted in racism. Further, the focus group selection TUS-74 exemplifies the deduction of these urban educators who also concluded that uninformed people who live in poverty are angry and lash out at Native people. Given the thoughts of teachers who participated in the urban focus group, as illustrated in TUS-72 and TUS-74, and the information in the School Plus documents, one might ask whether uninformed parents' impressions of Community Schooling in Saskatchewan stem from racism, socioeconomic status, or both.

RESPONDENT: Community Schools have a negative reputation. There are racist stereotypes about Community Schools . . . (TUS-72).

RESPONDENT: Many uninformed people, many are angry, many live in poverty and they vent their anger towards Aboriginal people. They need to be aware and to talk about this with the community (TUS-74).

The data passage TUS-72 describes the assertion of a few urban focus group discussants who noted that, despite the negative connotations associated with the label "Community Schools" many parents and students show interest in their services. Further, these urban educators also reported that the range of programs offered, especially cultural initiatives, make their school more rather than less attractive to parents and students. The group interview fragment TUS-30 shows the response of most participating urban instructors who highlighted the success of the adult education, and cultural and social programming in their school. In

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the label reads "the urban site-excerpt 66"; see page 54 in Chapter Three for details regarding the data labeling system.

addition, staff present for the urban focus group attributed to their school programming, improved relations between staff and parents as well as students' preparedness for learning. The majority of educators at the urban focus group suggested that the results of community education are overly positive, and bear no resemblance to the negative assumptions uninformed people have about Community Schools in Saskatchewan.

RESPONDENT: . . . parents send their children here and many students from other schools have expressed interest in attending because of the programs we offer (TUS-72).

RESPONDENT: Families and Schools Together (FAST) was a success. This program helped improve home-school relations and supported families building communities amongst themselves (TUS-30).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Aboriginal education strategy in Saskatchewan places a great deal of emphasis on fostering parental engagement with schooling (Saskatchewan Learning 2005a). Many of the urban focus group respondents confirmed that families are more involved in teaching and learning because of social programs, such as "Families and Schools Together" than ever before. These urban instructors further argued that parents in their school solidified their position as role models for their children by participating in learning. The data section TUS-43 reveals the thinking of some participating urban teachers who suggested that parental involvement in education improves the scholastic achievement of youth. For this reason, a few of the respondents to the urban focus group went further and argued that adult education is fundamental to achieving success in Aboriginal education. The interview segment TUS-70 relays the reaction of almost all the instructors present for the urban focus group who recommended that staff take part in adult education by asking families to teach them about Native culture.

RESPONDENT: The students are good at [type of Aboriginal language] but they need to use it everyday [parents can help achieve this by participating]. This new program, the parent obviously feels positive about [type of Aboriginal language] but lost it in the past (TUS-43).

RESPONDENT: We need to educate ourselves and ask families to teach us about [Aboriginal] culture (TUS-70).

The data excerpt TUS-63 represents the reply of several urban focus group participants who believed that students of mixed ethnicity are uncomfortable with Aboriginal culture in course material. Further, these educators declared that students of mixed ancestries do not often self-identify as Native and have little to no knowledge of Indigenous culture. The group interview selection TUS-76 conveys the argument of many respondents to the urban focus group who viewed cross-cultural situations as an opportunity to address similarities and differences, and an occasion to teach students of mixed heritage about their backgrounds. One educator present at the urban focus group explained that their school promotes cultural diversity and resolves fundamental differences between members of the school-community by emphasizing shared values. Consistent with literature on Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Learning 2005a), some participating urban teachers told the researcher that cultural diversity and inclusion are aspects of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan, and that they exist in their school.

RESPONDENT: There are many Métis children with self-identity problems. When you offer Aboriginal content they often feel uncomfortable. These students are not often visible but they are there. They do not really self-identify (TUS-63).

RESPONDENT: The focus is on similarities rather than difference. There is a respect for difference and connections are made based on similar moral values (TUS-76).

The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000) and the federal government (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002b, 2007, 2008; Canada and Saskatchewan 2005) suggest that they intend to improve education with Aboriginal peoples by making resources for cultural programming available to schools and teachers. Many of the urban focus group discussants felt that more cultural resources are available than ever before, but Saskatchewan's urban Elder program should be fortified. The focus group quote TUS-70 imparts the reflection of participating instructors who expressed concern about the ratio of Elders to schools in their division. The majority of educators present for the urban focus group were adamant that urban schools need larger honoraria and more



support to help Elders participate in schooling. The data extract TUS-71 reveals that these urban teachers also talked about the varying amounts and different types of knowledge that Elders have about their culture. Participants in the urban focus group agreed that adult education should be offered to Elders as an aspect of their involvement in schools.

RESPONDENT: There are [too few] Elders in the whole system and they each have [too many] schools to cover (TUS-70).

RESPONDENT: We need an Elder. Elders require money, honorariums, transportation, and etc... Not all Elders have the same knowledge. They need training about some aspects of Aboriginal culture, teaching, knowledge of language . . . (TUS-71).

#### 4.3.2 Family

In agreement with literature on barriers to educational success (Riordan 2004; Saskatchewan Education 1996; MacKay and Myles 1995), educators from the urban focus group recognized that families who struggle to meet basic needs are not always prepared to participate in learning. Further, these instructors described family dynamics in their school as flowing from highs prompted by relief that needs have been met to lows because basic needs cannot be met. The focus group passage TUS-93 denotes the belief of most urban focus group respondents who expressed concern about asking children in these situations to meet educational requirements or even to be interested in subjects, such as math. The focus group excerpt TUS-90 communicates the thought of many participating urban teachers who stressed the importance of delivering support in a fashion that ensures parents and students keep their dignity intact, otherwise they may not use the services. Unlike position papers that argue for a balance between social care and expectations regarding the improvement of educational performance (Boyd 1999), staff present for the urban focus group concluded that educational improvement will not likely occur in any significant way until families are able to meet their basic needs on a continuous basis.

RESPONDENT: All children are at risk, and pushing them too much, they get overburdened in their lives and get depressed at a young age. Survival matters, not math. You need to focus on helping parents and kids and not so much on grades (TUS-93).

RESPONDENT: The problem with “help” is you often threaten people’s dignity. Yes, survival is good, but you need to do it with dignity intact. They could take things but it often embarrasses the kids and families (TUS-90).

The majority of urban focus group discussants subscribed to the integrated service model, a core component of Community Schooling (Saskatchewan Education 1996; Saskatchewan 2002), but raised concerns about the associated expanded human service mandate and the “new” schools initiative. These urban educators were concerned that the involvement of other government agencies could make their relationship with families too complex. The group interview fragment TUS-27 communicates the view of participating urban teachers who asserted that parents often feel threatened by representatives from government agencies who deal with social services. Similar to literature regarding Aboriginal parents’ concerns about education (Stairs 1995), most respondents to the urban focus group suggested that if parents fear blaming or cultural exclusion then they may not attend learning opportunities or seek help through the school. The majority of instructors present at the urban focus group underscored the need for representatives from other government departments and agencies to have a well-defined role when in the school.

RESPONDENT: The transition might be rough for the families if they feel threatened by the representative. If this did happen, we would expect a dramatic drop in attendance to events related to social services. The drop would be due to the relationship between the students and the representative (TUS-27).

Scholars writing about Aboriginal education (MacKay and Myles 1995; Battiste 2005; Monture-Angus 1995) argue that Native parents’ experiences with non-Aboriginal education often influence their views of and participation in public schooling. Other scholars similarly note that the legacy of residential schooling (Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003) and socioeconomic status (Lareau 1989) limit parents’ ability to participate in learning. The urban focus group discussants argued that urban schools in Saskatchewan are struggling to increase parental participation rates. The group interview excerpt TUS-58 presents the feeling of several participating urban instructors who argued that parents may not have access to transportation or

avoid schools because their educational experience was poor. The focus group segment TUS-36 demonstrates the outlook of a few participating urban educators who suggested that some parents may not attend school functions because they have addictions, lack parenting skills, are unhealthy, and/or fear parent blaming. In agreement with the literature, teachers from the urban focus group presented the context of their students' family life as a determinant of how educators work to improve Aboriginal students' learning, and concluded that integrated services could help families survive and prepare children to learn.

RESPONDENT: There are many reasons parents do not come in, for example transportation. Some have had a terrible experience with the education system. They have a fear of criticism (TUS-58).

RESPONDENT: It could be that they do not want to deal with their child while they are there. Some lack parenting skills, some have a dysfunctional family, others are homeless, they have health problems . . . (TUS-36).

Similar to literature on family background and learning, the urban focus group participants noted that poor family dynamics increase the number of resources required to meet the needs of children while they are in school. Participating urban educators further indicated that they adapt instructional methods to the local context of students' lives by providing time, opportunities for learning, and extra help. A few respondents to the urban focus group asserted that often the only solution for poor family dynamics is to set aside expectations about grades and help families. Several teachers at urban focus group cautioned that pushing kids, who live in such conditions too hard may make situations worse or increase students' existing depression. The data excerpt TUS-86 typifies the sentiment of instructors from the urban focus group who, consistent with at least one study on the influence of family background on learning (Lareau 1989), inferred that healthy and secure families are what make education a possibility.

RESPONDENT: They need to understand the context and the realities of student's lives. Provide opportunities for extra work. They just need extra help and extra time. Some kids need to be given medals for being here given what they are living through (TUS-86).

#### 4.3.3 Teachers' work situation

The community education model was adopted by the Ministry of Education as a broad approach for schooling in Saskatchewan, in part, to reduce the time teachers spend on non-instructional tasks, and to foster an efficient system for meeting other-than-educational needs (Saskatchewan 2001). The data quote TUS-49 epitomizes the feeling of the urban focus group respondents who reported that their school has an expanded mandate to address issues relating to poverty and health. The School Plus consultation group anticipated that professionals from other government agencies, working through schools would reduce the amount of time teachers spend on meeting students' other-than-educational needs under the expanded human service mandate (Saskatchewan 2002). The group interview selection TUS-46 shows the conclusion of many participating urban teachers who declared that they are busier despite additional help from other government professionals and community coordinators, because more people are around the school.

RESPONDENT: . . . now with a bigger mandate involving poverty, health and etc . . . (TUS-49).

RESPONDENT: . . . we are much busier and there is more help but also more people around the school (TUS-46).

Partnerships are central to the "new" schools approach which encourages government and community partners to enhance their access to families who require their services, and to reduce costs by working through schools (Saskatchewan 2002). The focus group quote TUS-47 illustrates the thought of a few educators at the urban focus group who explained that the resources received by the school to cover the expanded human service mandate were limited to select programs, such as the pre-k program. These urban instructors also talked about the lack of resources available in their school to improve teachers' effectiveness through training. The data extract TUS-34 reflects the conclusion of participating urban instructors who confirmed that efforts to increase parental involvement, a latent resource, rarely resulted in new help. These urban teachers further believed that agencies responsible for meeting needs that do not involve teaching curriculum content should commit the resources required to meet such needs. The

group interview passage TUS-8 presents the assertion of many respondents to the urban focus group who reported that the integrated model lacks full commitment from government partners. These urban discussants thought that educators were often slow in responding to meet students' needs due to the superficial involvement of their partners.

RESPONDENT: There are more teaching assistants and more money for them and more money for the pre-k program (TUS-47).

RESPONDENT: Efforts to improve these situations do not seem to draw more or different people. We have tried phone calls, draws, food and a number of other things but we still get the same people (TUS-34).

RESPONDENT: Responding immediately to a student's situation is seldom possible because there is not enough time, resources, or people to meet the demand. For example, the police officer working with our school has [too many] other schools and in this way their involvement may be perceived as superficial though it is appreciated (TUS-8).

The Community School/"new" school mandate requires that educators be engaged primarily in teaching, but also that they work as collaborators to facilitate the work of other professionals with families and students (Saskatchewan 2002). The group interview segment TUS-18 describes the assertion of many urban focus group discussants who reported that their work to meet the expanded human service mandate requires flexibility including long hours. These urban educators further depicted their work as accelerated and stated that they are unsure how long their pace of work can be sustained without additional help. A few participating urban educators acknowledged that some people reach self-fulfillment through high-pace work, but most burn-out after a short period of time. The focus group fragment TUS-52 exemplifies the argument of instructors at the urban focus group who perceived the decision making in their school as more collegial than the decision making process in traditional schools.

RESPONDENT: Some teachers and staff are already working day and night. The school has done well at helping teachers to meet their obligations and supporting them in dealing with the flexible demands of community schooling. For example, the school helped a teacher find a sitter when she needed one so that she could come to work (TUS-18).

RESPONDENT: We have lengthy staff meeting and we meet every [day] in the [time of day]. After the common day dismissal things are open for debate or discussion. Everyone has input (TUS-52).

Federal and provincial governments recognise the importance of fostering learning and working with families during the early years (Canada and Saskatchewan 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2007d). The majority of urban focus group respondents suggested that success be supported by investing not only in the early but also the middle years. The data segment TUS-94 describes the response of participating urban educators who explained that everyone needs to have reasonable expectations of teachers and students given the level of education that students are working at, and what can be achieved within one school year. A few of the instructors present for the urban focus group elaborated on the sentiment expressed by other participants in TUS-94, by stating that success should be determined based on the social situation of the child, the skills and knowledge s/he has at the start of the year, and the resources available to address the students' needs. The group interview excerpt TUS-92 shows the reaction of many respondents to the urban focus group, who thought that everyone needs to look closer at the pressure being put on teachers to improve students' educational achievements beyond what is possible in one school year, because too much pressure can be detrimental to students.

RESPONDENT: Need to slow down. Take the pressure off teachers. You can't expect a teacher, who gets a students working at a Grade two level in a Grade four class, to push them through and to have the skills developed to go into Grade five in a year (TUS-94).

RESPONDENT: Need to look at teacher expectations in terms of grades and expectations of students and teachers. Pushing kids through . . . (TUS-92).

#### 4.3.4 Working with the urban responses

Despite the emphasis that central education authorities placed on the attainment of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth, and the additional resources that governments secured to support Aboriginal education prior to 2003, urban teachers focus responses suggest that too few personnel and community volunteers were available to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal school-communities (TUS-66 and TUS-68 [page 83]; TUS-47, TUS-8, and TUS-34 [page 90]). The urban report supports the conclusion that urban educators increased the pace and duration of their work as a means to account for the context of family

life, and the lack of human resources or personnel in their school (TUS-49 and TUS-46 [page 89]; TUS-52 and TUS-18 [page 90 and 91]). The majority of urban instructors said that they are unsure how long they will be able to sustain their pace of work without additional help and resources (TUS-52 and TUS-18 [page 90 and 91]).

Participants at the urban site focused on the social context of family life in Aboriginal communities and the structural barriers that parents often confront in their efforts to meet basic needs, and to prepare their children for learning (TUS-93 and TUS-90 [page 86 and 87]; TUS-86 [page 88]). The urban case report documents the time urban staff spent supporting families to prepare students for learning, and suggests that urban educators had less time available for teaching than they had before 2003 (TUS-49 and TUS-46 [page 89]; TUS-94 and TUS-92 [page 91]; TUS-52 and TUS-18 [page 90 and 91]). Almost all the teachers from the urban site indicated that governments and schools need to help build the capacity of families and communities to prepare students for learning so they can be actively engaged in, and supportive of educators' attempts to improve education for Aboriginal children and youth (TUS-47, TUS-8, and TUS-34 [page 90]; TUS-86 [page 88]; TUS 36 and TUS-58 [page 88]; TUS-70 and TUS-71 [page 86]).

The urban responses suggest that the "lion's share" of urban instructors felt that expectations for educational improvement are too high and need to be grounded in what is actually possible, given the resources educators have at their disposal, Aboriginal students' social and educational situation, and the length of the academic year (TUS-93 and TUS-90 [page 86 and 87]; TUS-94 and TUS-92 [page 91]). These urban respondents also noted that the Aboriginal education program needs additional development including clarifying the curriculum for teachers, obtaining more teachers with knowledge of Aboriginal culture, increasing the number of Elders and funding for Elders (TUS-66 and TUS-68 [page 83]; TUS-70 and TUS-71 [page 86]). Prior to comparing the analytic points from the urban focus discussion with the survey findings, conclusions from the data collected at the other focus group sites are

developed, beginning with a review of responses from the rural focus group in the next part, section 4.4 of this thesis.

#### 4.4 The rural focus group

The rural school is in a small and well maintained building and teachers serve students from a number of surrounding communities. The rural focus group participants reported in 2003-2005 that they provide educational services to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The participating educators were enthusiastic about the research and discussed the issues at length.

##### 4.4.1 Aboriginal education

Aboriginal education initiatives are intended to change both the school and responsiveness to students' and families' complete needs (Saskatchewan 2002; Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994b; Saskatchewan Education 1996, 2000). The group interview selection TRS-132 conveys the thinking of participating rural teachers who believed that schools have the curriculum they need for Aboriginal students. The data selections TRS-129 to TRS-131 relay the outlook of rural focus group respondents who argued that additional investments in the curriculum will not improve Aboriginal students' educational outcomes, because change starts in the home. Unlike Saskatchewan's focus on both schools and basic needs, educators present for the rural focus group felt that Aboriginal students' educational success is best supported by changing students' home situations.

RESPONDENT: It starts in the home [educational improvement] (TRS-129<sup>6</sup>).  
INTERVIEWER: So it is not curriculum? (TRS-130) RESPONDENT: It is not the curriculum (TRS-131). We could have the curriculum we need and more, and the fact is we do. We could also attend training course after training course but . . . (TRS-132) . . . and resources, all the books on the shelves, all the programs in the computers . . . (TRS-133).

The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan has a history of promoting both Aboriginal and multicultural education within the broader context of cultural inclusion (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994a; Saskatchewan Education 1998). The focus group

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<sup>6</sup> The label reads "the rural site-excerpt 129."



extract TRS-190 communicates the reply of participating rural instructors who stated that their school places emphasis on Aboriginal culture daily and at special events. The data passage TRS-185 imparts the reflection of some rural focus group discussants who suggested that they rarely have time to cover the Aboriginal unit independently, but cover it in combination with other course material. Consistent with Saskatchewan's promotion of cultural inclusion and despite challenges, teachers at the rural focus group noted that they included Aboriginal culture in learning.

RESPONDENT: We always have these things that we have to fill out . . . all the things that you have done . . . that have . . . to do with Native culture, and well that's the only culture . . . we put any focus on . . . When you do have special events, you can bet that is the culture they are focused on, no other culture (TRS-190).

RESPONDENT: The [#] unit in the grade [#] curriculum deals with First Nations content. However, let's be realistic, how often do teachers get to the [#] unit? I think what has happened in previous years is that the unit is incorporated. If you incorporate it, it is there but did you get to it? (TRS-185)

The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan encourages teachers to adapt the curriculum to local students' needs within a reasonable degree given that substantive change constitutes alternative programming (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992). The group interview segment TRS-208 typifies the view of many participating rural educators who discussed challenges associated with improving Aboriginal students' educational outcomes. The rural focus group participants stated that Aboriginal students in their school are more likely than the non-Aboriginal pupils to have gaps in learning. Further, these rural instructors noted that they address cracks-in-education and behavioural dilemmas with a program called Structured for Success. The majority of teachers present for the rural focus group reported that alternative programs allow educators to be responsive to students' needs by substantively increasing Native content, incorporating aspects of Aboriginal cultural practice, and additional one-on-one attention.

RESPONDENT: . . . one of the things we have is the option of incorporating more Aboriginal content. This is especially important in the Structured for Success program where, unfortunately, all but two are Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students are more likely than the

other children attending our school to have major gaps in their learning. We incorporate more Aboriginal content in the Structured for Success program (TRS-208).

The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan and the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee makes a distinction between Aboriginal and anti-racism education (Saskatchewan Education 1998, 2000). The data excerpt TRS-179 epitomizes the view of several instructors from the rural focus group who reported that teaching Aboriginal curricula is problematic in their school due to the tension between Native and non-Native students. These rural educators further explained that students bring stereotypes and other misinformation to school which they have learned from their parents and relatives. The focus group quote TRS-173 illustrates the sentiment of participating rural staff who said that students and parents react to courses like French language and Native studies by arguing that they or their child respectively, should not have to take the course. All of the rural focus group respondents deduced that attempting to teach Aboriginal curricula in “racially” tense contexts often leaves teachers managing conflict between “racial” groups. Consistent with the literature, a few rural instructors considered solutions to the problem of “racial” conflict in their community, and in doing so made a distinction between Aboriginal and anti-racism education.

RESPONDENT: I enjoyed talking to the kids about the facts from residential schooling . . . I said well look at this school, 40% of these kids never went home afterwards because they died of disease . . . Now, if you were a parent, would you send your kid to that school? [the speaker relays the student’s response] “Well, if I’m looking at that, no” . . . So we had amazing discussion in there, but if Aboriginal kids were in the class, I probably would not have had those same discussions. They would not have gone the same way [because of “racial” tension] (TRS-179).

RESPONDENT: They get angry [the speaker relays the student’s response]. “Why do I have to take Native studies? I am not Native.” That is the argument we get. Parents have actually asked that their child be excused from the class (TRS-173).

#### 4.4.2 Family

One scholar writing about the influence of teachers and parents on educational achievement argues that schools and families, at least in the United States, are equal determinants of students’ educational performances (Riordan 2004). The group interview

selection TRS-90 reflects the feeling of the rural focus group participants who believed that parental involvement in teaching and learning is important. Participating rural educators discussed family factors that they associate with success including economic stability, reading and interacting with children prior to school, promoting positive attitudes about education, and developing long term goals. In contrast, all of the instructors at the rural focus group viewed family characteristics such as poverty, lack of parenting skills, mobility, prejudice, and other consequences of colonialism as barriers to education. Consistent with one author's (Riordan 2004) interpretation of research findings about education reform more generally, teachers present for the rural focus group thought that any concern about the education system should be balanced with an equal focus on the family.

RESPONDENT: I think what we are talking about involve two main factors . . . One part is family, where kids are coming from and, the second, accountability in the education system. We cannot take one away from the other. I would like to say, oh it is everybody else's fault, but let's look at our education system, let's see where we are going with it. I think the education system plays a role as well . . . and again, of course, the family (TRS-90).

The School Plus consultation group identifies transience and poor attendance as several factors that inhibit the improvement of students' educational performances in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan 2002). The data quotes TRS-41, TRS-49, and TRS-82 present rural educators' assertions with respect to the prevalence of school shopping in their area, and the turn-over of students in their school. The information in TRS-41 and TRS-49 exemplifies the conclusion of many rural focus group discussants who relayed evidence that students in their area were school shopping. A number of participating rural teachers also discussed transience and the difficulties that stem from families who move once or several times during the school year. Many of the respondents to the rural focus group expressed concern that transience is enhancing the consequences of poor attendance and cracks-in-learning. In agreement with the School Plus consultation group, participants in the rural focus group felt that parents should keep their children in one school for an entire year in order to improve education outcomes.

RESPONDENT: The children are making the decisions. They tell the adults what school they are going to attend (TRS-41).

RESPONDENT: This fall we had one student that had registered in . . . [more than two] . . . schools within . . . [more than three] . . . days, the first week in . . . (TRS-49).

RESPONDENT: We are seeing some success with a number of families [keeping them in the school for a full year]. It is a huge challenge and ultimately the family's decision if they move during or after the school year (TRS-82).

The Aboriginal Provincial Advisory Committee and the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan list parental engagement and support for learning as key to success in Aboriginal learning (Saskatchewan Education 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2005a, 2005b). The group interview passage TRS-81 describes the situation of some rural educators who said that they run a number of pull-out groups to address education gaps and behavioural difficulties, but the success of these groups largely depends on parental support. The focus group extract TRS-84 reveals the thought of many rural teachers who asserted that some parents in their school are not making sure that their children complete their homework. All of the rural focus group respondents concluded that obtaining parental support for and involvement in learning remains a challenge despite increases in parental support for education overall.

RESPONDENT: And there is a program in place at the high school to try this. We have a [type of alternative program] program there, and there have been kids that have benefited . . . But we don't have enough backing from home to keep them there, to keep on top of them to make sure that they continue to put the effort in and it's like banging your head against the wall . . . (TRS-81).

RESPONDENT: It can be very difficult . . . and with some of the parents if I have students who have homework, even if it's just a few questions, if the parents at home aren't willing to say: Do you have homework? Did you get your homework done? The kids come back the next day, it's not done, they don't care . . . Well how do I move on and continue teaching if we haven't finished the stuff from yesterday? And so we fall farther and farther behind because the homework's not being done (TRS-84).

Scholars writing about Aboriginal education equity argue that the consequences of colonialism in Canada often influence Aboriginal peoples' initial or firm conclusions about non-Aboriginal education and teachers (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Monture-Angus 1995). The data segments TRS-99 and TRS-150 reveal the feeling of several rural

instructors who asserted that trust between parents and teachers is central to communication between the home and school. The focus group excerpt TRS-169 conveys the thought of one rural focus group discussant who noted that dilemmas relating to trust and difference in their school are linked to community conflict and tension between students. Similar to Aboriginal education literature, participating rural staff suggested that “racial” conflict, such as that which exists in their community, set the context for developing relationships with parents.

RESPONDENT: . . . a lot of the trust issues are that the parents do not trust us . . . I think there are parents that do not have a lot of trust in the school because they certainly do not trust their Elders, at least not in this area (TRS-99).

RESPONDENT: I guess it is a trust issue . . . struggling with this young man . . . he was not doing well and I contacted the home . . . And we’d gone back and forth, this is what we need to do, we did a homework book, and then all of a sudden I got a note in the homework book, she would be emailing me . . . and she told her whole life story . . . They had sat down and talked about goals that they wanted for him, and everything kind of clicked into place . . . And that felt good (TRS-150).

RESPONDENT: If you look at the two groups obviously they are playing the old stereotypes against each other . . . Both are guilty of it . . . many of the students you have got here now their parents went to school with many of the First Nations parents and there was that conflict there. It is a trickle-down effect and they are angry and they do not know why . . . that is frustrating because not only now are you trying to help everyone learn and try to help everybody to be successful, you are now in a position where . . . you have got to be some sort of counsellor (TRS-169).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples (1996) solidified existing pressures on governments across Canada (MacKay and Myles 1995) to improve the educational attainment rates of Aboriginal peoples. The data fragment TRS-111 shows the outlook of rural focus group participants who argued that the majority of families in their community are struggling to meet basic needs. The group interview segment TRS-84 typifies the belief of participating rural teachers who agreed with one rural educator who asserted that many parents in the community lack parenting skills. The focus group excerpts TRS-92, TRS-95, and TRS-96 denote the sentiment of a few rural instructors who referred to the consequences of residential schooling and their connection with families’ challenges. Participating rural staff agreed that notions of educational success in Saskatchewan are unreasonable, because they do not reflect the

context of local family life and the need for stable families in order to improve Aboriginal students' educational attainment rates.

RESPONDENT: . . . there are a lot of supportive parents . . . you know they will talk to you and agree with you and, but . . . They have so many needs. When they actually get home . . . they don't have time for it or they don't have the interest . . . (TRS-111).

RESPONDENT: . . . if not actually just with homework but parent support when other activities are involved. Kids staying up until three o'clock in the morning . . . To do basically do whatever they want . . . I have had students where they're not functioning because they haven't had sleep, they haven't had breakfast, so we get a mat out and that child needs to sleep because there's no point trying to make them learn . . . They can't concentrate, they can't focus. Not all parents are like that, we have had some very supportive parents . . . but it's very frustrating when the majority of them are not helping to get . . . their child farther along and to help us fill the gaps (TRS-84).

RESPONDENT: In my mind it is a breakdown in society due to . . . [colonialism] . . . and things like the residential schooling . . . It did a huge amount of damage . . . (TRS-92) . . . a lost generation of parents . . . (TRS-95). The generation is . . . lacking the parenting skills (TRS-96).

The rural focus group discussants drew attention to the delivery of other-than-educational services through schools within the context of the "new" schools or expanded human service mandate (Saskatchewan 2002). Many of the rural teachers discussed the logic of School Plus and the idea that parents will become more involved in learning when it helps them to meet their families' immediate basic needs. All of the respondents to the rural focus group recognized that partnerships will likely improve parents' participation and contribute to meeting students' needs. Although, these rural focus group participants cautioned that schools need partners to support the "new" school endeavour with funding and workers if integrated services are to be effective. The data quotes TRS-257, TRS-258, and TRS-260 illustrate participating rural educators' perception that other government partners are not involved in the expanded human service mandate or integrated delivery of services in substantive ways.

RESPONDENT: The only way it is going to help us here is if we can get other agencies involved. It is not, we are a School Plus now. It is just that we do not have the other agencies . . . (TRS-257). Social workers are supposed to come in and justice . . . (TRS-258). OTHER PARTICIPANT: People. Let's get some people in here (TRS-260).

#### 4.4.3 Teachers' work situation

Similar to respondents' views expressed in a study conducted on the intensification of teachers' work in Canada (Naylor and Schaefer 2002) the rural focus group respondents were equally concerned about the variety and types of tasks which they are asked to perform compared to the number of hours they work. The group interview passage TRS-216 reflects the thought of participating rural instructors who noted that the amount of time spent meeting students' other-than-schooling needs has increased leaving less time for teaching. The focus group segment TRS-261 presents the feeling of many participating rural teachers who felt that students bring a range of issues to school which teachers are not trained to solve. The data fragment TRS-231 exemplifies the conclusion of several rural focus group discussants who explained that students with additional needs increase the number of meetings for staff.

RESPONDENT: You hear the comments, "I thought I was a teacher," "I wish I had time to teach," over and over again in this school (TRS-216).

RESPONDENT: . . . to have a counsellor that comes once a week does not cut it . . . I spent an hour and a half with a student today while my TA took my class . . . I needed to be a social worker/counsellor before a student went to her counselling appointment because of a meltdown she had in school. I did not teach at all [during that period] (TRS-261).

RESPONDENT: Well and the kind of students that you have in your class. As a resource teacher, I mean you have more meetings automatically. That is, compared to a classroom teacher with three or four kids who need more attention. Teachers are going to end up with lots of meetings (TRS-231).

Instructors present for the rural focus group said that they are able to address differential learning needs if students are prepared to learn, but this is often a difficult stage to reach because schools lack human resource personnel. The group interview excerpt TRS-77 describes the assertion of several rural focus group participants who stated that many students in their school have large gaps in learning, and in some cases teachers cannot help a student because the school lacks resources. The focus group selection TRS-75 shows the response of many rural respondents who noted that their school has enough material resources, but lacks human resources. The data quote TRS-36 reveals the reaction of a few participating rural instructors who argued that their school is trying to address the need for more teachers with

additional teaching assistants. Participants in the rural focus group felt that the number of educators in their school was insufficient to close learning gaps, and predicted that a shortage of resources would mean, if left for too long, that many students would not be able to close their gaps in learning by grade twelve.

RESPONDENT: I think with what [name of participant] mentioned about one of her students is important. We have all had that kind of student . . . The resource that it takes to get that child up to speed is far beyond what any of us have at our disposal. So the problem is compounded over the years yet we know what the problem is. We cannot, there is no way to deal with it because we do not have adequate resources to cope with them (TRS-77).

RESPONDENT: When it comes to teaching material and stuff the resources are available. The resource we do not have is teacher time. We do not have the personnel resources (TRS-75).

RESPONDENT: And we are trying to cover a lot of this with teacher assistants, our school has a lot of teacher assistants and they are assigned to help . . . the people who need a lot of attention (TRS-36).

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada reports that they are working with First Nations to build the capacity of individual communities to govern their educational programs and services, and to ensure that Aboriginal students receive an education comparable to that of students who attend provincial schools (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a, 2005, 2008). The group interview extract TRS-66 conveys the reflection of many participating rural educators who told the researcher that students are entering their school with incomplete files or with files that incorrectly report their competencies. Teachers present at the rural focus group wanted to know where the accountability had gone and raised a number of questions: Why did the files incorrectly report competencies? Who had completed the testing? The data passage TRS-71 relays the view of many rural focus group respondents who suggested that they think the problem with accountability stems from a lack of unionized teachers in band schools.

RESPONDENT: At a grade seven level, he came in and his file, there were testing things in there that he was reading at this level and he could do all these things, and nothing was there . . . What do we do now? I mean, do we place him in a total pull-out program, in a special needs program when he's a young boy just like anybody else but he can't read and write. Whose responsibility? . . . Why am I seeing this in a file and it's not true? There is no accountability . . . (TRS-66).



RESPONDENT: In this school teachers are members of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and, as a result, we are protected. I do not have to pass students who do not meet the standards for promotion because their parents want me to. Similarly, my administrator cannot fire me if a child does not pass. On many reserves in the province, your job is not necessarily secure at any time. I think this is a factor with a lot of the stuff that we're getting (TRS-71).

Aboriginal education and school reform literature pertaining to Saskatchewan directs educators to change the school environment and rebuild relations with students and parents (Saskatchewan Education 1996, 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005a). The group interview segment TRS-158 represents the thinking of many rural educators who explained that building trusting relations with Aboriginal parents in their school is challenging because Native parents often associate educators with non-Aboriginal parents or the people who they are in conflict with. The focus group fragment TRS-170 communicates the outlook of a few rural focus group discussants who deduced that "racial" conflict limits the teaching techniques that they can use in the classroom. The data excerpt TRS-178 reveals the feeling of most respondents to the rural focus group who suggested that "racial" conflict is affecting students' learning because they do not feel safe enough to ask questions about people of the opposite "race." In this respect, educators are obliged to negotiate community conflict within the context of the school in terms of both relationships with parents, and in teaching students.

RESPONDENT: It is an explosive situation where one side—whichever one starts . . . and it just builds and then it breaks down the trust from the Aboriginal side. They are not going to trust us because they think that we are a part of the problem. They associate us with the people who are causing grief for their kids. This idea is there whether we really are or not a part of the problem . . . (TRS-158).

RESPONDENT: I often use groups . . . The tension between the students limits the possible groups . . . I am then dealing with the conflict, in my Native studies class, when I am supposed to be teaching students about Aboriginal culture . . . I have kids that I cannot put together because of things that have happened this year that do have a "racial" background to them (TRS-170).

RESPONDENT: The kids will not talk and they are afraid that what they are going to say is wrong . . . because it is going to be held against them. So it has made it difficult to do things like having discussions . . . (TRS-178).

The data excerpt TRS-217 typifies the reply of many rural instructors who suggested that they spend more time managing behaviour and less time on classroom instruction than before. Participating rural educators said that they established school committees to address the situation and/or the behaviour of various students. Some of the rural focus group discussants expressed trust issues with a few parents despite their concerted effort to resolve the issues and reach a consensus. The group interview selection TRS-144 imparts the feeling of several teachers at the rural focus group who stated that they were often afraid that their good intentions might be turned against them if they confronted a student of an alternate ethnicity on his/her behaviour. These rural educators explained further that they put, as a result of uneasy parental relations, a great deal of thought into how they manage poor behaviour in their classroom.

RESPONDENT: You hear it all the time, when we started this job we taught 90% of the time, dealt with behaviour 10% of the time. Now it's about 50/50. You teach 50% of the time, and 50% of the time you are dealing with stuff that is not teaching (TRS-217).

RESPONDENT: There is a trust issue for me too. Any time I want to discipline a child I think to myself . . . despite the fact I would call any child on this behaviour, am I going to get my knuckles rapped for being a racist? (TRS-144)

The focus group quote TRS-79 demonstrates the outlook of many rural focus group participants who were disheartened because their efforts to close education gaps had resulted in few successes. The data extract TRS-80 denotes the belief of a few respondents to the rural focus group who asserted that they feel the only solution is to obtain a commitment from families to stay with the school from grade seven on ward. The group interview passage TRS-137 epitomises the view of the rural staff who talked about investment in early and pre-education programs as a way to reduce the number of students with education gaps. Instructors present for the rural focus group also raised points from a peripheral discussion about accountability and comparability, previously described, between educational jurisdictions. The participating rural teachers concluded that transience and school shopping might be less detrimental to students' learning if they entered comparable programs and schools.

RESPONDENT: The gap is so wide if you are reading at a grade two level but supposed to be at a grade eleven level that you will never get the gap closed . . . So we feel like it is an impossible [task] . . . The division is so wide, how do you bridge it? . . . As the years go on, the gap widens and widens and widens (TRS-79).

RESPONDENT: I think if we were able to get those students [ones with gaps in learning] at a grade seven level and have a commitment from them to stay until they were in grade twelve [things would improve]. We could try to reduce the gap but transience is an issue [we cannot get the commitment]. Some students move once and often twice throughout a school year . . . (TRS-80).

RESPONDENT: I think they have tried to put a little more emphasis on the lower grades . . . kindergarten and the Head Start program are examples. To get them learning before they even come to school. It seems they are doing this to address the education gap or to ensure it does not start at an early age . . . (TRS-137).

The data fragment TRS-34 reflects the sentiment of many rural focus group discussants who voiced concern about the amount of time, energy, and educational resources that gaps in learning, behaviour, “racial” conflict, and meeting other-than-schooling needs are taking away from all students. These rural educators were frustrated because they are being pulled between students with too many different learning needs. A few of the rural focus group participants expanded by highlighting that students with difficulties are often at different stages in learning and this also intensifies teachers’ work. A number of participating rural teachers acknowledged that resource programs require large numbers of trained teachers and other professionals which the education system does not have. All of the rural focus group respondents were frustrated because they believed that there is not enough time and personnel to meet students’ needs. The group interview segment TRS-141 presents the thought of instructors present for the rural focus group who expressed their frustration by talking about solutions. The rural staff noted that these solutions are often another source of difficulty because they require the involvement of other government agencies and/or external funding.

RESPONDENT: That is where . . . my level of frustration is. I do not see how we can really deal with everything that needs to be dealt with . . . without taking it away from kids that are here permanently [on a regular basis] because we are going back to do things for other people. They have [the kids at school on a regular basis] have totally lost time . . . (TRS-34).

RESPONDENT: It is meant, in a way, to augment existing parenting (TRS-140). So they experience a language rich environment before school or the age of five. Other things are also provided, depending on need, such as social skills etc... (TRS-141).

#### 4.4.4 Working with the rural responses

The rural report highlights rural educators' concerns that too few human service and teaching personnel were available in their school to prepare pupils to learn, and to manage and teach students (TRS-257, TRS-258, and TRS-260 [page 100]; TRS-261, TRS-216, and TRS-231 [page 100]; TRS-36, TRS-75, and TRS-77 [page 101]; TRS-34, TRS-140, and TRS-141 [page 105]). Further, the report indicates that urban educators spent more time on other-than-teaching tasks, negotiating conflict between pupils, developing alternative education programs to close gaps in learning, and evaluating students arriving from First Nation jurisdictions than they had previously (TRS-173 and TRS-179 [page 95]; TRS-261, TRS-216, and TRS-231 [page 100]; (TRS-217 and TRS-144 [page 103]; (TRS-66 and TRS-71 [page 102]; (TRS-36, TRS-75, and TRS-77 [page 101]). Many of the teachers at the rural site emphasised the lack of accountability and alignment between jurisdictions given that students regularly arrived from other schools without accurate files, and testing scores that did not reflect their actual abilities (TRS-66 and TRS-71 [page 102]). Based on the description of rural focus responses, one might conclude that rural teachers relied on parents' participation in education, decisions to keep their children in one school for the entire year, and support more generally, to improve students' educational outcomes (TRS-41, TRS-49, and TRS-82 [page 97]; (TRS-81 and TRS-84 [page 97]; (TRS-111, TRS-92, TRS-95, TRS-96, and TRS-84 [page 99]).

Almost all of the rural teachers were confident that educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth could be accomplished if governments contributed more resources to improve both schools and the context of family life in Aboriginal communities (TRS-129 to TRS-133 [page 93]; TRS-90 [page 96]; TRS-257, TRS-258, and TRS-260 [page 100]). The majority of rural participants noted that many Aboriginal people in their learning-community

are rebuilding their family and social networks following the consequences of residential schooling and colonialism more broadly (TRS-111, TRS-92, TRS-95, TRS-96, and TRS-84 [page 99]; TRS-90 [page 96]). As such, families and schools need to work together to prepare students for education and to close students' gaps in learning (TRS-81 and TRS-84 [page 97]; (TRS-208 [page 95]; TRS-90 [page 96]; (TRS-129 to TRS-133 [page 93]). Despite the need for other-than-schooling services, the rural responses indicate that the expanded human service mandate was not being fully supported by other government partners. Specifically, because partners were only involved in rural schools periodically and school-linked services are not as responsive to students' immediate needs compared with those that are integrated (TRS-34, TRS-140, and TRS-141 [page 105]; TRS-79, TRS-80, and TRS-137 [page 104]; TRS-257, TRS-258, and TRS-260 [page 100])

The rural data direct us to consider the possibility that curriculum changes are now less important than providing care to Aboriginal communities in terms of making progress toward actualizing the goals of Aboriginal education (TRS-129 to TRS-133 [page 93]; TRS-111, TRS-92, TRS-95, TRS-96, and TRS-84 [page 99]). Overall, the rural focus report highlights the complexity of teaching in Aboriginal communities as educators change the ways they perform their work to balance between their investment in care for students and families, while also attempting to connect these efforts with increased performance or the attainment of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth (TRS-185 and TRS-190 [page 94]; TRS-173 and TRS-179 [page 95]; TRS-261, TRS-216, and TRS-231 [page 100]; TRS-158, TRS-170, and TRS-178 [page 102 and 103]; TRS-217 and TRS-144 [page 103]). The ideas developed from the survey, urban, and rural reports will be compared to the band and Northern discussions in Chapter Five.

#### 4.5 The band focus group

The band school is in a relatively new or refurbished building that is well maintained, bright, and inviting. Teachers who are employed in band schools do not belong to the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and often work on contract. Students of Aboriginal ethnicity are free, for the most part, to attend public schools despite the existence of a school in their community. Educators at the band focus group were considerate and forthcoming in 2003-2005 in response to the research questions.

#### 4.5.1 Aboriginal education

Band schools are funded by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) on the agreement that they subscribe to the provincial curriculum (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005). The focus group excerpt TBS-16 exemplifies the conclusion of a few band focus group respondents who reported that they fortify provincial curriculum with First Nations' content. The data in TBS-162 and TBS-164 describe the assertion of several participating band teachers who were preoccupied with the way in which Aboriginal material had been included in science and math. Educators present for the band focus group said that they look forward to Aboriginal content being developed more fully in math and science. The focus group interview selection TBS-16 shows the thought of a few instructors from the band site who reported that they regularly add material to the provincial curriculum relating to social problems, such as diabetes, alcoholism, and HIV/AIDS. These teachers further stated that they periodically invite First Nations people to speak with students about social issues and to facilitate workshops.

RESPONDENT: And then in health, we have that diabetes curriculum designed primarily for First Nations, and I really liked using that as well. So those are kind of the two main specific First Nations adaptations that I've used, and then Language Arts, I'll use stories and writing and legends and things. And every year we have a focus for at least a week, usually it is First Nations culture, but this year we spread it out to a variety of cultures. So we have specific periods of time for that as well as program by program (TBS-16).

RESPONDENT: Aboriginal content in the math curriculum. There's a [not clear on tape] they were playing and they were applauding. And they were applauding starts and arrowheads and things as opposed to . . . I thought it was pretty strange [about a discussion regarding

Aboriginal knowledge in math and science] (TBS-162<sup>7</sup>). . . . So I had a really difficult time even thinking of something but I welcome and really look forward to it . . . (TBS-164).

RESPONDENT: The health is really a good one too. It really is – from diabetes to issues of aids and drugs and alcohol. We've had a lot of workshops on those kinds of things. Primarily, by First Nations people . . . (TBS-19).

Variation exists between Aboriginal communities where some have no school at all and others are able to offer various levels of education (Indian and Northern Affairs 2005, 2008).

The band focus group discussants were concerned about the environment at the public high school that their students would eventually attend. The group interview quote TBS-167 conveys the response of several participating band teachers who stated that Aboriginal content had been included, and then removed from a few courses at the public high school. In addition, some of the respondents to the band focus group reported that non-Aboriginal parents had rented a bus to drive their children to another community for school. The data extracts TRS-170, TRS-171, and TRS-83 relay the view of the instructors from the band focus group who were unsure if the bussing had to do with gangs, fear and resistance to Aboriginal programming, or both.

Educators present for the band focus group reflected that the community had worked with the RCMP and reduced the gang presence, but the non-Aboriginal students did not return.

RESPONDENT: I know at [name of school] they had [Aboriginal knowledge in math and science] for a bit and then they cut it and there was a lot of, I remember, a lot of real negative [feelings] coming from the teachers and the community (TBS-167).

INTERVIEWER: So in terms of that incident, with the bussing to another school, is that still taking place? After the gang problem was solved? RESPONDENT: Yeah. INTERVIEWER: And is that resistance to Aboriginal programming? RESPONDENT: What would your best guess be? Like, why those parents that pulled their students out of that school? I think it's fear and fear is usually borne out of lack of understanding I guess. I mean, why are people racist? I mean a lack of exposure and a lack of knowledge, and that's what brings about the fear, definitely... (TBS-170 and TBS-171 combined).

RESPONDENT: They are really not anymore [gang in the community] . . . the RCMP, the community at the band level, everybody, just clamped down and said, you know what? No way, we're not having this here . . . there were community meetings, I mean, there were all kinds of things, they stopped . . . (TBS-83).

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<sup>7</sup> The label reads "the band site-excerpt 162."

The majority of teachers from the band focus group described the positive contributions that the community made to learning through the Elder program. The focus group passage TBS-23 reveals the assertion of many band focus group participants who verified that Elders are present in the school at all times taking part in education by, for example conducting classroom presentations. Band staff at the focus group saw Elders as a source of information about local culture and people who facilitated the application of this knowledge in schooling. The data fragment TBS-24 represents the reaction of a few respondents to the band focus group who confirmed that the Elders help teachers and students with their concerns about learning at the school. The group interview segment TBS-28 imparts the thinking of participating band instructors who suggested that the Elder program is a core component of Aboriginal education in their school, and that the Elders had improved community involvement in the school.

RESPONDENT: No, we have had that ever since I have been here, actually, and before. Well now we have Elders daily. There are always two Elders here at the school (TBS-23).

RESPONDENT: I've also used the Elders for to help me through specific difficult times with particular students that might benefit from visiting with the Elders and talking with them. Also depending on the Elders a couple have made direct classroom and group presentations over the course of the year . . . (TBS-24).

RESPONDENT: And it's so much better having the Elders there expressing their feelings and concerns about what's happening at the school and how it happened rather than just teachers. It's really reinforcing for the community (TBS-28).

#### 4.5.2 Family

The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Learning 2005) and scholars writing about Aboriginal education (Stairs 1995; Monture-Angus 1995) identify Elders as key facilitators of learning in Aboriginal communities. The band focus group discussants attributed successes in their school with home-school communication to Elders' participation in schooling. The focus group excerpt TBS-26 denotes the outlook of many teachers from the band focus group who characterized Elders as neutral observers, resolution facilitators, and advocates for teachers, students, and parents. Further,



these band educators revealed that Elders promote Aboriginal cultural values and their application in dispute resolution in their school. The data selection TBS-28 communicates the sentiment of a few participating band instructors who inferred that Elders had convinced parents and students to become involved in resolving behaviour issues in the school. The group interview quote TBS-29 demonstrates the feeling of several teachers present at the band focus group who noted that Elders were responsible for the trust that had been developed between the school, parents, and students.

RESPONDENT: . . . when I was teaching grade four . . . we had a big school break-in in the evening. And there were a lot of students in my classroom involved, so two of the Elders came in and had a talking circle with the kids . . . and then, really got the kids to suggest . . . how we were going to rectify the situation . . . I really think their influence and their presence in that made it such a success . . . like respecting our school building and why respect is important, like really bringing that cultural aspect to that value into it . . . the kids had decided exactly . . . what they had cost the school and what it cost them to go on a school trip and the opted out of the school trip as a way of paying the school back for what they had done. So they, you know, made their restitution that way. And what amazed me with that was how the students didn't feel punished. You know, they really felt like it had been a learning experience . . . (TBS-26).

RESPONDENT: . . . we had a group of girls fighting, it was a couple years ago there, two real distinct groups of in the community of girls, and some experience of a talking circle with the Elders with everybody involved, parents as well. And it went okay, there was a resolution with two groups . . . I think the students are a lot more honest about their participation and their activities with the Elders being around to witness their activity. So it was really good, it worked out really well (TBS-28).

RESPONDENT: . . . when we first starting having the Elders in the school every day. It was really neat how the Elders took the message of what was going on in the school and brought it to the parents . . . in the community. And instead of the kids going out there and just telling their side of the story . . . the Elders would come in and say . . . I saw your kid do this today in school. It's really not very respectful . . . I think, made the parents see that . . . there is another side of the story, and it's so much more effective having an Elder do that than a teacher . . . they're really advocates for the school in what they're doing (TBS-29).

Many of the band focus group respondents described the relationship between the home and school in terms of the expectations that the education system has of parents. Participating band educators understood that some parents are not able to prepare their children for learning. Further, these band instructors were clear that teachers should adjust to this situation instead of being frustrated or blaming the parents. A few teachers from the band focus group alleged that

there are other people responsible beyond the parent for child poverty, including the Federal government. These band instructors were upset that the Federal government had committed to solving child poverty by 2000 but failed. Educators present for the band focus group situated parents as members of a community responsible for ensuring children's well being. The focus group extract TBS-179 typifies the assertion of participating band instructors who were adamant that staff should understand and be helpful despite the difficulties that children arriving at school unprepared to learn constitute for educators' work. Respondents to the band focus group were firm in their belief that everyone should recognize that no child is being neglected purposefully and everyone is trying to give the youth what they need.

RESPONDENT: . . . I used to get really frustrated . . . if the parent would just put them to bed earlier so they weren't tired then I could do my job better, but I really stopped looking at it that way. It's everybody involved with that child is doing the best job that they can at that present time . . . look at the challenges that poverty is bringing to these parents and these people and it's not their fault . . . You know, this government we have promised to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000, and it's still alive and well and growing out there . . . I still think there's a villain out there, but the villain's a lot higher up the totem pole. Like, these families need support to get out of where they are. And I think the support is coming, it's coming slow, too slow, but I don't feel that resentment against the parents . . . (TBS-179).

As discussed in Chapter Two, governments in Canada have taken steps to address concerns about funding for Aboriginal education and learning more generally (Saskatchewan 2002; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008), but educators are concerned that the funding is insufficient (Wotherspoon 2004, 2007; Naylor 2002). The group interview passage TBS-137 epitomises the thought of participants in the band focus group who shared the argument that schools need to be supported with funding and resources to keep class sizes small. Educators from the band focus group recounted that this would help them adjust and account for the differential situations students experience at home. Instructors present for the band focus group thought that the primary challenge teachers have in the classroom is to address children's needs so they can learn. Participating band instructors viewed a smaller class size as a means to better enable educators to cover the curriculum and adapt for varied needs. Further, these

band teachers stated that educators will be better able to manage the classroom so they can move on to learning.

RESPONDENT: . . . I really think we have a lot of students who have challenges at home, or have challenges because they're FAS or they're FAE . . . I think our rate of kids . . . who have those kinds of special needs are higher in our schools. And so I think it's essential that our class sizes are kept small . . . when they're not, I think it's really difficult, even when they've gotten bigger in the middle years, we cut the sizes down for language Arts and Math, because . . . when we look at how many kids come to resource . . . those are the kids that I see that have those challenges, in some classrooms they make up a huge chunk of that classroom and that certainly makes it very challenging to meet all of the curriculum and still adapt for those students . . . if you look at any population that lives in poverty, there's more addictions. And more addictions brings all of those other problems and challenges to students and . . . my point is that we should be more heavily funded for those students because they require more manpower (TBS-137).

Instructors present for the band focus group sensed that funding for schools should be based on a combination of student population and social indicators. The band focus group respondents qualified their statement by adding that children living in poverty and who experience a variety of social problems require more resources to learn. The data segment TBS-139 illustrates the conclusion of participating band teachers who explained that students with FAS and other special needs require additional educational resources. These band educators further added that students of Aboriginal ethnicity with FAS should receive funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to meet their needs, despite whether they live on or off the reserve. Respondents to the band focus group accredited problems in obtaining these funds to issues regarding legislation, specifically those related to funding models.

RESPONDENT: And lots of TAs where they're needed. And I know one concern that I have as a resource teacher, if we have students living in town who are diagnosed for example FAS, we're not getting a dollar extra for those kids, and if those kids are in the public system, we would be getting that money . . . I know it's because there's certain legislation and whatever that's going on and they haven't sorted it out but . . . that presents a challenge when the funding isn't getting there. And we do have funding for our kids, but that's one area where if they're living in town, we're not getting the dollars (TBS-139).

#### 4.5.3 Teachers' work situation

The Ministry of Education (Saskatchewan Learning 2005b) and the Aboriginal education Provincial Advisory Committee in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Learning 2005a) list shared

leadership and decision making as principles of community/Aboriginal education. The focus group excerpts TBS-99 and TBS-100 reflect the thinking of band focus group participants who stated that good leadership was central to realizing success with school improvement initiatives. Educators present for the band focus group characterized their principal as open to trying new ideas, always positive, and constantly looking for new challenges. The data selections TBS-103 and TBS-104 exemplify argument of many participating band teachers who also reported that their principal included school staff in the improvement process regardless of their occupation. Respondents to the band focus group elaborated further by talking about the contribution of consultants, sharing success, problem solving, and measuring outcomes. The focus segment TBS-114 relays the experience of instructors from the band focus group who described an instance in which they networked with another school to identify and implement a program useful to their students.

FIRST RESPONDENT: [Name of principal] has always had some new thing that s/he's going to try and some new idea that's going to save us all, or whatever. And at times I was sort pessimistic but as time has gone by, I really take my hat off because s/he just doesn't quit. You know and consistently working at trying, and s/he'll try whatever s/he can. SECOND RESPONDENT: Solid and consistent leadership . . . perseverance. FIRST RESPONDENT: I've come to appreciate, s/he's been great. SECOND RESPONDENT: We wouldn't be where we are without this leadership...we wouldn't (TBS-99). FIRST RESPONDENT: Absolutely not...definitely...that's key (TBS-100).

RESPONDENT: Everybody participated in presenting various topics, so that was really good (TBS-103). Everybody, right from like our cook from the kitchen, our teacher assistants, everybody like an equal share in it. We were in groups to work on the values and then to present to each other and then to discuss. It wasn't just a teacher effort, it was an entire school effort, and we have a pretty big support staff so it's important that you have everybody on board and with the school improvement plan too it can't just be the teachers, it has to be the entire support staff (TBS-104).

RESPONDENT: . . . we really are able to keep that trend of progress going . . . we heard about this . . . reading program at [name of school] in [name of place] and we said . . . why not us? . . . So we went in there, four of us for three days and we watched their program and we met with the teachers after school, and we got nothing but support for it. I mean our grade one's are taught for an hour every morning in groups of five or smaller in their ability group in reading groups and they have one, two, three, four, five teachers and two teacher aids are staffed just for that room every morning . . . (TBS-114).

The School Plus consultation group and scholars researching Aboriginal education equity highlight changes in teachers' professionalism or the school environment as key to the development of education equity for Aboriginal peoples (Castellano, Davies, and Lahache 2000; Saskatchewan 2002). The group interview quote TBS-110 describes the response of a few participating band instructors who argued that their work environment changed because teachers began to focus on the positive rather than the negative. The data extract TBS-111 shows the reaction of several band focus group discussants who said that it was too easy to become caught in a cycle of negativity where you do not feel like coming to work. As revealed in TBS-105, respondents to the band focus group highlighted that meetings were limited and people stayed focused on the agenda, rather than rambling. The majority of staff at the band focus group argued that the positive environment gave them energy which flowed through to their values and respect program for students. Teachers present for the band focus group asserted that these changes improved students' and teachers' behaviour, and improved how people felt about the school.

RESPONDENT: There's another thing that we've made a big [concern] . . . there's no time for bitching in the staff room. You can't complain about students, you can't sit there . . . (TBS-109). And no one said you can't – it just stopped happening (TBS-110).

RESPONDENT: . . . it's . . . not even tolerated all that much anymore around the staff table. You know, you can just get into a whole negative event of, day after day . . . And you're going to have the odd comment and stuff and that person having a bad day. But I'll tell you, I hear good things, if not more, like the whole idea of sharing successes and what not . . . it gives you a little energy . . . (TBS-111).

RESPONDENT: . . . staff meetings were . . . regular, but they were cut down, eh? It's only going to last thirty-five minutes or forty minutes set at the beginning and that's the way it was no matter what, and boy, does that help. They can go on forever (TBS-105).

The focus group passage TBS-96 reveals the reply of many band focus group participants who said that representatives from other agencies and Elders commented on the improved school environment in just three weeks. The data fragment TBS-125 conveys the belief of a few participating band instructors who characterized student behaviour and attitudes as difficulties managed by every school in Saskatchewan. The group interview segment TBS-

127 relays the view of respondents to the band focus group who explained that educators' work has changed across Canada to include preparing children to learn. Participating band teachers described the child care function, which always existed to varying degrees, as more important than it has ever been. The band focus group discussants further believed that teachers' work changed to involve meeting students' complete needs, including child care, as a means to create opportunities for learning.

RESPONDENT: . . . we had . . . health nurses and Elders who . . . on . . . a four-week rotation, come into the school and say, what are you doing? Something's different, something's better . . . We interviewed staff before and after and every comment was negative the first time around and I think we had one negative comment the last time around . . . it went from, I don't want to be here anymore, I hate coming to work because of all the swearing and the disrespect to you know, it's a good place to be, I'm really proud of what we've done . . . it was really successful . . . It's a huge step forward (TBS-96).

RESPONDENT: Relations are a continuous challenge, there's no question about it. To tell you the truth, I don't find them terribly different here than any place else, to be honest so, I really don't (TBS-124). It's just like part and parcel of teaching nowadays . . . (TBS-125).

RESPONDENT: . . . I taught at [name of school or area], and it's as difficult there. You have various groups of students that are just not really prepared to be working as students . . . their attitude and what not . . . I don't think our school's any different . . . so, it's a continuous challenge all over the country, and sometimes it'll wear you down, there's no question about that . . . there's lots of really, really good learning experiences. I've shared with the students and really enjoyed a lot of extracurricular times . . . (TBS-127).

The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee conveys the teaching of an Elder to explain that momentum for change and support for Aboriginal education is growing in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Learning 2005a). The focus group excerpt TBS-114 imparts the outlook of participants in the band focus group who suggested that the academic motivation and skill level of their students have improved considerably in recent years. Several of the educators at the band focus group attributed their students' improvement to an increase in employed parents and families, and community support for and investment in education. As indicated in TBS-48, participating band instructors reported that they feel the relationship with the community has improved a great deal, but the actual role of the educator, in terms of teaching has not changed that much.

RESPONDENT: I don't feel like the role of the teacher has, in terms of teaching, has changed tremendously. SECOND RESPONDENT: . . . I'll have to agree. The relationship, I think, with the community has certainly changed, I would say . . . (TBS-48).

RESPONDENT: I think we've seen such dramatic change that I mean especially, like [name of teacher] has been here five years, I've been here fourteen, can really see the growth . . . it only got better . . . you know, more working parents, kids coming to school with more skills and . . . it's like I can really get a sense of the progress, slow or not, like its, change is happening . . . we've had tremendous success and improvement. But we got the support. You can't make that kind of a staffing change without the support . . . (TBS-114).

#### 4.5.4 Working with the band responses

The band report highlights the need to shape and re-constitute the relationship that schools and teachers have with parents by changing teachers' attitudes toward parents and families that are struggling to prepare students for learning (TBS-109, TBS-110, TBS-111, and TBS-105 [page 114]; TBS-179 [page 111]). Further, the band report indicates that educators need to alter their relationship with parents through role modeling and leadership by promoting shared cultural norms behaviour, and by constructing an engaging and positive school climate (TBS-99, TBS-100, TBS-103, TBS-104, and TBS-114 [page 113]). Many of the participants in the band focus group felt that Elders are key in this respect, because they facilitate communication between schools and parents, mediate dispute resolution processes, and ensure that parents are aware of their child's success and challenges in schooling (TBS-26, TBS-29, and TBS-28 [page 110]). In contrast, almost all of the band focus group respondents conceptualized teachers as collaborators who work with Elders, parents, and other community members to democratically improve education for Aboriginal students (TBS-26, TBS-29, and TBS-28 [page 110]; TBS-23, TBS-24, and TBS-28 [page 109]).

The band report also underscores the short-fall of governments, communities, schools, and society more generally, in that responsibility for the social well-being of families and students was still perceived as an individual rather than a collective responsibility (TBS-179 [page 111]; TBS-137 and TBS-139 [page 112]). According to the band focus group discussants, governments had done more to support Aboriginal education by 2003-2005, but they had not

done enough to support families in preparing students to learn (TBS-48 and TBS-114 [page 116]; TBS-137 and TBS-139 [page 112]). As a result, band schools and teachers were inclined to focus on helping families prepare students to learn, and they were less able to focus on improving students' performance (TBS-179 [page 111]; TBS-96, TBS-127, TBS-124, and TBS-125 [page 115]). Participants in the band focus group asserted that all Canadians are responsible for supporting Aboriginal families, communities, and schools in their work to improve Aboriginal students' education outcomes (TBS-137 and TBS-139 [page 112]).

The responses from the band site prompt us to think about the importance of teachers' work with parents and Elders to achieve the improvement of educational outcomes for Aboriginal students (TBS-23, TBS-24, and TBS-28 [page 109]; TBS-109, TBS-110, TBS-111, and TBS-105 [page 114]; and TBS-83, TBS-170, TBS-171, and TBS-167 [page 108]). Many educators from the band focus group noted that they enriched the provincial curriculum with material developed for First Nations, and that community members were central to integrating culture into their classrooms (TBS-162, TBS-164, TBS-16, TBS-19 [page 107 and 108]). The band report suggests that Elders figured prominently in guiding teachers and in actualizing cultural curriculum in band schools, and in making local cultural practices a part of the social norms and everyday behaviour of students, and of teachers in their instruction (TBS-23, TBS-24, and TBS-28 [page 109]). The analytic concepts gleaned from the band site will be compared with points developed from the other sites in Chapter Five.

#### 4.6 The Northern focus group

The Northern focus group is composed of educators from more than one school and community. Few of the participating Northern teachers lived in the communities they served year round, and travelled from across Canada to Northern Saskatchewan each year to teach. The Northern focus group participants took time out of a busy conference in 2003-2005 to discuss teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Northern Saskatchewan.



#### 4.6.1 Aboriginal education

Participating Northern educators made a distinction, similar to the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education 2000), between Aboriginal and anti-racism education. The group interview selection TNS-214 communicates the view of several participating Northern instructors who told the researcher that it is often not necessary to include practical aspects of Aboriginal knowledge in learning or to visit heritage sites, because they are a part of students' daily life in the North. By comparison, other educators present at the Northern focus group explained that they often include practical-local cultural knowledge in schooling because it is disappearing from their community. The data quote TNS-294 typifies the outlook of most Northern focus group respondents who noted that Aboriginal content had been successfully integrated into, and is a natural part of, their learning day. These Northern teachers compared their achievement in this regard with early attempts to include Aboriginal curricula which was done by setting aside blocks of time to cover the material outside "regular" course time. The focus group extract TNS-218 epitomises the sentiment of Northern staff from the Northern focus group who reported that anti-racism education was also being taught, but that it is different from Aboriginal education.

RESPONDENT: . . . It's all around when you are in the North, it is what you are living in, so taking visits to Aboriginal heritage sites, we are living, like it just would not be something you do (TNS-214<sup>8</sup>).

RESPONDENT: It's amazing compared to what it used to be, what we have now. And it has become a natural extension, before where it was sort of: "oh, we'll do this for half an hour once a month". But now it's just naturally there (TNS-294).

RESPONDENT: I think we do teach more towards the culture, teaching the culture, bringing people in to teach the culture, but do we teach about racism? SECOND RESPONDENT: Yeah, we do. I mean, to any length in our school? FIRST RESPONDENT: It's in, you know, grade four and grade five curriculum (TNS-218).

The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan increased the number of resources available to teachers for Aboriginal culture following recommendations by the Aboriginal Education

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<sup>8</sup> The label reads "the Northern site-excerpt 214."

Provincial Advisory Committee (Saskatchewan Education 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2005a). The group interview passage TNS-229 illustrates the feeling of many Northern focus group participants who suggested that they have more resources on Aboriginal culture than ever before. The group interview segment TNS-222 relays the preoccupation of these Northern educators with the lack of guides and other teaching tools to go along with available Aboriginal resources. A number of respondents to the Northern focus group revealed that they need more Aboriginal material and guides written by Canadian authors about local cultural groups. The focus group fragment TNS-285 shows that participating Northern instructors discussed the extent to which Elders had and were a source of local cultural knowledge.

RESPONDENT: We have a tremendous amount in our school. We have Elders in residence, and we have [type of Aboriginal ethnicity] language classes. And if we want it, we can ask for it (TNS-229).

RESPONDENT: We have quite a few Canadian Native anthologies but there are no unit guides to go with them. Most of the unit plan guides to go with the novels in the literature are from European authors or American authors, which is what concerns me. So what we're having to do with the Aboriginal literature is create our own units, create our own comprehension questions . . . it's very time-consuming (TNS-222).

RESPONDENT: [Name of person] knows some of the gliffs. He said there are [#] people in the community that are still alive that know how to read the gliffs (TNS-285).

Consistent with the values expressed by the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994a; Saskatchewan Learning 2005b), the majority of Northern focus group discussants suggested that they promote cultural diversity, but find this task difficult when exploring local cultural art. The data segment TNS-233 reveals the thought of many educators from the Northern focus group who said that some of their students are more interested in making dream catchers and totem poles than crafts from their heritage. One participating Northern teacher explained that some ethnic groups are better represented than others in dominant symbols of Aboriginal culture and, as a result, students are drawn away from their heritages. The group interview excerpt TRS-291 describes the assertion of a few participants in the Northern focus group who said that Elders had commented on students' general lack of knowledge about local culture. A few participating Northern instructors

concluded that colonialism and technology are responsible for the decline in knowledge transfer from one generation to another in Native communities.

RESPONDENT: I've got plenty of Aboriginal information, but not necessarily any specific [local Aboriginal ethnicity] information . . . what I'm finding is . . . the kids becoming a universal or North American Aboriginal because they want to make dream catchers as opposed to [type of Aboriginal ethnicity] folk craft. They want to make totem, belongs to the West coast . . . so they're looking at different cultural aspects of our Native and North American Aboriginals and trying to incorporate it into their culture, so that's muddying the waters because then they don't really know what their culture is (TNS-233).

RESPONDENT: The Elders would come in . . . these children don't understand our culture anymore . . . I think it's a generation era of fifteen years. Twenty years ago, they got power/electricity, tv, and that sort of stuff so outside-world influences walked into the community and the proverbial television/black box babysitter . . . (TNS-291).

In agreement with the goals of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan 2002; Saskatchewan Learning 2005a), the majority of Northern focus group participants perceived community support and parental involvement as fundamental to the success of educational programming. The focus group selection TRS-297 conveys the response of most participating Northern instructors who said that parents withdrew children from schools in the past when programs or practices were not deemed acceptable. In light of the historical happenings, these Northern teachers said that they are keen to keep parents and community members involved in schools by including them in decision making. The data quote TRS-296 relays the thinking of many educators at the Northern focus group who asserted that parents and community support is central to students' learning about local culture and educational improvement overall. These respondents to the Northern focus group talked about language programming and the supportive role parents had played in making immersion a success.

RESPONDENT: It's paramount because the community will not send the kids to school and in the past . . . you could see which kids . . . these boys weren't sent to school, and they never did catch up to themselves (TNS-297).

RESPONDENT: . . . think it's very important because if the community doesn't want it, they'll stand back and let it go (TNS-296).

Similar to scholars writing about Aboriginal education and decolonisation (Stairs 1995; Monture-Angus 1995), most Northern focus group discussants were aware that local people, in

particular Elders constitute a latent resource for learning, and that language is central to Native cultural retention. The group interview passage TNS-173 imparts the reflection of many participating Northern educators who noted that many Elders are an authentic source of cultural knowledge and learning. These Northern instructors revealed that the inclusion of Elders in school activities serves a variety of purposes including to train teachers about local cultures, ensure that information is passed down accurately, provide role models for students, and convey respect for cultural institutions. The focus group fragment TNS-283 communicates the reply of one teacher from the Northern focus group who discussed challenges associated with teaching Aboriginal languages that are living.

FIRST RESPONDENT: It's like me picking up cultural ways to make bead work . . . even if I know how to do it now I still need to have a cultural person in the classroom to teach it. SECOND RESPONDENT: Right. FIRST RESPONDENT: To respect them and their cultural institutes (TNS-173).

RESPONDENT: . . . most North American Aboriginal languages have been only written for the last 50 years, and it's still evolving. The words – our [type of] language teacher says – the words are still being evolved right now. So he's learning how to write more words in [type of language], and he's the [type of language] instructor (TNS-283).

English is a second language for many people in the North making language courses a core aspect of Aboriginal education but, for Northern teachers, language is more significant in its connection with the development of literacy skills. The data segment TNS-247 typifies the belief of many Northern focus group respondents who reported that their students arrive at school with only oral skills in their Native language. These Northern teachers noted that they were challenged when teaching their students English, because the children could not read the school texts which translated local Aboriginal words into English. The focus group excerpt TNS-212 denotes participating Northern educators' assertions that their students learned most of their English from television or their parents, and did not really understand what they were saying. The group interview quote TNS-247 conveys the outlook of many instructors from the Northern focus group who agreed that Northern Aboriginal students should learn literacy skills in

their ancestral language prior to school in order to prepare them for learning in both their Native language and English on arrival at school.

RESPONDENT: We have this ESL problem. They don't know what the words mean, so they'll use words that they've heard get used on the TV or parents that have said something or like that (TNS-212).

RESPONDENT: . . . A lot of them have difficulty with just reading the word "pot". Now they can identify the letters separately like "p" "o" and "t", but to put them together and to understand that that's pot, even though I use a combination of [unclear] awareness, guided reading, and whole language, it's not enough. So they know the word pot in [native language], but they don't know how to write it. Now we have a [type of Aboriginal] language program and a [type of] language project going on where we have books with the translations from English to [native language], but the concern is the kids can't read the [type of native language] anyway, and that's what they struggle with . . . (TNS-247).

Consistent with the principles of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education 1996), the Northern focus group discussants reported that cultural diversity and inclusion are elements of schooling in Northern Saskatchewan. One participating Northern educator mentioned that an existing program which provides pre-K training in literacy and social skills to children by working with parents could help solve difficulties with Native language and learning. The data passages TNS-255, TNS-256, and TNS-257 illustrate the belief of several respondents to the Northern focus group who explained that their students thought they were speaking English well, but in reality the children only spoke non-standard English. The group interview fragment TNS-258 reflects the sentiment of most teachers from the Northern focus group who recalled that their pupils were attracted to rap music because of the drum beats, and said that this helped their students learn English. The Northern educators further stated that they feel students in their schools are drawn to activities that share similarities with local culture, such as African drumming, and said that such cultural activities are an opportunity to promote shared roots and respect for diversity.

RESPONDENT: They think they are speaking really good English. They don't understand . . . (TNS-255) But they're speaking . . . (TNS-256) It's not standard English . . . (TNS-257).

RESPONDENT: It's non-standard because I find what really attracts them is the rap music and the words that go with it and I'm wondering if it's cultural because of the beat.

Drumbeats play a major role in how they understand things and you can just see any little drumming, they can pick up faster. And that's the way rap music is played . . . (TNS-258).

Similar to concerns expressed by researchers and Aboriginal educators (MacKay and Myles 1995; Wotherspoon 2000), the Northern focus group participants conversed about cultural retention, cultural brokerage, decolonisation, and the importance of instruction in both local Aboriginal languages and English. The focus group extract TNS-282 reflects the feeling of several participating Northern instructors who argued that teaching should be relevant to the local and outside world in terms of language. The data passage TNS-281 relays the thought of many respondents to the Northern focus group who discussed the logistics and cost of offering education in more than one language. The group interview segment TNS-276 imparts the thought of a few participating Northern educators who identified at least one school in Saskatchewan that offers learning in a Native language alongside English. Most of the teachers present at the Northern focus group felt that language training in local dialects alongside Aboriginal programming in English met the need for linguistic cultural retention.

RESPONDENT: But then that limits those children from moving out of that community. They don't have the freedom then. It's like me wanting to get a job in [name of place] I would need to do a lot of preparation and learning the language. So they would then be, they would be forced or they would have fewer opportunities if they don't get a grasp of English . . . but I'm not sure they know either language (TNS-282).

RESPONDENT: It would be difficult to find teachers, because they would have to be from that community who spoke that dialect and spoke it well (TNS-281).

RESPONDENT: [Name of place] has a system that they have a pilot [type of Aboriginal language] immersion K to 4, K to 3? (TNS-276)

#### 4.6.2 Family

In agreement with literature on Canadian society (Hiller 2006), the majority of Northern focus group respondents agreed that communities in the North are unique given geographic isolation, and local cultures of independence and mutual support. The focus group extract TNS-342 denotes the assertion of most participating Northern educators who pointed out that there are no food banks in the North. The data selection TNS-347 communicates the view of many

teachers at the Northern focus group who stated that the traditional Northern lifestyle is becoming less viable because students must go further to find animals. Further, these Northern instructors noted that declining opportunities in some communities are placing pressure on students to seek work in the South. The group interview quote TNS-340 typifies the response of several participants in the Northern focus group who were concerned about Northern students who are not prepared to leave their community and family.

RESPONDENT: . . . I'm sure there are kids who go hungry, but there are no food banks in [name of place] because they say they can just go to their relatives if they run out of food, so it's a different . . . (TNS-342).

RESPONDENT: So there's infinite, very large development pain, because not everybody now can go out and live off fishing and hunting . . . There's not enough animals left, but the kids in grade eleven and twelve say well we have to go 400 kilometers North [farther] for our moose because we sort of killed them out in all our neighbourhood (TNS-347).

RESPONDENT: I think that's the main problem of the North here that some of the kids don't want to leave. They have their security blankets, they have their, not necessarily moms and dads, but they have their aunts, and they have their [cultural words for care givers] and, you know, everybody else is going to take care of them. They feel nice and secure here (TNS-340).

Consistent with the goals of the "new" schools initiative in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan 2002; Saskatchewan Learning 2005b), the Northern focus group discussants indicated that they were working to improve community engagement with and support for learning. Instructors at the Northern focus group revealed that communication between the home and school had improved. The data extract TNS-313 illustrates the experience of many participating Northern educators who reported that they were encouraged to remove barriers to community involvement by seeking parents out at home or in the community. Several participants in the Northern focus group said that, prior to changes in their communication strategy parents would remove children from their classroom with no explanation, and talk poorly about them in the community. The focus group passage TNS-320 conveys the feeling of participating Northern staff who said that home-school communication had improved because parents felt comfortable attending the school and voicing dissatisfaction.

RESPONDENT: But in order to sell education, we have to convince the parents that it's worthwhile. Half of those parents don't come into parent interviews . . . because they had bad experiences or didn't get what they needed from the education system. It was an Aboriginal person who gave a workshop . . . and she had said that if we take our concerns with the kids or whatever to the home, you remove that barrier. I don't know if she's right or not, but you remove the fear of them walking basically into the school because some people just can't do that . . . (TNS-313).

RESPONDENT: Frankly, they're now brave enough to come in and vocalize dissatisfaction, whereas before it would have just been a backstabbing through the community. And now they will actually come in and approach you. "On your mature days, I'm glad you care enough to complain," but before that, in the past they would just pull the kids from your classroom and you really wouldn't be too sure why (TNS-320).

Aboriginal and community education literature often highlight the positive aspects of teachers' integration into communities (Saskatchewan Education 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2005b). In contrast to this literature, one might ask: to what extent have educators' families become appendages to the machinery of education in Saskatchewan? The Northern focus group participants talked about their family situation and its relationship with teachers' work in the North. The group interview fragment TNS-89 presents the thought of many educators from the Northern focus group who described the situation of older teachers with young children, and the context of family life for instructors without children. These Northern instructors stated that staff without supportive spouses brought their children to school during the evening so that they could continue working. One of the respondents in the Northern focus group stated that teachers training prepares educators for the type of work situations found in the North including long work days. Educators from the Northern focus group agreed that long hours, and the need to be flexible with family responsibilities are requirements of teachers' work in Northern Saskatchewan.

RESPONDENT: . . . teachers that are coming out of university, they've heard, they know, they're prepared to work long hours, so somehow they make that work, and yes, a lot of them bring their children in the evening. They seem to be at school almost all the time and they pretty well have to bring their kids to school or they wouldn't see them, you know, except to put them to bed, or sometimes not even that. I do know that a few people that I really know a little more intimately in terms of their situations, their husbands play an incredible role in keeping the family together – if it's the woman teaching. Now I don't know the situation . . . (TNS-89).



#### 4.6.3 Teachers' work situation

Northern focus group respondents commented on preliminary survey results made available on teachers' working conditions, for example intensification, during the focus discussion. The data segment TNS-47 reflects the thought of many teachers from the Northern focus group who indicated that educators' work in Northern Saskatchewan is both similar to and different from teaching in other parts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The group interview excerpts TNS-18, TNS-19, and TNS-22 exemplify the assertion of participating Northern instructors who argued that they work more than the average number of hours reported in the survey for a typical work week (Table 4.1a [page 67]; 44.6 hours for full-time teachers). The focus group selection TNS-47 also shows the reaction of many participants in the Northern focus group who felt that the survey respondents underreported the need for more preparation time (Table 4.1b [page 67]; 50.7% of survey participants strongly agreed that they had adequate preparation time).

FIRST RESPONDENT: I think if you have any teachers anywhere, they don't have enough time . . . I am amazed that people think they have adequate preparation time . . .  
SECOND RESPONDENT: . . . I could work twenty-four hours a day and never get done, but maybe I'm too fussy (TNS-47).

RESPONDENT: . . . I'm in the classroom from 7:30 in the morning til about six at night (TNS-18). Most high-school people have two hours of prep time in a six day cycle . . . And then, adding up the stuff I do, because I only have two hours at school (TNS-19).

RESPONDENT: . . . And we were looking up what you're doing in total: at home, on weekends, if you come to work early (TNS-20). I'd say I probably in total work fifty-five to fifty-six hours a week (TNS-22).

Somewhat similar to Waller's (1967 [1965]) notion of teachers as strangers in the community, educators present for the Northern focus group suggested that teachers maintained identities separate from the communities they served, and that they had no special status as instructors. The data selections TNS-37, TNS-88, and TNS-33 relay the thinking of the Northern focus group discussants who talked about their isolation and visibility as teachers in Northern communities. The focus group quote TNS-37 imparts the view of many participating Northern

instructors who asserted that community expectations of teachers, in terms of role modelling and morality, limit them from participating in normal social activities. The group interview extract TNS-88 reveals the reply of several respondents to the Northern focus group who suggested that teachers gravitate toward each other forming communities within the broader community. The data fragment TNS-33 relays the reflection of a few participating Northern instructors who noted that single educators or teachers who are away from their family have little to do in the North but work which means they usually end up at school on the weekend.

RESPONDENT: . . . I don't want to go to a bar there for a glass of pop let alone anything else, because, you know, that's not becoming of a teacher . . . (TNS-37).

RESPONDENT: Other things are younger teachers that are single tend to group together . . . And a lot of us other teachers will get together and have – the older middle-aged teachers – a meal together, or with a few friends, or whatever (TNS-88).

RESPONDENT: If I don't go home to [place of primary residence] from [place of work], I'm usually in the school Saturday morning until Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning until Sunday afternoon, because I've got nothing else to do, I figure well may as well put in the time . . . (TNS-33).

The data segment TNS-27 communicates the outlook of many Northern focus group participants who argued that teachers who work at the school on the weekend usually end up supervising students, because students are drawn to the school, and like to use the facilities for recreational activities. The focus group excerpt TNS-21 typifies the sentiment of a few participating Northern teachers who declared that children contact educators at school, and when they are running personal errands for help, food, money, or just to talk. The group interview selection TNS-28 illustrates the feeling of several instructors from the Northern focus group who stated that they often retreat home in order to get work done, but students phone them or knock on the door. Participating Northern staff agreed that it is difficult to have a normal private life in the North because educators are always on duty.

FIRST RESPONDENT: . . . during the weekend when I'm working on my unit plans and lesson plans in the computer lab . . . with other teachers, we end up supervising kids in there as well. SECOND RESPONDENT: They show up, coming to the school. FIRST RESPONDENT: Yeah (TNS-27).

RESPONDENT: . . . since I moved there, I never really was off duty, because I was always viewed as a teacher even when I was out doing my grocery shopping . . . and I've seen other teachers do the same (TNS-21).

RESPONDENT: . . . I tend to take my stuff out of the school, so I can work on it at home and just don't answer the door to get it done. So it does get done . . . (TNS-28).

The School Plus consultation group identified (2001) teachers' spending on classroom resources as a dilemma that needed concern to be addressed by the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan, and recommended that money be allotted to teachers annually for this purpose. The majority of Northern focus group respondents said that they are given allowances at the start of every fiscal year to buy resources for their classroom. The group interview selections TNS-104, TNS-106, TNS-108, and TNS-115 present the conclusion of many educators at the Northern focus group who asserted that they spent or would need to spend between \$400.00 and \$2000.00 on basic classroom supplies for one school year. The focus group quote TNS-106 conveys the reflection of a few participating Northern teachers who said that they have spent substantial sums of money (the example given is \$3000.00) on text books for use in their classes. Staff present for the Northern focus group agreed that classroom resources are more important to teaching than they were prior to the introduction of resource-based learning.

RESPONDENT: I spent \$50 a month basically on art supplies last year that wasn't compensated for (TNS-104).

RESPONDENT: . . . this summer I put out \$400 my own money, had to wait until fall to get it compensated back, and I just spent another \$200 today . . . I'm trying to get away from putting my stuff out, but almost all my textbook resources are my own books, so there's probably \$3000 worth of textbooks in my classroom that belong to me (TNS-106).

RESPONDENT: . . . I'd say, last year I spent pretty close to \$500 or \$600, this year I've spent that already because of the grade level I have. And it doesn't look like it's going to end too much soon. Probably close to \$2000 before I get to the end of this year (TNS-108).

RESPONDENT: . . . I usually spend around \$200, like, at the convention every year and then, that's 200, and then again another, maybe \$100 or \$200 at Christmas. And then again at Easter, and that's for the holidays for the kids . . . (TNS-115).

The data extract TNS-143 relays the assertion of a few Northern focus group discussants who talked about resource sharing, budgeting their purchases, and investing book

rewards back into the classroom. The focus group passage TNS-119 communicates the response of several respondents to the Northern focus group who said that they reduce the personal cost they incurred on purchasing basic classroom supplies by spending personal money on re-useable resources, such as texts, and school money on non-renewable resources, such as motivation/reward stickers. The group interview fragments TNS-116 and TNS-117 denote the thinking of a few participating Northern teachers who made a distinction between spending on classroom supplies, and the other purchases educators make on small things to honour students during holiday celebrations.

RESPONDENT: . . . I'm not spending that much, but every time you go to the grocery store, oh, I need those marshmallows for this, and you're throwing it in. But where I work, we get a budget for classroom supplies, like three or four hundred each, and before convention we were told how much we're getting for next year, so you could spend that all right now if you chose to . . . but I tend to . . . put out my own money for say, books and things that I can keep forever and use the school money for stickers that you're going to be buying anyway but giving away (TNS-119).

RESPONDENT: . . . I walk by this high school teacher and . . . she may teach high school, but beginning years, and all this bird walls and things she was going to buy, and I said, why don't you don't just come over some night and go through the filing cabinets, we have all that stuff. You don't have it in high school, but you're certainly going to find it in elementary, like save your money! (TNS-143).

RESPONDENT: So even beyond classroom supplies, there are also the usual celebrations – the holiday celebrations that you have (TNS-116). Yeah, just to honour the kids, so that they have something (TNS-117).

The data segment TNS-46 exemplifies the reaction of many Northern respondents to the survey data in which 54.2% of survey participants stated that they did not have sufficient time for students with difficulties (Table 4.1b [page 67]). All of the educators present for the Northern focus group said that they did not have enough time for students with difficulties, enough resources to adequately address students' dilemmas, or the required support from other government agencies. The focus group excerpt TNS-317 illustrates the view of most Northern focus group participants who thought that there were too few counsellors and social workers in Northern schools and that other government agencies should be in the schools more than once a month. Participating Northern staff believed that the lack of human resources and support

from other government agencies made it more difficult to be responsive to students' and families' other-than-schooling needs on an immediate and daily basis.

RESPONDENT: . . . They used to call it the opportunity class or special ed., and there doesn't seem to be any of that right now, and this is where the difficulty lies because, if I have in my classroom twelve kids who are continuously misbehaving, you can tell them, you can ask . . . would you please take care, I have a job to do . . . You know, you have the ADHD, you have fetal alcohol syndrome. No, I don't have enough time . . . (TNS-46).

RESPONDENT: . . . there is being some effort being put to it, towards bringing other agencies and support systems in, but . . . we have this distance thing up here as well. And that's why we put guidance counsellors into our schools and social workers in some of our schools, so that we actually have someone there qualified in the school, because we have other people that are from other agencies that come once a month which isn't adequate for some of the needs . . . but in terms of FAS and some of the other stuff, like I don't think it's adequately being addressed but again I am always reminded that our division is very young in comparison to other divisions. And so, and no, we're just starting (TNS-317).

Similar to a report on Aboriginal teachers in Saskatchewan (Denis, Bouvier, and Battiste 1998), the Northern focus group respondents stated that though Aboriginal teachers have unique experiences as educators they also share common experiences with other instructors based on their membership in the same occupational group. Participating Northern instructors indicated that their relationship with parents is fundamental to helping children receive the services they require. The group interview selection TNS-315 reflects the belief of many teachers at the Northern focus group who explained that trust and communication can lead to conversations where instructors are able to refer parents to government services. The data quote TNS-311 presents the outlook of a few respondents to the Northern focus group who said that building trust with parents is even difficult for teachers of an Aboriginal ancestry.

RESPONDENT: It's a start. I mean there will never be enough to totally erase our frustration level, but compared to what was there before, it's a lot now. But you have to know how to access it. And you have to get the parents' trust to finally, you know, to get to the point where you can say: Have you thought of mental health helping you? But you can't say that the first time you meet a parent (TNS-315).

RESPONDENT: If you talk to some of those teachers though they'd say we're people that walk in two worlds, and we're not necessary trusted by either world [Aboriginal people who have become teachers] (TNS-311).

The Northern focus group discussants talked about “race” and ethnicity in relation to how children treat each other. Participating Northern staff supposed that some children use any difference as a basis on which to exclude, bully, or discriminate. Educators from the Northern focus group recalled that teachers’ children, as others, often deal with exclusion based on the colour of their skin or on the basis of their “race.” The group interview extract TNS-216 shows the reaction of some participants in the Northern focus group who depicted tension between students of differing Aboriginal or mixed ethnicities as ethnic conflict. The focus group passage TNS-197 conveys the thinking of staff at the Northern focus group who elaborated that a common difficulty in Northern classrooms is tension between treaty and non-treaty Aboriginal children. The majority of educators present for the Northern focus group said they resolved this dilemma by promoting respect for each other and cultural diversity, so that everyone’s needs are met.

RESPONDENT: . . . one of the experiences that I had when, and an on-going one . . . if somebody would ask me for a pencil the others would say “You don’t give him one; he’s treaty, he should be bringing his own.” And I was told that several times, so you can tell that maybe some of the students who were Métis maybe felt a bit – like I’m not saying they all were . . . but some of them did feel some resentment (TNS-197).

RESPONDENT: I had this one [Aboriginal ethnicity] girl in a [different Aboriginal ethnicity] classroom and she had problems because they would pick on her. SECOND PARTICIPANT: I can remember that in [place name], there was one [Aboriginal ethnicity] kid and his life was miserable. It [his difference] was a target for harassment, a target for bullying . . . . And the same thing there was a white child in a grade seven last year that was sought out as a target for harassment, just to see how much the kid could take (TNS-216).

#### 4.6.4 Working with the Northern responses

The Northern report underscores that teachers’ professional status had changed by 2003-2005 in the North to the extent that educators were obliged to consult parents and community members in decision making, seek parents out at community events in order to gain their support for educational initiatives, and ensure that students, parents, and other community members were democratically included in schooling (TNS-296 and TNS-297 [page 120]; TNS-313 and TNS-320 [page 125]). Further, the Northern report suggests that Northern teachers’

work was intensified based on when the educators were working which included during paid school hours, unpaid hours at home, and while at the grocery store (TNS-27, TNS-21, and TNS-28 [page 128]). Many of the respondents to Northern focus group indicated that geographic isolation shapes their work and relationship with community members to a degree given that they are only in the community for the school year, lack anonymity and opportunities for recreation, and spend more of their time in the school working (TNS-89 [page 125 and 126]; TNS-37, TNS-88, and TNS-33 [page 127]).

The Northern responses also direct us to consider the ways in which Northern teachers' relationships with community members had not changed by 2003-2005 in that Northern educators were expected to be role models, that individual identities often needed to be concealed in closed educational communities, and for this reason teachers often needed to form communities within a community in order to gain some semblance of self-identity (TNS-18, TNS-19, TNS-20, TNS-22, and TNS-47 [page 126]; TNS-37, TNS-88, and TNS-33 [page 127]). In addition to discussions about teachers as "stranger in the community," educators in the North emphasised the context of family life in the North and the need for integrated service delivery. In this regard, the majority of Northern educators were not focused on the lack of teachers, but rather the need for other government professionals to be working in the school/community on a permanent basis (TNS-89 [page 125 and 126]; TNS-342, TNS-347, and TNS-340 [page 124]; TNS-46 and TNS-317 [page 130]).

The Northern report reflects a number of Northern teachers' concerns regarding Aboriginal education in terms of the availability of curriculum and teaching resources that reflect local Indigenous cultures or at least resources that have been produced by Aboriginal Canadian scholars (TNS-222, TNS-229, and TNS-285 [page 119]). Many of the Northern focus group participants were concerned about the dominance of universal Aboriginal content and the need to replace it with local cultural material (TNS-233 and TNS-291 [page 120]). In their attempts to replace existing curriculum content by accessing local cultural knowledge, participating Northern

educators discovered that community members constitute to varying degrees a latent source of local cultural knowledge. Although meaningful, the ability of Elders to participate varies based on the types and degrees of knowledge they have about local culture (TNS-283 and TNS-173 [page 121]). Analytic conclusions from the survey, and the urban, rural, band, and Northern site are discussed in Chapter Five.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

The data from focus groups and surveys were described and discussed in this chapter producing a review of main points at the end of each site report for use in Chapter Five. The review of main points at the end of each site report was organised to reflect the relationship between the data and the themes: work situation, family, and Aboriginal education. Responses from research sites, taken collectively, suggest that a great deal has been accomplished in terms of improving education for Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan. However, a great deal remains to be done in terms of achieving the improvement of educational attainment for Aboriginal children and youth. Educators across sites identified structural barriers to meeting students' needs that are not easily surpassed by schools and families working together, and argue that governments need to do more to help schools and families be responsive to the needs of Aboriginal communities. Responses from the focus groups and the survey will be compared with each other Chapter Five. In addition, aggregate findings from the survey and focus group data will also be compared in Chapter Five with excerpts from interviews with non-teaching educational practitioners.



## Chapter Five: Comparing the focus group, survey, and interview data

### 5.1 Introduction

The intent of this chapter is to develop research findings about teachers' work with students of Aboriginal heritage in Saskatchewan. This chapter is broken into five substantive parts. The first three sections offer conclusions about teachers' work in Aboriginal communities, relating to productivity, community, and Aboriginal education initiatives. Respondents' observations are compared throughout these sections with each other (between the urban, rural, Northern, and band site) and where possible with data from the survey reported in Chapter Four. The research findings, developed in the first to third sections, are compared in the fourth substantive part with information from interviews with key non-teaching educational practitioners. Responses to the three guiding research questions are outlined in the fifth and final section of this chapter.

### 5.2 The influence of productivity on teachers' work in Saskatchewan

Educational administration literature (for example Boyd 1999), reviewed in Chapter Two, suggests that productivity imperatives figure centrally in the reform of schools globally (Smyth et al. 2000; Robertson 1999), across Canada (Wotherspoon 2004), and in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). Educational administrators and Canadians commonly expect teachers to use resources more efficiently, connect learning to economic competitiveness/employment, and improve education with Aboriginal peoples (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008; Angus 1993; Wotherspoon 2004, 2007; Saskatchewan Learning 2004b, 2007a, 2007f). The Ministry of Education formalised educators' human service work by introducing the "new" school plan, and by securing targeted funds for "at-risk" students following the School Plus consultations (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). The "new" school model

was, in part, intended to clarify teachers' roles within the expanded human service mandate, and address educators' concerns regarding the intensification of teachers' work. Teachers' professional associations across Canada have acknowledged the value of governments' renewed interest in education and additional funds for learning, but they have also expressed concern about the expectations that Canadians commonly have with respect to the capacities of schools and teachers to achieve established educational goals. Despite additional funds for Aboriginal education and students of a lower socioeconomic status, teachers feel that they lack adequate support from the governments and communities with whom they work and work for (Wotherspoon 2004, 2007).

#### 5.2.1 Doing more with some support

The School Plus initiative/"new" school model had been in operation for about one or two years in Saskatchewan when the group interviews for this study were initiated. Rural, Northern, and urban focus group participants asserted that their situation has not changed and many of the challenges they faced prior to the School Plus consultations have not been resolved. Core concepts taken from the School Plus, community, and Aboriginal education reports and literature on teachers' work are used to organise the discussion of participants' responses regarding teachers' work situations below (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002; Saskatchewan Education 1996, 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a; Boyd 1999; Hall 2004; Hargreaves 1994a, 1994b). The organising concepts include the expanded human service mandate, expectations regarding student performance, accountability, and changes in professionalism.

#### 5.2.2 Teachers' work situations: Comparing the focus group and survey data

##### 5.2.2.1 The expanded human service mandate

Scholars working in the field of educational change (for example Boyd 1999; Smyth et al. 2000) argue that learning is a collaborative endeavour achieved by the educational community including students, teachers, and parents. The notion that learning is collaboratively produced is

expressed in the democratic community schools movement with the sentiment that the community is responsible for meeting students' complete educational needs (Saskatchewan Education 1996; McKay and Myles 1995). Despite the development of the "new" schools model in Saskatchewan with the introduction of a school-based network for delivering other-than-schooling services to students, teachers' work at the research sites remained intensified and divided between instruction and non-instructional tasks in 2003-2005.

Many educators from the urban, rural, and Northern site reported that they are struggling to meet the requirements of the expanded human service mandate, because other government agencies are primarily involved on a school-linked rather than an integrated basis. Participants from these focus groups revealed that they share professionals, such as those from mental-health with other schools in their district under the "new" school system. Almost all of the educators from the rural, Northern, and urban site concluded that they were obliged to take time away from teaching to meet students' non-instructional needs during and to facilitate the involvement of professionals from other government agencies after a crisis situation. Similarly, the majority of educators from the urban focus group noted that they have too few Elders compared to the number of schools in their district, and that community service organisations are only involved in their school periodically. Overall, participants from the rural, urban, Northern, and band site concluded that they appreciate school-linked and community-based services, but these initiatives have not reduced the amount of time they spend on meeting students' basic needs.

In addition to spending more time on meeting students' basic needs, several participants at the band site said that educators are also obliged to take time away from classroom instruction for other tasks relating to students' preparation for learning. A few of the band respondents further asserted that educators across Saskatchewan and Canada are spending more time developing students' behavioural skills, and managing their conduct prior to learning than before. Many teachers at the rural site corroborated this statement by expressing concern

that the amount of time spent on preparing students to learn, managing students' behaviour and ensuring their basic needs are met, had increased to rival the time spent on teaching.

The majority of focus group participants from the urban, rural, Northern, and band site suggested that managing crisis in relation to meeting students' other-than-school-needs, facilitating external professionals' follow-up with learners subsequent to a needs-based situation, and managing students' behaviour in the classroom are contributing to the intensification of teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan. Many educators at the urban site were unsure how long they will be able to sustain their pace of work without additional help. Similarly, the rural focus group respondents indicated that they lacked enough time, personnel, and resources to meet students' needs, and for alternative education programs. The survey and focus group data suggest that a variety of factors may be driving the intensification of teachers' work in Saskatchewan, such as varied teaching tasks, pace of work, number of hours worked, and the emotional aspect of work within a school system that has an expanded human service mandate.

For the most part, the rural, urban, Northern, and band teachers conveyed perspectives similar to what educators had reported in the School Plus reports (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). Specifically, teachers are obliged to take time away from learning to meet students' other-than-school needs and they are spending personal funds on basic classroom supplies. Despite the repetition of findings, the focus group data are important indicators of teachers' views regarding how changes relating to the "new" school model have influenced the ways in which educators conduct their work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan. Many participating educators felt in 2003-2005 that the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan had not freed up teachers' time for instructional tasks at the research sites within one to three years after the release of the School Plus reports. Educational administrators and research may not find this alarming given that teachers are, following the introduction of the "new" school model, more

likely to feel less tension between their role as instructors and care givers over the long than the short term.

#### 5.2.2.2 Expectations regarding student performance

As discussed in Chapter Two, educational administrators seek to improve students' performances by encouraging teachers to be more productive or efficient and effective in schooling. Teachers are often encouraged to be efficient in schooling by reducing costs so that savings can be transferred to programs for marginalised students, and to be effective by achieving established goals for improving Aboriginal students' successes with learning. Educators should endeavour to be more efficient and effective in education by changing their instructional behaviour to combine an ethic of caring with high academic press. Academic press entails creating and promoting shared values about learning, a common agenda of coursework, and a clear means for realising established educational goals (Boyd 1999; Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992; Saskatchewan Education 1996; Saskatchewan 2002; Saskatchewan Learning 2007b, 2007f).

Teachers at the band group recognized that changing teachers' attitudes and instructional behaviour supports success in educational improvement. However, respondents to the urban, rural, Northern, and band focus groups agreed, for the most part, that governments should primarily foster success in Aboriginal communities with additional resources. Further the majority of participants from the rural, Northern, urban, and band focus groups felt that expectations for educational improvement should be based on the resources that schools and teachers have at their disposal. In addition, some of the participating urban, rural, and band teachers placed emphasis on the time required to achieve improvements in students' learning.

Consistent with concerns about time, some teachers from the urban and rural focus groups talked about education gaps and goals, and the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth. The majority of urban educators stated that

education gaps limit the amount of educational achievement possible in one school year, and they further slow a student's progress toward high school completion. Further, these urban and rural focus group participants argued that expectations regarding students' performances are too high. Many of the rural focus group respondents added to this by arguing that education gaps cannot be closed given that schools lack resources. Specifically, these rural participants were concerned about the non-teaching and teaching personnel available for alternative programs.

Similarly, respondents to the Northern focus group indicated that they lack basic resources for learning which they address annually by spending personal money on basic classroom supplies. The majority of participants at the band site agreed with educators from the other focus groups who argued that expectations for improvement should be based on the time and resources available for learning. In addition, teachers present for the band focus group added that expectations for educational improvement should also consider that the actual rate of change is slow and steady. Despite challenges, the band focus group respondents noted that their students are better prepared for learning than before. In contrast to data from the other focus group sites with respect to educational improvement, the band instructors suggested that at least one of their successes with educational reform started with changing teachers' attitudes as opposed to acquiring additional resources.

Focus group respondents from the rural, urban, Northern, and band sites felt in 2003-2005 that educational improvement for Aboriginal peoples was difficult or occurring slowly. Select survey data from 2002-2003 (Tables 4.2 [page seventy two], 4.3 [page seventy four], and 4.4 [page seventy six]) and the 2005 Action Plan for Aboriginal Education in Saskatchewan also support the conclusion that change is occurring slowly for Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan. Despite the rate of change, the AEPAC views recent developments with regard to Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan as successful because the momentum for Aboriginal education equity is growing in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Learning 2005a). The focus group and

survey data shed light on the necessity for governments to ground expectations regarding productivity by acknowledging that challenges, such as gaps in learning are not easily addressed with existing resources, and for teachers to recognise that educational success also begins with changes in their attitudes and/or instructional behaviour.

#### 5.2.2.3 Inter-jurisdictional accountability

As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Four, First Nations are obliged to provide educational services to their students which are comparable to those received by other Canadians within the same province (Indian and Northern Affairs 2005, 2008). Many of the rural educators were concerned about accountability and asserted that teachers who work for non-unionized band schools are not regulated professionally. These participants argued that many of the students who arrive at their school have incomplete or misinformation in their files. Students' competencies and achievements are unaccounted for or altogether misrepresented. The rural respondents further depicted inter-jurisdictional alignment as one of several factors responsible for education gaps. These educators argued that Aboriginal students in their school are more likely than non-Aboriginal students to have gaps in learning. The rural focus group respondents felt that the movement of Aboriginal students inter-jurisdictionally makes partnerships between the provincial and First Nations education systems fundamental to improving the educational achievement of Aboriginal children and youth.

One might conclude then that the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children is an inter-jurisdictional concern in Saskatchewan, and it would help improve Aboriginal students' educational outcomes if federal rules regarding comparability extended to regulations governing teacher training, teachers' professional associations, and student evaluation and accounting practices. As noted at the start of this section, federal funding of elementary and secondary education requires that First Nations provide their people with education that is comparable to or better than that which other Canadians receive in provincial

schools. Comparability is not well defined and often a contentious issue given that First Nations have the inherent right to govern their own education systems, and they desire learning that does not replicate the locally-defined cultural deficiencies of provincial schools.

A few respondents from the band site argued that successful respect programs and the creation of a positive work environment begin with a change in teachers' attitudes. Central to this process is good leadership, consultants, and teachers who are committed to school improvement. Educators at the band school were clear that schools need to adjust to families and that parent blaming is not an acceptable response. In addition, to acknowledging the responsibility that schools have with respect to students' and families, the band focus participants highlighted federal and provincial roles in reducing child poverty as well as governments responsibility to provide social care for families. A few of the band focus respondents argued that, while parents are doing what they can, this is not an individual difficulty or responsibility; the real problem is more systematically embedded in our society in the lack of social supports and programming. In contrast, the survey participants focused on the lack of support from parents and poor working conditions as primary factors in schools that inhibit the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal youth and children.

#### 5.2.2.4 Changes in professionalism

A range of trends in educational reform relating to changes in teachers' professionalism were covered in Chapter Two, including a loss of autonomy/control within the labour process of teaching in favour of more collaborative approaches to teaching and learning. Similar to Waller's ([1965] 1967) teacher, many educators at the urban, Northern, and rural site reported that they lacked self-determination, and that society more generally expected them to conform to moral-social norms with little to no deviation as role models for others. Further, several of the Northern respondents also expressed feelings of isolation and explained that educators constructed a community within a community to obtain a sense of self set apart from their professional identity.



Many respondents in the North reflected on their lack of anonymity and the way in which they were perceived, and utilised by other community members as teachers while they were at school, at the grocery store, and even at home.

Although it is no conciliation prize, Waller's educator wielded power and status, as often the only educated person in the community, and was able to influence community life, as evaluators, based on their monopoly over knowledge. Unlike Waller's teacher, the majority of participants from the rural, urban, Northern, and band site reported a change in their professional status with an increase in the importance of community-determined and culturally particular perspectives. Although, these educators also discussed their role as coordinators in facilitating community involvement in learning which often included mediating disputes between students, parents, and community members. One might conclude then that teachers are strangers, set aside from the communities they serve as role models and representatives of the education system. Although, it also appears that educators have shed their status as influential evaluators given that they no longer have a monopoly over knowledge. In this way, educators may be better described as cultural mediators because they guide wide-spread democratic participation in schools according to community cultural norms.

If accurate, one might assume that teachers' role as mediator would be more pronounced in cross-cultural educational contexts or in culturally plural communities than in culturally homogenous schools. As an illustration, many educators from the rural focus group suggested that community ethnic and "racial" conflict makes not only teaching, but also facilitating the democratic participation of parents more difficult, especially in the instance that parents are in conflict. One could extend the findings to conclude, that in culturally diverse communities teachers have an opportunity to exercise traditional-professional power in mediating disputes as well as in their role as a conduit through which governments become informed about community views with respect to educational programs and services. For example, a number of teachers from the urban, rural, Northern, and band site mentioned that

parents and students are often in conflict with each other, the school, or with particular teachers stemming from cultural difference, racism, and/or disputes over what students need to learn. Many of the respondents from the urban, rural, and band site stated that educators play an important role in supporting, or not, the views of community members who do or do not think that their children should be exposed to Aboriginal history, perspectives, language, and knowledge.

A few of the Northern focus group participants reported that teachers as an occupational group should ideally be representative of local cultural groups, though it is not necessary, as a means to resolve disputes and achieve equity in education. Shared ethnicity between a teacher and parent does not make developing trusting relations easier, according to focus group participants Aboriginal colleagues have expressed concerns about “walking in two worlds.” The survey data extend these assertions (see Chapter Three, page fifty eight) by indicating that more male Aboriginal educator-role models are needed; this point has also been made by an Aboriginal scholar (Battiste 2005). In addition to these points, some educators from the Northern and rural site were also interested in helping students shed the racist assumptions, and baggage that they had learned from their families, and in teaching students about the value of cultural diversity.

### 5.2.3 Summary for the influence of productivity on teachers’ work in Saskatchewan

The group interview data indicate overall that teachers’ work was being intensified due to the expanded human service mandate, unrealistic expectations regarding student performance, the lack of comparability between provincial and First Nation education systems, and changes in teachers’ professionalism or their reconstitution as mediator in the school-community. In fulfilling the requirements of the expanded human service mandate, teachers were obliged to be responsive to students’ entire needs without the continuous support of other government agencies or the communities they served. Based on teachers’ perspectives, the Ministry of

Education's attempts to free up educators' time in Saskatchewan by addressing the division of teachers' labour between other-than-school and instructional tasks were not evident. Adding to this difficulty, the common perception that schools and teachers are receiving adequate support for Aboriginal education has legitimised Canadian citizens' and governments' unrealistic expectation that the difficulties Aboriginal students' face in developing educational success will be resolved "shortly."

The majority of respondents to the rural focus group expressed frustration with respect to working with students who arrive from other educational jurisdictions because there is no guarantee that the students' evaluation within the alternate system will be comparable with their standards. Students who are not properly evaluated or placed create additional work given they require both evaluation and placement in remedial educational programs, and the investment of this time and energy is not a guarantee that the student will stay in the school until the end of the academic year. Changes in the teacher's professional role have brought new responsibilities and require non-teaching skills to facilitate the democratic involvement of parents in educational decision making and leadership. In responding to Aboriginal education initiatives, teachers with little to no formal training in Native studies or local cultures are inclined to spend personal time learning about local peoples. Many of the rural, Northern, and urban educators also expressed concern that they are spending time on coordinating collaboration and inclusion which means that they are constrained in terms of their ability to teach students what they are required to learn under the curriculum, especially if community or parental desires conflict with government policy.

### 5.3 The influence of community on teachers' work in Saskatchewan

Government policy literature and reports presented in Chapter Two (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005, 2008; Saskatchewan Learning 2005b, 2007c) reveal that Aboriginal communities are exercising their jurisdiction over education, and they are working with other

governments who share control over learning for First peoples in order to improve schools. Although First peoples' inherent right to govern education is widely recognised, the federal government emphasises that Aboriginal communities have differential capacities to deliver, evaluate, and improve education programs and services for people within their ethnic group (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a, 2007). As a result, federal and provincial governments are working with First peoples to build the capacity of Aboriginal communities to become fully independent and sustainable in exercising their jurisdiction over education (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008; Saskatchewan Learning 2005a). Governments have asked that schools and teachers facilitate the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth, in part, by creating and/or enhancing the social capital available for use by students and families in Aboriginal school-communities (Saskatchewan 2002; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a).

### 5.3.1 Caring for students and families

Families and schools are connected to each other through children, and are mutually obligated in the care and education of young people (Lareau 1989; Riordan 2004; Saskatchewan 2002). Academics, educators, policy makers, and parents alike commonly understand that students who arrive at school without their basic needs met are not able to learn (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994b; Saskatchewan Learning 2005b, 2007e). Saskatchewan and other governments who share jurisdiction over Aboriginal education are involved in the delivery of programs and services intended to be responsive to the varied and complete needs of students (Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2007b, 2007d, 2007e, 2007f; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008; Canada and Saskatchewan 2005). Core concepts taken from federal and provincial policy literature that regulates Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan are used to organise the discussion of the focus group and survey data below (Saskatchewan Learning 2005a, 2005b, 2007c; Saskatchewan 2002). The ideas are

encompassed by the headings: the context of family life and expectations regarding educational improvement, community support and parental involvement in school-located services, and community and opportunities for democratic collaboration in Aboriginal education.

### 5.3.2 Family: Comparing the focus group and survey data

#### 5.3.2.1 The context of family life and educational improvement

The School Plus consultation group notes that families, guardians, parents, and community members are collaborators and essential partners in responding to students' needs (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). Partnerships increase access to community resources and expertise, improve school programming and educational experiences, and the ability of the community to support programs and services. Further, the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan states that collaborators can contribute to or help teachers in the processes of adapting the curriculum, instructional methods, or learning climate (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992). The inclusion of community members and parents is a core part of the Community Schools and School Plus policies and programs (Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005b; Saskatchewan 2002).

In Saskatchewan teachers are responsible for developing community, student, and parent engagement in learning and for facilitating access to school-linked and integrated services (Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2007f). Many of the educators at the rural, band, and Northern site discussed how families were doing in relation to preparing children to learn. In addition, they were also concerned about parents' level of involvement in and degree of support for learning. The majority of teachers at the rural site claimed that people interested in educational improvement should be equally concerned about the family and the education system. These educators argued that changes need to be made to both education and the family if Aboriginal students' achievements in learning are to be improved. Parents and families

often struggle to prepare children for learning, and often wish to become more involved, but are unable given their focus on meeting basic needs.

The majority of respondents from the urban, rural, Northern, and band focus group agreed that supports need to be more fully developed for families so that educational improvement can occur. The extent to which participating educators focused on the family, education system, and community varied from one site to another. Many of the participants at the urban, rural and band site discussed the relationship between the context of family life and expectations regarding educational improvement. These teachers suggested that families who have their basic needs met, and who are not dealing with social or health problems are in the best position to invest in education, and to support their children in learning. As illustrated in Tables 4.4a, 4.4b, and 4.4d (page seventy six), the survey data support focus participants' assertions with respect to the need to fully develop supports for children and youth in order to achieve educational improvement.

According to focus group respondents, educational improvement will occur for the vast majority of students when supporting families becomes a political priority for Canadians resulting in additional investments. Some of the survey participants asserted that parents' attitudes, addictions, and socioeconomic status, are primary factors in addition to the school that inhibit the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal students. The majority of teachers at the urban and all of the educators at the rural site were emphatic that stable families are required to significantly improve the educational achievement of Aboriginal students. Participating educators at the band site expressed a similar sentiment, that supporting families is the route to developing success more fully, and asserted that additional resources are needed for families that live in poverty and/or who experience health and social difficulties.

The instructors at the band school asserted that parents are doing what they can to prepare students to learn. The majority of respondents from the rural, urban, Northern, and band site were concerned about the resources that schools have available and the objectives

they are obliged to achieve with these resources. These focus participants argued that the objectives of education programming should be adjusted to account for the context of family life given the resources and time available to achieve educational tasks. Further, the instructors argued that the context of family life determines students' needs when they arrive at school, the resources required to prepare them for learning, and the educational goals that will be possible to achieve in one year. The majority of focus respondents were adamant that governments, local communities, and schools need to make up the difference for parents who are struggling to fully prepare children for learning.

#### 5.3.2.2 Community support and parental involvement in school-located services

Participants at the urban, rural, and Northern sites discussed the integrated model of service delivery and school-linked services. The integrated and school-linked philosophy is, as previously noted, a part of Aboriginal education initiatives in Community Schools and the School Plus program (Saskatchewan 2001; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a). The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) in Saskatchewan recommended that educators strengthen the connection between programs, such as pre-natal, parenting, nutrition, and child care despite their disparate existence in schools, communities, and/or workplaces (Saskatchewan Education 2000). Government policy documents discussed in Chapter Two suggest that school-located services were adopted because students and families needed access to social and other services, existing professional services lacked collective-strategic coordination, integrated and school-linked models were perceived as a more efficient use of resources, and school-connected or education-grounded services fulfilled the need for preventative programming (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1992, 1994b; Saskatchewan Learning 2007f). Further, the successful delivery of integrated or school-linked services requires that: 1) participating schools and agencies develop partnerships to organise collaboration, 2) communities support, through broad based participation, the creation and

delivery of school-connected services, 3) service providers are accountability to funders and the communities they serve through program evaluation, 4) the funding available for such programs be non-categorical/flexible, and 5) all participating organisation be involved in planning, decision making, funding, and evaluation (Saskatchewan Education, Training, and Employment 1994b).

Almost all of the teachers who participated in the focus groups discussed the integrated model of service delivery more often than school-linked services, although they argued the latter were more common. The “lion’s share” of educators from the rural, Northern, and urban sites revealed that the integrated model of service delivery, where it existed, was not fully developed. Participating instructors at the urban site raised concerns regarding the role that representatives from other agencies would take if they were in the schools on a more permanent basis. These educators thought roles would need to be well-defined, otherwise parents may feel threatened. Despite concerns, staff at all of the research sites supported the integrated model of service delivery, and perceived it as a much needed means to support families and improve learning. The teachers also promoted the development of positive family dynamics, and preparation of children for learning as the vehicle to success in learning, and felt that the integrated model would, in part, accomplish this.

Many of the participants at the rural, urban, Northern, and band site talked about the existence of early child development and parenting programs in Saskatchewan. Some of the participating urban and band educators confirmed the existence of nutrition programs, and a few of the band staff also discussed other additions to their curriculum, such as health curricula developed specifically for First Nations. The majority of focus group participants concluded that partnerships and collaboration exist in their school although the extent to which respondents at each site reported that these were developed varied. In addition, these educators suggested that the programs in their schools are better described as school-linked rather than integrated services. Almost all of the teachers at each site reported that a human service strategy oriented to meeting and being responsive to individual needs requires, in addition to teachers trained



human resource personnel. All of the respondents at the urban, many of the rural participants, and most of the Northern teachers indicated that more funding and resources are needed for the delivery of integrated services.

The majority of instructors who participated in the urban, Northern, and band focus groups stated that their school enjoyed community support, and participating staff at the urban and band site described community support for their school as broad based. According to focus respondents from all of the sites, broad based participation is more difficult to achieve compared to broad based support. Several participating band teachers reported broad based community participation through their regular Elder program and the involvement of parents. Most of the educators at the urban and Northern site enjoyed parental and community participation, though they noted that parental participation was limited to a core group of people. The rural instructors argued that parental participation existed, but they were unsure about the degree to which participation was broad or localized within a particular group of parents. Respondents from all of the focus groups thought that they had achieved some degree of broad based community support, and participation in programs and services in their school.

In addition to the lack of integrated services, the teachers at all of the sites highlighted the complexities of the relationship that parents often have with representatives from other government agencies. The educators at the urban site mentioned the need for non-educational professionals to have a clear role while in the school, while some of the teachers at the Northern site talked about their work in mediating parents' access to other government agencies and their services, such as mental health. One might conclude then that schools' partnerships with other government agencies, situates educators uneasily between families and representatives from other government departments. In such instances, teachers may be required to collaborate with other government professionals to deliver school-located services, but also to maintain community involvement in learning by mediating between parental concerns, and non-educational professionals' agendas. Many of the educators from the rural, urban, and Northern

site expressed an additional concern about broad based participation, specifically it is difficult to achieve because many of the parents who require non-educational services are rarely in a position to participate in schooling.

#### 5.3.2.3 Community and opportunities for democratic collaboration

As described in Chapter Two, it is commonly known that parental involvement in and support for teaching and learning is fundamental to the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth, and students of a lower socioeconomic status (Lareau 1989; Monture-Angus 1995; Riordan 2004; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Saskatchewan Education 1996, 2000; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2005a). The Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee made several recommendations under cultural affirmation and the school climate in 2000. First, that the Ministry of Education facilitate the creation and renewal of positive school environments. Second, that the Ministry of Education encourage schools and communities to develop healthy and productive relationships by including Aboriginal people in school activities on a daily basis (Saskatchewan Education 2000).

Educators' responses to the survey and the "lion's share" of teachers from the rural, urban, Northern, and band focus groups indicated that their respective school is cognizant of these goals and working to achieve them. One might wonder to what extent educational policy makers are aware of the barriers that parents often face when attempting to become engaged with learning. The School Plus consultation group and the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan recognise in their policy documents that parents face barriers to participation, and suggest that parents are only expected to become involved in schooling to the degree that they are able (Saskatchewan Education 1996; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a; Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). Despite such acknowledgement, real barriers remain hindering the expansion of parental participation, and steps need to be taken to remove parents' barriers to involvement

with schooling. However, the work which remains to be done to develop broad based participation should not overshadow the significant achievements that many schools have already made in the area of parental engagement with learning.

Many of the teachers in the Northern focus group reported that they are removing barriers to parental participation by interacting with them outside the school and by becoming involved in the community. Participating educators at the band site accredited the Elders with improving communication between the home and school and the continuing development of trust between teachers, students, and parents, and the level of parent involvement. There are a variety of strategies for including parents, but in many ways these are facilitated by the existence of a community. In contrast, many of the participating rural educators highlighted the lack of or level of conflict in the community as a determinant of parental involvement, and the relationship between the home and school. One may conclude that in these cases, anti-racism programming and a variety of communication strategies are needed to develop and maintain a learning community.

Many of the rural participants made the connection between parental involvement in learning and the challenges that many students face in closing education gaps. Though the rural educators highlighted the need for human service personnel and alternative education resources, they also focused on barriers to parents' support of, and participation in learning. Family situations typically involve a degree of mobility in their area, a facet of rural depopulation in Saskatchewan, and combined with poor attendance, this results in students having larger education gaps. The majority of respondents at the rural site indicated that parental involvement is more important to closing students' gaps in learning within the context of an education system which lacks human resources, than in an educational setting where adequate personnel are available.

Aboriginal communities remain a relatively untapped resource for the development of student success and especially with respect to training teachers about Aboriginal culture.

Teachers think that removing barriers by seeking parents out in the community and at home in order to facilitate the democratic involvement of families in schooling is somewhat fruitful.

However, structural barriers to parental participation in schooling do not allow many Aboriginal parents to even consider the possibility that they could become involved in learning. In such instances, Elders are able to act as intermediaries and ensure that parents are aware of their child's successes and challenges at school, and further make schools and teachers aware of parents' views and concerns.

### 5.3.3 Summary for the influence of community on teachers' work in Saskatchewan

The findings reinforce existing literature on education equity, as examined in Chapter Two, which suggests that family has a deep and broad influence on the context of teachers' work and the achievement of educational improvement for marginalised students. The focus group data suggest that parents support and are involved in the delivery of school-based services, but the degree to which they are engaged varies from school to school due the context of local family life. Some teachers from the focus groups noted in 2003-2005 that educators' attempts at developing parental involvement provided schools with little to no additional support beyond what communities had already contributed. Despite challenges in this regard, respondents to the focus groups were positive that increasing parental and community involvement is necessary to achieving the improvement of educational achievement for Aboriginal students. Participants in the focus groups argued that the likelihood that families will be able to support schools and become involved in learning tomorrow (i.e. in more meaningful ways than they already are) depends on the extent to which governments, communities, and schools are able to support families today.

## 5.4 Achieving educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth in Saskatchewan

### 5.4.1 The Aboriginal Education Action Plan for 2000-2005

As noted in Chapter Two, the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) periodically releases action plans and makes recommendations regarding Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan. In 2000, the AEPAC developed a number of recommendations and indicators for work relating to meeting the goal of Aboriginal education. The indicators are used to organise the discussion of focus group and survey data in the following section and are contained under the headings: resources and supports for curriculum actualisation, community engagement and authenticity of perspectives in curriculum actualisation, and Aboriginal education, life-long-learning, and adult education.

### 5.4.2 Aboriginal education: Comparing the focus group and survey data

#### 5.4.2.1 Resources and supports for curriculum actualization

As outlined in Chapter Two, the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) places emphasis on developing “practical, relevant, and authentic” Aboriginal education resources, and making them available to teachers through in-service seminars. The AEPAC also suggests that teachers should be supported in actualising Aboriginal curriculum in the classroom by having Aboriginal consultants, available in all regions and working on new in-service support models (Saskatchewan Education 2000, 7). Educators from the urban, Northern, and rural site shared thoughts relevant to Aboriginal education resources, supports, and curriculum actualisation.

Many educators from the rural focus group placed less emphasis on curriculum content and teacher training than on creating supports for families by increasing personnel. These rural participants were satisfied with the material and educational resources available to them, including in-service opportunities, access to consultants, and other sources of knowledge about

Aboriginal culture. Further, the rural educators felt supported in their efforts to actualize Aboriginal content and perspectives, and had access to content specialists and supports.

The majority of participating urban educators agreed that more personnel were required, but differed in that they also thought supports for the actualization of Aboriginal curriculum needed to be improved. These urban respondents were not concerned with the quality of the material resources, but rather the clarity of messages in the curriculum and teacher training. Further, the urban teachers suggested that more work be done to develop and better explain to teachers the messages contained in aspects of the Aboriginal curriculum. The urban discussion encompassed comments regarding compulsory in-service training, the availability and number of Aboriginal specialists such as language teachers, and compulsory training on Aboriginal knowledge development. Comparatively, the survey data (Table 4.3a [page seventy four]) support the conclusion that teachers lack university level training on Aboriginal culture, knowledge, languages, and perspectives.

In contrast to what was stated at the urban site with respect to Aboriginal curriculum, focus group participants at the Northern site reported that they needed instructional guides and resources for teaching Aboriginal curricula. Many of the participating Northern teachers were concerned that instructional guides available for teaching Aboriginal culture are not written by Canadian authors. If educators had access to guides written by Canadian authors about local cultural groups then teachers could focus on tasks other than the development of instructional guides. In addition, the majority of Northern participants argued that the cross-cultural aspect of Aboriginal education and curriculum needs to be more fully developed, especially with regard to variations between Aboriginal ethnic groups.

Despite challenges with Aboriginal education, the “lion’s share” of teachers who participated in the focus groups appear to have believed that governments and some educational divisions have made progress in developing supports for educators, and facilitating access to practical, relevant, and authentic resources relating to Aboriginal education, so that

teachers may actualize Aboriginal curriculum in the classroom. In contrast, the majority of rural and urban participants who considered the availability of curriculum supports and education resources stated that they lacked adequate personnel. A number of rural participants also added that Aboriginal peoples' attainment rates could be improved if the governments who share responsibility for Aboriginal education make additional investments in personnel as opposed to the curriculum or education material.

#### 5.4.2.2 Community engagement and authenticity in curriculum actualization

As outlined previously, the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) recommended that authenticity in curriculum actualisation be achieved through two means. First, that the Ministry of Education initiate a discussion to define Aboriginal content and perspectives, and to determine how educators will ensure "quality" and "authenticity" in the classroom. Second, the Ministry of Education guarantee that teachers understand how Indigenous content and perspectives are to be integrated into the classroom. The AEPAC also highlights the necessity of building connections between programs in schools, communities, and workplaces. For example, issues such as racism should be addressed by the school in connection with a variety of initiatives, such as through existing programs in the community (Saskatchewan Education 2000, 7-8, 12, 14).

Many of the urban, rural, and band focus group respondents discussed parent and teacher reactions to the introduction of Aboriginal curricula. Several educators at the band site were concerned with teachers' and parents' reactions to curriculum changes at the local high school. These instructors suggested that the relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community in their area was not always positive leaving many of the teachers and parents involved in the removal of Aboriginal curricula from the classroom with poor feelings. The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan supports and promotes equity for Aboriginal people in schooling and more generally, and promotes the elimination of racism in society by

requesting that teachers connect anti-racism activities in school with those programs already existing in the community (Saskatchewan Education 1997; Saskatchewan Learning 2007b).

The participating rural teachers were frustrated because community conflict between “racial” groups determined, for the most part, parents’ reactions to Aboriginal content. Negative reactions permeate the school making it more difficult for educators to accomplish their tasks. A few of the urban focus group respondents thought their stigma as a Community School was related to uninformed people’s perspectives regarding the Aboriginal content they taught, rather than the socioeconomic status of the students in the school. In contrast, the authors of the School Plus report argue that the stigma associated with Community Schools or resistance to the Community School designation has to do with students’ overall socioeconomic status and/or property devaluation (Saskatchewan Education 2000).

Many of the educators at the rural, urban, and band site confirmed that parents often react negatively to the introduction of Aboriginal curriculum. Some of the participants at the band and urban site, added teachers to the list by making reference to educators’ resistance to the addition of Aboriginal content to the curriculum. Respondents to the research did not focus overly on students and seemed to think students’ attitudes were learned from family members. Several of the participating urban teachers described students’ aversion to Aboriginal programming as resulting from self-identity issues; students of mixed-ethnicity complained about Aboriginal material. The students who were initially disgruntled became comfortable after they were included in a discussion about the importance of learning about Aboriginal culture and perspectives.

Some of the rural and most of the Northern educators reported integrating Aboriginal content with other course material regularly to ensure that it is covered. In comparison, a few of the focus group respondents at the band site said that they fortified the public curriculum with curricula developed for First Nations. Participating educators at all of the sites made the distinction between anti-racism and Aboriginal education. Several of the instructors at the rural



site noted that anti-racism training was often required prior to Aboriginal education. Educators' at the Northern and urban site reported that cultural diversity is a fundamental aspect of Aboriginal education. Almost all of the respondents from these sites said that they taught cross-cultural perspectives as a part of Aboriginal education.

Despite challenges with clarity, the majority of teachers from the focus groups indicated that they think the meaning and purpose of including Aboriginal content and perspectives in education is somewhat clear, and they have a fair grasp of the strategies for achieving true understanding. However, participants expressed concern that some teachers, and many parents, were not convinced that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students need exposure to the history, knowledge, and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples. The educators felt, overall, that much work remains to be done with respect to the promotion of Aboriginal education initiatives, cultural diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism in Saskatchewan communities and in some schools.

Many of the focus group respondents expressed concern about the importance of anti-racism and the effects racism has on their work. The "lion's share" of focus group participants depicted anti-racism and the promotion of cultural diversity as everyone's responsibility and reported taking a variety of steps to deal with these issues. The majority of teachers who participated in the focus groups felt that work to promote Aboriginal education initiatives needs to be done separately from anti-racism. However, they also indicated that anti-racism and Aboriginal initiatives are connected given that reactions to the introduction of Aboriginal curriculum often bring "racial" conflict and cultural misinformation to the surface. It is likely that the resolution of racism would reduce resistance to Aboriginal content in learning and promote understanding. Therefore, one might conclude that funding is needed for public relations to inform people why changes are being made and to enlighten teachers, parents, and students about the importance of these changes.

#### 5.4.2.3 Aboriginal education, life-long-learning, and adult education

An additional recommendation made by the Aboriginal Education Provincial Advisory Committee (AEPAC) pertains to the utility of life long learning. The AEPAC recommends that the Ministry of Education promote “respect for diverse perspectives on education and traditional Aboriginal ideas about learning.” For example, Elders should be involved in the school, traditional Aboriginal perspectives on learning should be reflected in students’ formal educational experiences, and educators should acknowledge that informal learning is responsive to students’ needs, and is connected to improving one’s self over time (Saskatchewan Education 2000, 8, 15).

The majority of teachers who participated in the focus groups argued that community involvement is a core part of Aboriginal education. Many of the Northern and all of the band respondents thought that parental involvement and Elder participation in schooling are a means to improve the educational achievement of children and youth. Many of the Northern and all of the urban participants stated that community members have varying types and amounts of knowledge about local culture. The urban focus group respondents said that, for this reason adult education needs to be made a part of Aboriginal education. In particular, these teachers thought that the Elder program should receive funding to provide supports for participation and links to adult education. The majority of focus group respondents from all of the sites said that the involvement of parents and Elders in teaching and learning facilitates Aboriginal education.

Participants in the rural, urban, Northern, and band focus groups also discussed the importance of programs promoting life long and informal learning and, of course, participation in formal learning. As noted earlier, respondents from the urban site linked the introduction of Aboriginal education and cultural programs to negative stereotypes about Community Schooling. In opposition to these assumptions, these urban teachers argued that cultural and social programs in their school have made learning more, rather than less attractive to the people who require them. Parents, in particular, attend their school because they offer learning

on both a formal and informal basis. Parents, teachers, students and, thus, families learn and grow together by sharing daily experiences. The survey data (Table 4.2b [page seventy two] and 4.3a [page seventy four]) indicate that teachers gain most of their information about Aboriginal culture through in-service, but also from the community, parents, and through informal learning.

The majority of teachers from the rural site noted that Aboriginal education should more assertively focus on programs that close education gaps by expanding existing support for education, and ongoing informal learning programs with parents, such as early child education programs which take place in the home. Further, these rural educators believed Aboriginal education should focus on closing gaps in learning because Aboriginal students are more likely than non-Aboriginal students to have gaps in learning. The rural participants' experience is corroborated by educational literature which documents lower levels of high school graduation rates among Aboriginal peoples compared to non-Aboriginal peoples (Auditor General of Canada 2004; Wotherspoon 2004).

The rural educators connected the existence of gaps in learning to governments' failure to substantively improve Aboriginal peoples' high school graduation rates. The rural respondents argued that gaps in learning stemmed from family mobility during the school year, lack of regular attendance, and poor family dynamics. The School Plus consultation group address problems with attendance and transience in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002), and its connection with hidden students who are not really in school based on their attendance rates. Justice, tracking, and integrated or school-linked services have been proposed and are an ongoing collection of strategies being used in Saskatchewan to solve these problems (Saskatchewan 2000). The rural instructors argued that parental involvement and informal learning have helped reduce this problem in their schools and are strategies in addition to those mentioned above.

One Northern and a number of rural participants recounted experiences with Aboriginal education that relate to programs and support students' improvement based on informal learning. Some educators from the North discussed a program intended to develop literacy and other learning skills with pre-K children by working with parents. According to the Northern participants, the promotion of life long learning early on in the home results in an initial, though not necessarily sustained advantage for learners on entering the school. The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan is involved in the delivery of programs and services, in cooperation with other provincial ministries, such as Health, and with federal funding to develop the skills of pre-K learners and has been since the 1990's (Saskatchewan Learning 2007d).

The focus group and survey data suggest overall that Elders are involved in integral ways in many schools in Saskatchewan, and are in many cases involved in school improvement and consulted about educational concerns. The extent to which schools have incorporated traditional Aboriginal perspectives on learning into the students' formal education experiences is unclear. However, all of the focus groups identified that this was being achieved in part through the involvement of Elders and parents in teaching and learning and by including Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives in the classroom. The majority of respondents to the focus groups discussed informal learning as an important part of education, though this was not often linked to responsiveness to individual needs, other than as illustrated in the exchange of cultural knowledge and in social programming.

#### 5.4.2.4 Responses relevant to only one site

Some of the responses were unique to the Northern group including a discussion about English as a second language and the retention of local Aboriginal ethnicity. Many of the Northern focus group participants talked about Aboriginal language training alongside learning in English as a means to ensure the retention of Indigenous languages. Some of the participating Northern teachers expressed an additional concern about cultural retention and the

lack of knowledge their students have about local Aboriginal culture. Further, these Northern educators highlighted that their students are attracted to dominant symbols of Aboriginality which tend to better represent some groups, compared to others. This fits somewhat with the actualization of curriculum, as it relates to the development of resources aimed at promoting local cultural differences.

#### 5.4.3 Summary for Achieving educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth in Saskatchewan

By comparison with Aboriginal education policy literature (Saskatchewan Learning 2005a, 2007c, 2004a; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005, 2008), the focus group and survey data indicate that the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan was doing a great deal to promote Aboriginal education and thus education equity for Aboriginal peoples. However, the focus group and survey data also suggest that much work remains to be done in order to convince some teachers and parents that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students should learn about Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives, and history. Based on participating teachers' perspectives, changes to the curriculum are now less important than increasing personnel in school and supports for families in terms of governments' attempts to improve the educational attainment rates of Aboriginal peoples. Key strengths of the Aboriginal education program to date are derived from the inclusion of Elders and parents in schooling though changes are required to ensure that all schools have a regular Elder program and that Elder's have access to learning opportunities. In this way, the focus group and survey findings pertaining to Aboriginal education reveal that life long learning is important to the achievement of educational improvement with Aboriginal peoples.

#### 5.5 Productivity, community, Aboriginal education, and teachers' work in Saskatchewan

Main research points were developed in Chapter Four through a description of the data from the rural, urban, Northern, and band focus groups in Saskatchewan, and from a discussion of teachers' responses to the survey on Teachers' work in Aboriginal communities in

Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Sections 5.2 through 5.4 in this chapter compared the main analytical points developed for each focus group with each other, and with the survey data where relevant. In the next section of this chapter, 5.6, the focus group and survey findings developed thus far will be compared, where possible with excerpts from interviews with non-teaching educational practitioners conducted in Saskatchewan between 2003 and 2004.

## 5.6 Comparing educators' responses with those of non-teaching educational practitioners

### 5.6.1 Non-teaching educational practitioners

The summaries developed at the end of 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 are compared here, where possible, to information derived from interviews with non-teaching educational practitioners. The intent of this exercise is to corroborate, refute, or add additional context to what teachers have stated in the focus groups. As noted in the methodology chapter, the interviews are not the focus of analysis, but an additional source, and so excerpts included in this chapter should not be taken as dominant in the discussions with the non-teaching participants. The following review is organised according to the core themes from the focus group sites including: Aboriginal education, family, and teachers' work situation.

### 5.6.2 Perspectives on productivity and community

Overall, the rural, urban, band, and Northern focus group data reveal that much has been done to improve education for Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan, but also that fundamental issues remain unresolved. Teachers working in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan raised concerns about unresolved dilemmas with respect to resources, collaboration, integrated services, community engagement, other than teaching tasks, accountability, and more generally the expanded human service mandate. As illustrated by MA-82 and MM-24, the manager and middle manager discussed in 2003-2004 their knowledge of issues relating to the development of the School Plus model.

RESPONDENT: I think what you're going to find with government . . . is that they are looking at greater coordination of their department efforts. In other words, the shared-services model is one wherein social justice people and legal justice people, health, and all of those can actually work together to say, "You know we're part of this, we too have to coordinate our thinking and our efforts so that we're not separate departments. We're impacting on separating little units of activity out there." In other words, build more . . . horizontality . . . (MA-82<sup>9</sup>).

RESPONDENT: . . . The School Plus model is based on the notion that School Plus has 2 functions. One is a traditional one – the learning of kids. The second one is that the schools are centers for the delivery of services – a wide variety of services – to young people and their families (MM-24<sup>10</sup>).

The rural, urban, band, and Northern focus group data, consistent with educational renewal documents from Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan 2001; 2002), Canadian literature on teachers' work (Naylor 2002; Hall 2004), and global literature on educational change and teaching (Robertson 2000; Smyth et al. 2000) highlight dimensions of educators' work that have been intensified through an increase in the duration and pace of schooling as well as the addition of other-than-schooling tasks. Dimensions of teachers' work that have been intensified include ensuring that children are fed, properly clothed, and that they have had enough sleep to learn as well as meeting students' mental-emotional health needs and managing pupils' behaviour. However, these sentiments are tempered with survey data which indicate that teachers' employed full-time in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are on average working only forty-four hours in a typical work week or four hours beyond that of the standard work week in Canada.

Based on rural, urban, band, and Northern focus group data, specific to the expanded human service mandate it seems that teachers in Saskatchewan experienced in 2003-2005 tension between their instructional role, and their obligation to coordinate students' access to other-than-schooling services. This is surprising given that one to three years earlier, the School Plus consultation group recommended that the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan develop the "new" school model further to, in part, free up teachers' time for instructional tasks. Despite

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<sup>9</sup> The label reads "manager-excerpt 82."

<sup>10</sup> The label reads "middle-manager-excerpt 24."

the Ministry of Education's attempts to address this concern, the rural and Northern focus group data suggest that teachers spend equal amounts of time on instruction and non-instructional tasks. Consistent with rural and Northern focus group participants' views in this regard, the data excerpts LR-10 and LR-12 show that the labour representative had heard about teachers' challenges with other-than-school-tasks and the initiatives intended to address them.

RESPONDENT: The School Plus report describes a tectonic plate of issues at the beginning and this reflects the concerns I have heard from teachers . . . related to more students with special-needs in the classroom and more students that present a lot of difficulties such as social or economic-type of issues. They present themselves because of economic issues and kids that are out of control. They are not necessarily people with special needs but they present some real challenges in a regular classroom (<sup>11</sup>LR-10).

RESPONDENT: Teachers recognize that they have to treat each student individually and to support a child's learning to the best that they can. However, there are situations where individual kids will present challenges where they not only are a threat to the teacher's . . . physical welfare, but also to the class. I have been in situations where students who have difficulties challenge you and you can spend half of your time disciplining versus teaching (LR-12).

In addition, the middle manager reflected on the broader meaning of integrated services for teachers' work, and schools' successes and challenges. As illustrated in MM-24, MM-43, and MM-60, the middle manager stated that more funding is needed, and that the School Plus initiative has solidified changes to teachers' work with respect to the expanded human service mandate.

RESPONDENT: . . . where we have other services, which include health officials – people who work with addictions, people that work in primary health . . . We have a social worker from [name of department] now that works directly in the school and . . . Some of the justice people that work out of the school . . . a key feature of that program is again a daycare, nursery opportunity because again, many of those young people have children of their own . . . In terms of how it changes our work, it . . . complicates it . . . we do not do much nowadays without thorough community consultation, without connecting up with partners. The School Plus work will see its way into new projects . . . (MM-24).

RESPONDENT: . . . partnerships and the School Plus, it takes time, there is no question about it . . . we do a lot more work with partners and that means we're doing less of something else. . . there's no question that all this partnership work puts a real strain on these people . . . puts them in situations of having to leave important things undone while they attend other things . . . The easiest thing would be to say, "Yeah they need more time for administrative duties and

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<sup>11</sup> The label reads "labour representative-excerpt 10."



leadership duties and they'll teach less," but that of course costs money . . . Money is a huge issue (MM-43).

RESPONDENT: . . . in working with our board, one of the key things that we're trying to do is... develop plans to . . . resource the initiatives that were planned . . . one of the strategies . . . is revenue development . . . we feel a strong need to have more revenue to get the resources we need for early learning initiatives or special education initiatives or equity initiatives. Part of what we have to do is . . . evaluate some of our programs, and if they're not doing anything, let's take those resources and refocus them on things that matter (MM-60).

The rural and urban focus group respondents discussed the difficulties they faced when students moved either from the city to the reserve or from one school to another during the school year. The rural, urban, Northern, and band focus group participants suggested that Aboriginal education is an inter-jurisdictional initiative. Further, participating rural teachers argued that governments need to align their teaching, evaluation, and accounting practices to ensure comparability of education from one school to the next. The non-teaching educational practitioners discussed agreements or understandings, and partnerships between the provincial and various First Nation jurisdictions, and the role of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada with respect to issues of language, culture, and equity. As shown in MA-30, the manager highlighted the importance of partnerships in raising awareness about inter-jurisdictional alignment, and the economic efficiencies that can result from such collaboration.

RESPONDENT: [commenting on partnerships and understandings] . . . So hence, you know, the partnership can generate both interest and raise the profile of the issues, as well as help us to streamline some of our resources in such a way that we can cooperate in this area . . . And again the thing hinges on the role of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada or the Federal Government (MA-30).

One may conclude given the survey, focus group, and interview data addressing the intensification of teachers' work, the expanded human service mandate, and the inter-jurisdictional movement of Aboriginal students that key aspects of educational improvement for Aboriginal peoples include freeing teachers' time for instructional tasks, developing governments' involvement to support families, and inter-jurisdictional alignment. As reflected by MA-78, the manager talked about access to the latent power that communities constitute as a means to ensure that learning is supported. Complimenting the managers' point on

communities, the middle-manager noted, as presented in MM-46 and MM-64, that teachers and schools need to do more with less, and to inform the public that increased spending on education results in long term savings overall.

RESPONDENT: I think that what the School Plus design actually states is, "How do we generate the latent powers of the community so that the school is supported?" And the latent powers in the community are Aboriginal people, their knowledge or expertise . . . their ways of thinking. There's a tremendous amount of expertise and knowledge there . . . I think that the School Plus goals for building that capacity is really accommodating with Aboriginal education philosophy or principles (MA-78).

RESPONDENT: I think it's been a constant . . . I think where it really hit was in the early '90s when the government changed and the Devine government was defeated and the NDP government came in . . . Huge deficit, funding was cut dramatically to education in those years. And so we found that through the '90s we were having enrolment increases and . . . diminishing resources . . . frankly we've never really recovered from it . . . for example, two years ago, we had significant staffing cuts . . . centrally here as well as in schools . . . And, proper resourcing of the things that we need to do is a huge issue . . . (MM-46).

RESPONDENT: . . . we see a greater need for smaller classes and more learning resources and probably an inability to afford both . . . our responsibility is to look at what's the impact of learning . . . from the research we've read, there's a much greater positive impact on learning from smaller class sizes from a greater investment in professional development than from increased preparation time . . . interventions like full-day every-day kindergarten; small class sizes, kindergarten to grade three . . . The research results are extraordinary . . . in terms of the potential. Now can we afford to do that? . . . we've got a wider community to convince and . . . a board to convince, and business community to convince that these in fact are very wise investments for our community. In the long run they're going to really pay in terms of fewer expenditures and special education and in justice and in social services and so on (MM-64).

The urban, rural, Northern, and band focus group participants alluded to decision making and leadership strategies in their schools, and to devolved systems of management. Unlike the literature on devolution discussed in Chapter Two (for example Hargreaves 1994b), the focus group respondents did not mention the degree to which the devolved systems of management were democratic or hierarchical. The rural, urban, Northern, and band focus group data collectively indicate that educators face common difficulties in developing community engagement with, and parental participation in shared decision making and responsibility for education. As discussed in the review of survey data in Chapter Four, the majority of survey participants, as shown in Tables 4.1c and 4.1d (page sixty seven and seventy respectively) felt that their teaching contexts are collegial, and that they are supported by administration. As

illustrated in the data excerpt MM-43, the middle manager discussed the relationship between the division and school in terms of educational administration and management.

RESPONDENT: . . . there's been a lot of discussion here and a lot of study and research regarding the extent to which the school division should be centralized or decentralized . . . We tried to balance what we think are sensible centralized functions that can be easily handled and more effectively and efficiently handled centrally . . . if schools have too many things to do then principals and vice-principals do not get at their primary task which is promoting the learning of young people . . . partnerships are missing part of that because partnerships in schools . . . are very partnership-intensive . . . take a lot of time . . . that means that one of their [principals'] key roles which is the support of instruction in schools, they are not getting to the extent we would like them to be getting to. So, it is an issue . . . (MM-43).

The rural, urban, Northern, and band focus group respondents indicated that their schools are oriented to creating positive environments to support the development, and maintenance of healthy and productive relationships. Participating rural, urban, and Northern teachers also noted that partnerships and collaboration exist in their respective schools though the extent to which they were reported to be developed varied by location. The rural, urban, Northern, and band focus group respondents discussed the core challenges they face in cultivating community and parental engagement with learning including the legacy of residential schools. Participating urban teachers reported that their attempts to grow community and parental engagement with schooling had rarely resulted in “new faces” (people new to school activities). As shown in MA-72 and MM-74, the manager and middle manager added context to, and in some instances corroborated, participating educators' views on developing community engagement with learning.

RESPONDENT: . . . people say that it should not bother people's minds anymore, but the residential school experience is alive and well in the psyche of Aboriginal people . . . I am trying to identify with parents now. I think that you will find that the other factor is modern life, especially the modern experience is frantic. I do not think parents, in general, get to the school and participate all that much any more. I think we all used to a whole lot but you have to negotiate with your working environments and . . . there is always that coordination in a frantic world and I think that parents experience this a lot (MA-72).

RESPONDENT: . . . again community-education engagement and development of . . . the community is integrally involved and so when schools develop their plans – and this is a requirement we have for every school, every school develops its own strategic plan . . . based on the division plan and integrated with the division plan, but it also has to meet local needs and initiatives as well – and so we expect that schools will develop their plans, not just with their staff

but with members of their community. And sometimes that will mean most directly with the parent-teacher council or parent-school council, some times it will involve a surveying of parents, gathering of input from a wide variety of parents, it will take lots of different forms; but certainly, do we consult with parents more often and committee more often? Absolutely, and that will get stronger and stronger all the time (MM-74).

The band focus group participants argued that everyone in Canada is responsible for and should be required to make up the difference when parents are not able to fully prepare children for learning. Further, participating educators from the rural, urban, Northern, and band site stated that more social programs should be developed and/or delivered to support families in their attempts to prepare children for learning. By comparison to participating teachers' views, the labour representative and the middle manager reflected on the importance of parent-teacher relationships in meeting students' basic needs and in resolving difficulties. As presented in LR-14 and MM-72, the labour representative and the middle manager acknowledged teachers' situation in terms of the provision of care for children:

RESPONDENT: What I am picking up from teachers relates to kids who are probably in some difficulty not only in school but probably at home too. They probably do not have the kind of supports that nurture, that are healthy; that are healthy for the development of young people (LR-14).

RESPONDENT: . . . they [teachers] just have to be that much more conscious of good communication with the home, with community . . . It's just not report cards once in a while, it's a constant. You'll see that a lot of teachers, the practice is now constant newsletters . . . we do more of that than we used to. Schools are much more apt now for young persons experiencing trouble to get parents in earlier saying "there's difficulties, what are we doing about that...?" . . . again parents are relying on the schools more . . . as families evolve over time . . . both parents working . . . translates into a strong need for clear communication with the school (MM-72).

### 5.6.3 Perspectives on educational improvement for Aboriginal peoples

The labour representative and the manager highlighted concerns regarding public and professional responses to the introduction of Aboriginal content into the curriculum, and the goals of the Aboriginal education initiative. As reflected by LR-70, the labour representative asserted that educators encounter people who think non-Aboriginal students should not be required to take programming relating to Aboriginal history, knowledge, and perspectives. Many of the teachers who participated in the urban, band and rural focus groups suggested that some

teachers and/or parents hold this view, and often resist the implementation of Aboriginal education initiatives. As illustrated in MA-36 and MA-40, the manager reported that Saskatchewan needs to do more work to promote Aboriginal education and that the goals of the Aboriginal education initiative have not been met. These comments coincided with focus group participants' claims that more work needs to be done with regards to generating enthusiasm for and an understanding of the purpose and utility of Aboriginal content in the curriculum.

RESPONDENT: The current policy with respect to Aboriginal education and specifically the curriculum is that all students in this province are to be exposed to Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives, and content . . . It is not just for Aboriginal students, it is for all students in the province. I am frustrated. I encounter situations where people say . . . when they are asked about the kind of efforts they may be making with respect to Aboriginal education initiatives in this province...we do not have very many Aboriginal students here, so . . . they do not take up the kind of initiatives that the policy advocates provincially (LR-70).

RESPONDENT: . . . I mean if we look at what we really want to achieve and that is the Aboriginal content and perspectives in the core curriculum being taught to every student, every child, and every pupil in the system. I would say that we're faltering – we're not doing very well. We're not doing as much as we need to be doing in that area very well (MA-36).

RESPONDENT: . . . to see how content was being taught in the curriculum . . . we found that the new curriculum guides . . . were not being accepted and being taught as fully as they should be . . . that can be attributed to a couple of things; first of all you have . . . an established teaching profession. Some of them might be a little older and ready for retirement who know how to teach and have been doing a darn good job with the materials that they've had – don't want to rush all over to learn the new stuff . . . And I think you would have the added fact that we haven't had the resources sufficient to do a good job in having teachers adopt this as their own personal missions that we're going to do this (MA-40).

The focus group respondents in all cases further argued in 2003-2005 that work remains to be done with respect to the promotion of cultural diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism in Saskatchewan, and in select schools to fortify the Aboriginal education initiative. The focus group participants made a distinction between Aboriginal education and anti-racism programming, but they argued that one was necessary for the success of the other. Despite successes, teachers from the urban, Northern, and band focus groups discussed the Aboriginal curriculum and related resources, and concluded that improvements are needed. In addition, educators from the urban, rural, and Northern focus groups claimed that they lack adequate personnel in their school to achieve education equity. As outlined in MA-14, MA-8, and MM-16,

the manager and middle manager provided additional context and information to understand these claims:

RESPONDENT: That is where I depart from anti-racist education. I think in its own right, it's a positive and good thing, but I think it has its job to do. Aboriginal education has its job to do too – a more important role (MA-14).

RESPONDENT: . . . What I believe we need to focus on now is professional development, school board leadership development, and just the development of teacher competence in the areas of Aboriginal education; and to build some important community and societal relationships . . . (MA-8).

RESPONDENT: . . . through our staff development programs . . . The curriculum contains a very significant dimension which is referred to as the adaptor dimension . . . where teachers are obligated . . . to take a good look at the students who they work with, to recognize their differences – whether they're cognitive . . . cultural . . . or physical differences – and to make the proper adaptations to their methods of instruction, to the learning environment, whatever it would be that will allow these young people to succeed in school . . . (MM-16).

#### 5.6.4 Support for teachers' perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal communities

The excerpts taken from interviews with key non-teaching educational practitioners add additional context, insight, and in many instances corroborate teachers' views with respect to their work situations, family, and Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan. A number of the comments made by non-teaching educational practitioners lead us, in conjunction with what has already been learned from a review of the focus discussions and the survey data, toward some key conclusions. Specifically, that teachers' work situations are shaped by the need to be efficient while also addressing increased work-loads, families represent both an asset for schools, but they are also consumers of educational products and services, and Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan is a growing success which requires additional investment. In 5.7 of this chapter, the discussion of survey and focus group data, and the literature are used to develop responses to the research questions.

#### 5.7 Making sense of the findings

Data from the focus group sites were compared with each other and with teachers' responses to survey questions in sections 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 of this chapter. The focus group and

survey data in aggregate form were further compared with excerpts from interviews with non-teaching educational practitioners in part 5.6 of this thesis. The purpose of this section is to outline a response for each research question based on the previous discussions of survey, focus group, and interview data. For ease of reference, the questions are:

- What do teachers, working in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan identify as the main factors driving their work?
- According to teachers, how are the main factors driving their work affected by policies to improve education for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?
- How, if at all, are educators managing to balance the seemingly oppositional policy and program logics of productivity and community while attempting to achieve educational improvement for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?

#### 5.7.1 The primary determinants of teachers' work in Aboriginal communities

##### 5.7.1.1 The context of family life in many Aboriginal school-communities

Teachers' perspectives indicate that the responsibilities of schools and families have converged due to the consequences of residential schooling as well as the changing socioeconomic context of family-life in Saskatchewan. Aboriginal education understood as cultural inclusion, changes to the curriculum (access), and the school environment (treatment), are perceived as significant endeavours toward the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth. However, the majority of educators who participated in this study argued that additional progress toward educational improvement in Aboriginal communities (as measured by governments in terms of improved educational outcomes) requires the development of integrated services, funding to close education gaps, additional supports for families, more funding for Elder programs, and sustainable strategies for attaining community engagement.

Governments, schools, and teachers have addressed the convergence of roles and responsibilities between the family and school with an expanded human service mandate, plans for community engaged and organised teaching and learning, and integrated service

partnerships with other government organisations. In particular, those that have responsibility for or expertise in, for example, mental health and addictions (Saskatchewan 2002; Saskatchewan Learning 2004a, 2007a, 2007d; Canada and Saskatchewan 2005). Many of the teachers who participated in this project made a distinction between the utility of integrated as opposed to school-linked services, noting the former were more responsive to students' needs and freed educators' time for instruction whereas the latter were inadequate. According to almost all of the teachers in this study, the convergence between the role and responsibilities of the school and family, in terms of meeting students' complete needs or preparing students for learning, has become a greater part of their job when compared to classroom instruction.

It is important to avoid narrowly defining teaching as classroom instruction (Riordan 2004), but an equally important pitfall to avoid is adopting or duplicating the role and responsibilities of the family. This is especially important in Aboriginal communities that are rebuilding family functions following the consequences of residential schooling and the sixties scoop<sup>12</sup>. The "lion's share" of teachers' in this thesis revealed that meeting students' "whole" needs and ensuring family involvement in schooling are closely related endeavours. Many of the focus group respondents thought that everyone, including schools and the federal government, is responsible for ensuring that students' needs are met, but also that state agencies should support rather than replace families. Almost all of the educators in this study expressed, based on this sentiment about social care, that they are partners in preparing students to learn, and that this is necessary if they wish to achieve the improvement of educational attainment with Aboriginal people.

Flowing from this, the educators envisioned parents and families at the center of community organised and engaged learning, despite teachers' involvement with other-than schooling tasks and community engagement. The majority of teachers in this project perceived

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<sup>12</sup> The sixties scoop occurred when Aboriginal children were removed from their families and given to white middle-class families (Ambert 2006).



parents as wielding enormous power in educational improvement by agreeing to defer moving until the end of the school year, ensuring that students attend school regularly, and encouraging children to stay in one school for an entire year. Similarly, many of the participants in this thesis credited Elders with accelerating parental involvement, facilitating student engagement, developing trusting parent-teacher relations, and promoting positive school-community relations, though some respondents' schools lacked a well developed Elder program. Almost all of the educators in the study recognised that families face barriers to educational involvement including struggling to meet basic needs, community conflict stemming from poor historical relations, and negative experiences with schooling.

Some of the rural teachers argued that any discussion about the improvement of education for Aboriginal children and youth should be balanced with equal concern about the family and school; sentiments similar to this emerged in the urban and Northern focus groups. In addition, almost all of the participants from the rural, urban, Northern, and band site argued that children who live in poverty or with families who experience health and social difficulties require more resources to achieve comparable educational outcomes compared to those students who do not. These respondents believed that stable family dynamics, healthy and secure families, and students who are prepared to learn are factors that contribute to students' educational successes. For these reasons, educational improvement not only requires accounting for but also addressing the context of family life by providing supports for families so that they can in turn support their children and teachers in learning. Many families in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan do not constitute a latent source of economic power for educational improvement in the short term, but will be a source of support for schools and teachers in this regard over the long term.

### 5.7.1.2 Community governance and the regulation of teachers' work: Quasi-markets

As discussed in Chapter Two, federal, provincial, and First Nation governments share jurisdiction over Aboriginal education (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2002a, 2005, 2008). Inter-jurisdictional policy development and the coordination of educational improvement are standard in Aboriginal education. The primary aspects of Indigenous education are community control and involvement in learning, and achieving the improvement of educational attainment for Aboriginal children and youth. Devolved systems of management change teachers' work, and contain both opportunities for professional development, and the loss of autonomy. Community involvement provides parents with choice and subjects teachers to the dynamics of a quasi-consumer market, especially in the case of First Nations in Saskatchewan who have access to the public, Catholic, and band systems of schooling. In addition, parents' views regarding issues such as instructional methods, behaviour management, and alternative educational programming, are increasingly viewed as comparable to those of the trained professional.

Parents are becoming engaged with learning both as consumers who are interested in purchasing educational programs and services, and as authorities on local culture. Teacher training and knowledge is equally valuable or less significant than the knowledge held by community members within the context of Aboriginal education. Knowledge about local culture is not considered common, but rather specialised or similar to university training. Post-secondary education credentials became, over time, the sole form for indicating that an individual embodies cultural capital useful, as a teacher, in exchange with an educational employer for a wage. Under First Nation jurisdiction, one may assume that local communities are now the best possible authority to accredit and license people for teaching, or alternatively their certification is also useful in exchange between teachers and schools for a wage. In contrast, funding obtained through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada for band schools require

that Aboriginal governments hire teachers with comparable credentials to those necessary for employment in the provincial system (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2005).

Educators strike paths between the cultural knowledge of Aboriginal communities and policies pertaining to school matters set by professional, provincial, and district decision makers. The labour process of teaching in Aboriginal communities is structured through political influence by authorities from above and below who often have competing demands. Various groups of teachers in this thesis suggested that the messages contained in the Aboriginal curriculum need to be clarified, schools require more personnel with cultural knowledge, educators need additional teaching materials written by Canadian Aboriginal people on local culture, Elders and other community members bring varying types and different degrees of knowledge about local culture to school, Elder programs (including supports for living, travel, and adult-education) need funding, and Aboriginal education should contain a cross-cultural dimension to highlight the cultural uniqueness of local Aboriginal peoples compared to other Aboriginal groups across Canada.

Educators' autonomy in structuring the labour process of teaching was also a focal point in the group interview discussions about quasi-market influence and educational decision-making. Some of the teachers argued that many parents reacted negatively to the inclusion of Aboriginal culture in the provincial curriculum. Further, these instructors reported that some parents and educators alike think that non-Aboriginal children should be exempt from learning about Aboriginal culture, history, and perspectives. Although teachers are subject to curriculum guidelines, a few participants asserted that some teachers resisted the introduction of Aboriginal content by refusing to include it and/or by voicing opposition in conformity with parents who were opposed to Aboriginal programming. In contrast, varying numbers of focus group participants suggested that most educators embrace Aboriginal education, there is a need for local culture in schooling, and students and families are attracted to schools that offer culturally based curricula. The findings indicate that educators exert a degree of control over their work in

Aboriginal communities, and that this may be augmented or eroded by the political influence of community members.

Community members structure the labour process of teaching indirectly and often directly through their histories, beliefs, and behaviours. Many of the focus group participants noted that teaching Aboriginal education is more difficult in communities where high levels of “racial” conflict exist compared to communities with positive relations. Students not only bring misinformation and prejudices to school, but they are often reluctant to participate because of ongoing conflicts with the other group. Teachers at one site revealed that they experience pressures from both parents who are supportive of Aboriginal education and those that are not. In such a case, the educators argued that anti-racist programming (for everyone), though distinct from Aboriginal education, is a pre-requisite to successful Aboriginal programming.

The findings indicate that the dual character of education for Aboriginal people (empowerment and acculturation), and subsequent policies that return control over, responsibility for, learning to First Nation communities have resulted in quasi-market dynamics. Teachers are increasingly subject to the views of “lay” people and are obliged to negotiate compromises, and strike paths between often competing agendas of educational authorities. Consequently, educators are positioned to make key-decisions with respect to educational change, especially in situations where several authorities share jurisdiction over learning. Aboriginal communities’ control over the labour process of teaching is further enriched by the lack of formal teaching materials on local Aboriginal groups. However, both teachers and Aboriginal communities find the lack of materials problematic given the existence of universal Aboriginality and its contribution to the erosion of local knowledge, and the varying and different types of knowledge Aboriginal community members bring to learning. Overall, teaching in Aboriginal communities can be understood to hold both opportunities for increased professional control, the possibility that educators will be further controlled, and the hope that cooperative work relations will prevail.

### 5.7.2 Balancing productivity and community while achieving educational improvement with Aboriginal peoples.

The authors of the School Plus reports (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002) highlighted the need for an expanded human service mandate (develop partnerships for integrated service delivery) to address students' needs and the intensification of teachers' work. In addition, the authors recommended that funds totalling approximately \$300.00 per teacher be allocated for the purchases of basic classroom resources. This research finds that little has changed with regards to the need for human resources, the lack of basic classroom supplies, the intensification of teachers' work, and the need for integrated services since the publication of the School Plus reports (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002). The majority of focus group participants argued that the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth relies in part on addressing these concerns. For example, almost all of the educators felt that additional investments in the curriculum are needed and that they are short personnel; one group highlighted the need for teachers with cultural training. Elders and other community members represent, to varying degrees, sources of knowledge and a latent resource useful in making up for limited personnel. However, despite this potential, many of the teachers reported that attempts at community engagement often created additional work and rarely resulted in more participants. Despite this, these respondents discussed the impact that Elder and parent involvement had made on learning and so perceived their limited results in developing community inclusion as a success.

Almost all of the teachers stated that they had spent more time than ever before meeting basic and other-than-schooling needs and managing student behaviour. The majority of educators at the urban, rural, and Northern focus group site argued that the current human service model, as it stands is not efficient in helping them respond to students' needs. Participants reported that integrated service partnerships are under developed, funded, and supported, and further, that they need to address issues such as the role of other government

representatives in the school. The “lion’s share” of focus group respondents predicted that a fully developed, funded, and supported integrated model of service delivery will free up teachers for instruction, ensure that trained professionals are addressing students’ and families’ other-than-schooling needs, and allow families and students to engage learning on a renewable basis. Some of the teachers indicated that they were maintaining an intensified pace of work in order to make-up-for a lack of personnel, adequate classroom resources, and developed integrated services, as well as, to meet the demands of an expanded human service mandate.

Many of the participants reported contributing personal time and financial resources to ensure that their students’ needs were met and that, adequate classroom resources were available. A number of focus group respondents argued that Aboriginal students are more likely than non-Aboriginal students to have “gaps-in-learning”; students who have education gaps require more resources to achieve learning results comparable to those that do not. As a result, many of the educators observed that the achievement of education equity for Aboriginal children and youth is more likely to occur in a resource rich learning environment compared to an education system attempting to do “more with less.” Almost all of the discussants noted that additional human resources are needed to address education gaps and to support alternative programming, as well as, in the provision of integrated services.

One might conclude, given teachers’ perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan, that market-based logics aimed at doing more with less and being responsive to “consumers” needs are compatible with social justice based on the principle of returning control and responsibility for education to the individual and community. However, education oriented to social justice requires more resources than individuals and communities often have at their disposal, and further, that society at large takes responsibility for creating a social good to rectify a collectively perpetrated wrong. Based on the data collected in this study, it is clear that some tension exists between productivity and community imperatives given the context of teaching in Aboriginal communities, and initiatives to improve education for Aboriginal

people in Saskatchewan. However, by comparison to the literature on educational change, the focus group respondents conveyed no conclusions about the tension between market-based and social justice policy and program logics (Whitty 1997; Boyd 1999).

The focus group data are more generally significant in that they underscore the necessity that teachers have access to adequate resources and be working in a socially sustainable context if they are expected to significantly improve the educational outcomes of students who have been marginalised on the basis of their culture-ethnicity. In this regard, the focus group data also reveal that the benefits of community-organised or engaged schooling are difficult to realise in a resource-constrained context. Further, based on the focus group and survey data, teachers' work increasingly involves a great deal of mediating, mediating the competing demands of students, parents, governments, or more theoretically situated, mediating the competing demands of productivity and community in Aboriginal education.

## 5.8 Conclusion

Based on the research results, it is clear that a great deal has been accomplished in working toward the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth in Saskatchewan. Participants concluded that the context of family life and return of responsibility for and control over schooling to Aboriginal communities has influenced the ways in which teachers' perform their work. The role and responsibilities of schools and families have converged intensifying teachers' work as they are requested to be responsive to students' and families complete needs. Teachers' professional status has changed as teachers mediate the often conflicting demands of central governments, communities, and parents, with regard to the content and processes of teaching and learning in Aboriginal schools. Schools and educators are balancing the oppositional policy and program logics of productivity and community care in Aboriginal education by intensifying the pace and duration of their work. Educators' are further relying on Aboriginal communities to support them in their requests that governments and other

community members do more to help schools achieve educational improvement for Aboriginal students, and to assure central authorities that they are accountable in their attempts to achieve educational objectives. The research recommendations and contributions of this study are discussed in Chapter Six.



## Chapter Six: Conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

This thesis, focusing on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan, has sought to offer practical applicability and theoretical relevance by filling an analytical void in the research of an often controversial issue of teaching in cross-cultural settings. Most importantly, this study has the potential to contribute to knowledge development, empowerment, and social change for Aboriginal peoples. This study attempted to address three main research questions focusing on: (1) What do teachers, working in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan, identify as the main factors driving their work? (2) According to teachers, how are the main factors driving their work affected by policies to improve education for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan? (3) How, if at all, are educators managing to balance the seemingly oppositional policy and program logics of productivity and community while attempting to achieve educational improvement for Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan?

### 6.2 Thesis structure

In Chapter One, I outlined this thesis including the content, main argument, background literature, research questions, findings, and contributions that my study makes to the development of education equity policy and practice for Aboriginal peoples. I reviewed literature in Chapter Two relevant to the development of the research questions, and described the theoretical concepts used in this thesis to analyse data and develop findings. In Chapter Three, I described the research design and methodology used in this study including the case study strategy, definition of a "case," time and place of collection, sampling method, triangulation, methods of data collection, characteristics of the survey sample, description of the research sites, analysis strategies, validity, reliability, and generalization, ethics, and the limitations of this

study. I reviewed select survey responses, and described teachers' views of their work in Aboriginal communities in Chapter Four including educators' responses from the urban, rural, band, and Northern research site. In Chapter five, I compared points developed from the focus discussion completed at the urban, rural, Northern, and band research site with each other, with the survey data, and where possible with information from interviews conducted with key non-teaching educational practitioners. In this chapter, Chapter Six, I briefly summarise this thesis and set out my research conclusions and recommendations.

### 6.3 Thesis summary

Teachers are increasingly subject to the dynamics of the global economy, and citizens' expectations that public schools can solve social and economic problems through the development of social and human capital. Canadians expect too much from schools given the social context of teaching and learning in Aboriginal communities, the time and resources available to improve education for Aboriginal people, and demands that teachers be more productive and provide more care to families than they have in the past. Despite the additional resources and attention given to Aboriginal education, and a recent resurgence in support for elementary and secondary schooling, teachers and educational scholars argue that governments' expectations with respect to Aboriginal peoples and schooling are unrealistic. By contrast with the lack of attention given to educators' perspectives in literature on educational improvement, teachers are identified in critical analysis within the sociology of education as key agents crucial to the realisation of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth.

The focus group data presented in Chapter Four and Five reveal how Aboriginal education, in conjunction with the expanded human service mandate and community-organised schooling has changed the labour process of teaching. Educators in Saskatchewan are more likely than before to be involved in integral ways with child care services, feeding/nutritional programs, social and family services such as mental health, behavioural management, and a

variety of other-than-school activities. The focus group responses in this study are consistent with the result of the School Plus consultations (Saskatchewan 2001, 2002) in which educators asserted that teachers in Saskatchewan are increasingly over-worked, learning is under-funded, educators are stressed, and schools face unrelenting criticism with little to no help. Educators' perspectives are critical to developing a complete understanding about the social context of learning in Aboriginal communities, and what actually remains to be done in order to improve schooling with Indigenous peoples. This thesis sought teachers' perspectives regarding their work in Aboriginal communities to inform policy and program development in Aboriginal education as a means to support attempts to improve education for Aboriginal students.

Participating teachers, in all contexts revealed that education oriented to social justice often requires more resources than individuals and communities in Saskatchewan have at their disposal. Based on the focus group data, it seems that some tension existed between community and productivity imperatives in Aboriginal education initiatives, due to the context of teachers' work in Aboriginal communities. According to the teachers who participated in this study, combining productivity and community imperatives in Aboriginal education under such conditions is not likely to result in the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth. The majority of focus group respondents in each site argued that the health and sustainability of Aboriginal communities needs to be developed if significant progress is to be achieved toward the attainment of educational improvement for Aboriginal students, but also that this requires a resource rich education system. Specifically, these participants noted that the benefits of community organised or engaged schooling are difficult to realise in a resource constrained context, and their success in this regard is limited prior to data collection in 2003-2005. Almost all of the teachers expressed concern about their ability to improve education for Aboriginal people without adequate personnel, support, and in some cases without sufficient resources.

In agreement with educators at the rural site, the majority of focus group respondents from the other three sites expressed sentiments which support the notion that educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth should be equally concerned with improving the context of family life and the school. According to the majority of teachers who participated in this study, the responsibilities and the roles of the school and family in Saskatchewan had converged prior to 2003-2005, due to poverty and a variety of health and social difficulties common to many Saskatchewan communities. The School Plus reports (2001, 2002) and the views of non-teaching educational practitioners from 2003-2004 support focus group respondents' views from 2003-2005, and the survey responses from 2002-2003. One might suggest, similar to the notion that learning is a cooperative endeavour between the teacher and student (Boyd 1999), that preparation of children for learning is increasingly a responsibility shared by the home and school.

The focus group data indicate that some schools in Saskatchewan required more personnel and resources in 2003-2005. In addition, these participants thought that teachers should accelerate the development of partnerships with other government agencies. Further, educational administrators should work to clarify the role of non-educational professionals who are in the school to ensure that parents feel safe, and that they continue to trust teachers. In contrast, many of the educators from the rural, urban, and Northern site argued that families have significant power useful for improving students' educational outcomes, but parental involvement requires stable family dynamics, healthy and secure families, and that students' basic needs are met. According to the band participants, schools will only realise the latent power that families constitute when parent blaming stops, federal and provincial governments spend more money on family programming and supports, and after schools have supported families in the short to medium term. The "lion's share" of focus group respondents from the rural, urban, Northern, and band site anticipated that families would be able to support schools

and teachers over the medium to long term if governments made changes to support families in the short term.

The focus group data indicate that a return of responsibility for schooling back to Aboriginal communities, and Aboriginal education initiatives more broadly had resulted by 2003-2005 in quasi-market type dynamics. As noted in Chapter Two, quasi-market type dynamics prompt schools and teachers to compete for students, and to cater to students' and parents' desire for particular types of educational products. Further, quasi-market type dynamics commonly emerge in publically funded education systems when students and parents are able to choose from schools offering different types of education, within one or several jurisdictions. According to almost all of the urban, rural, and band focus group respondents, quasi-market type dynamics seemed to be at play in a number of instances in which students and parents were choosing schools within and/or between provincial and First Nation systems.

According to the focus group data, educators are increasingly subject to the views of lay people, and obliged to negotiate compromises and strike paths between the often competing agendas of community members and central educational decision makers. In this regard, teachers' professionalism in many Saskatchewan communities in 2003-2005 was that of mediator in the community; a professional status which is heightened within the context of ethnically plural communities in conflict. In Aboriginal and cross-cultural schools, one might suggest that teachers' status as mediator is further exacerbated by some loss of control over the labour process of teaching with an increase in community control, but this process seems to be accompanied by opportunities for professional development, such as becoming a key decision maker in educational change or acquiring additional training in local Aboriginal culture.

One might conclude based on the focus group and survey responses in this study that the knowledge Aboriginal people collectively hold with respect to local culture gives them some influence over teachers' work. Further, such influence is heightened when teachers lack formal teaching materials written by and about local Aboriginal peoples to guide them in classroom

instruction. Community inclusion and engagement might also be interpreted, based on the data collected for this thesis, to enable non-Aboriginal parents and other cultural groups in the influence of school curriculum. In such instances, one might suppose that the type of control Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents exert over the labour process of teaching takes on a quasi market dynamic, especially when students and parents are dissatisfied with the educational products being offered and they leave for other schools. The majority of teachers at the band site recalled an instance in which parents at a local high school rented a bus and sent their children to another community for schooling. Similarly, many of the educators at the rural site recalled that some students were school shopping at the beginning, and that students often moved inter-jurisdictionally throughout the school year. In contrast, the urban respondents revealed that many parents and students expressed interest in the urban school, specifically because of the cultural and social programs being offered through the school.

Within the context of Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan, at least just prior to and during data collection from 2003-2005, educators were obliged to mediate between community members' agendas and centrally defined educational policy. Many of the Northern and urban focus group respondents suggested that teachers need more training and/or resources, and Elder programs need additional investments, so that Aboriginal cultural curricula will be actualised in the classroom in a manner that is both accurate and meaningful for communities. Further, almost all of the rural, urban, and band focus group participants asserted that ethnic or "racial" conflict may heighten quasi-market type dynamics or create barriers to learning which often impede the achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth. In addition, many of the rural focus group respondents seemed concerned that economic opportunity seeking and quasi-market type dynamics would make it more difficult to reduce Aboriginal students' gaps in learning.

## 6.4 Conclusion

This thesis connects teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan with broader social change in the Canadian welfare-state under globalisation. Awareness of this connection has over the course of this work to an understanding about educators' success and challenges in, and barriers to Aboriginal education. Most of the teachers who participated in the study understood that the majority of barriers to Aboriginal education are not individually derived, either from the actions of teachers or families, but rather they are structurally induced and thus of public concern. Similarly, I assert in this thesis that teachers in association with Aboriginal families and communities have some autonomy in determining successes and challenges in Aboriginal educational improvement, though most of the barriers to success are set aside from the people involved in the struggle for Aboriginal education equity. In this regard, return of responsibility for and control over education to Aboriginal communities should not be taken as the dissolution of collective responsibility for improving the educational attainment of Aboriginal people. Social justice is a good which can only be obtained if Canadians acknowledge the structural barriers to educational improvement in Aboriginal communities, and cooperate to remove them, so that Aboriginal parents and teachers can work together to achieve the improvement of educational attainment for Aboriginal students.

This thesis encompasses but has avoided engaging a number of highly controversial debates regarding educational change. A preface to a discussion regarding controversies in education reform should address the expectations that Canadians have of teachers (as a society) and the compatibility of multiple, but simultaneous educational goals. Are our expectations justifiable given the level of education which teachers have, the number of resources available for learning, and what is possible given the types of structural barriers to learning which remain in Aboriginal communities? From this study on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan, we have learned that our expectations regarding education should be balanced with: 1) an equal investment in understanding teachers'

work, specifically how policy imperatives in education reform interact and influence how teachers' perform their work within varied social contexts, and 2) an investment in views that tell us what teachers will need to do if they are to increase productivity, provide adequate social care to Aboriginal families, and improve educational outcomes in a cross-cultural setting.

Schools and families are core social institutions which share roles and responsibilities with each other as well as with other primary social institutions. Of concern to many parents and teachers alike is the extent to which the roles and responsibilities of schools and families have converged. Blurring the line between the family and school entails additional concerns for Aboriginal people given the historical relationship First peoples have with schooling in Canada or the legacy of residential schooling. What has been learned in this study is that schools and governments need to provide families with more supports so they can send students to school prepared to learn. Additional research and policy making on Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan are likely to pose questions about what roles and responsibilities families and schools should reserve as solely their own tasks.

Based on the focus group and survey data in this study, it seems that the collaborative delivery of social services within the context of democratic community-school relationships has enhanced teachers' professional control and autonomy, with respect to mediation and collaboration, but it has also reduced educators' control more generally over the labour process of teaching in many Aboriginal communities located in Saskatchewan. Communities and families are becoming more involved than before in the day-to-day activities of teaching and learning in their school. In Aboriginal communities, knowledge of local culture, history, and perspectives has enabled people to exercise influence over the labour process of teaching. Educational credentials earned in universities far removed from communities have become less important, not only in regards to culturally based activities but also in developing relations with parents. What has been learned in this research is that teachers working in Aboriginal



communities located in Saskatchewan are likely undergoing professional development while simultaneously sharing decision making with respect to the labour process of teaching.

## 6.5 Recommendations

### 6.5.1 Expanded human service mandate, integrated services, and the intensification of teachers' work

The intensification of teachers' work should be further addressed by researchers and other professionals by consulting with educators on an ongoing basis. Policy makers and practitioners should replace integrated services with school-linked services in working to reduce teachers' workload. Other issues of concern that should also be addressed include the lack of human resource personnel and the need for more specialized teachers and alternative programs in some schools, the management of student behaviour in the classroom and school, responsibilities for the preparation of children for participation in learning, and expectations of students' performances compared to students' and families' lives. Non-educational human service providers such as Family Services and Health need to become authentically involved and committed to integrated service delivery through the provision of significant funding and the allocation of personnel resources locally.

### 6.5.2 Resource based learning, curriculum actualisation, and community engagement

Teachers should not feel obligated to incur the cost of resource-based learning and education authorities should find ways of ensuring that all teachers and students have access to the amount and types of material for teaching and learning that they need, as determined by their local and differentiated situations. The Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan education divisions should continue to support and facilitate curriculum actualisation. In addition, they should further consult teachers in order to more fully develop and improve existing curriculum and other supports, for teaching and learning. Funding should also be made available to the educators responsible for Aboriginal education development in Saskatchewan for learning

materials to inform and convince teachers, parents, and students about the need for curriculum change and the reasons why every student should learn about the histories, perspectives, and knowledge of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Schools should continue in working toward the development of broad based support from, and participation by parents and community members. Most importantly, schools and learning-communities should be recognised for their existing success.

### 6.5.3 Inter-jurisdictional aspects of Aboriginal education

The achievement of educational improvement for Aboriginal children and youth is an inter-jurisdictional (First Nation, federal, and provincial), horizontal (between government departments and agencies), and vertical (federal and provincial) issue. Partnerships exist between educational authorities and they should continue to be expanded in order to ensure that Aboriginal students have access to comparable learning opportunities and that their educational needs are equally met despite the fact they live on or off a reserve. Educational authorities should also consider further aligning their teaching, evaluation, accounting, and tracking practices or alternatively developing mechanisms for evaluating and placing students when they arrive for education from another jurisdiction. One might also suggest that Indian and Northern Affairs incur the cost of such evaluations given that they are responsible for funding the education of Aboriginal peoples. Students, parents, and teachers should be made aware that the quality and character of education in Canada and between jurisdictions within provinces differs markedly due to the autonomy of jurisdictional authorities. This will prepare students for placement in an alternative and or remedial program at their new school or, possibly, the learning grade for which they are suited within the context of education as delivered in the alternate jurisdiction.

#### 6.5.4 The contributions of Elders, life-long-learning and adult education

Elders are involved in meaningful ways in teaching and learning, for example as facilitators and instructors, and they were being consulted about educational concerns in 2003-2005. Elder programming in Saskatchewan should be strengthened with resources to ensure that schools have dedicated Elders and should not be without Elders during any part of a school week. Elders need to be honoured with support so that they can participate without carrying additional burdens. Additional funding should be allotted for life-long-learning and adult education programs for Elders because, as one Elder indicated to me during the course of this research, Elders bring with them varying degrees and/or different types of cultural knowledge to schools. The contributions that Elders are making to learning in Saskatchewan need to be recognised and their commitment to learning celebrated through the augmentation of existing Elder programs.

#### 6.6 Research recommendations

##### 6.6.1 Research and praxis

During the course of this research, it became apparent that teachers and educational institutions are, in many instances, over-researched and under-changed or lack a degree of change comparable to the studies they participate in. Teachers are increasingly short on time and are often in a position where they repeat to researchers what has already been stated a number of times. From this, one could suggest that there is a missing link between research and change, or at least between researchers and their research findings, and the people and types of changes that are made. Ellen Meiksins Wood notes, "The original intention of historical materialism was to provide a theoretical foundation for interpreting the world in order to change it" (Wood 1996, 19). The research for this thesis was conducted with the intent, similar to historical materialism, to create meaningful change. My work has taken the position and proceeded according to the notion that research should be conducted closely with teachers and,

when possible, with the local communities they serve. Such a strategy is intended to ensure that the capacities for change in Aboriginal schools are maximised through the development of mutual recognition, and an understanding that a great deal has been accomplished, but also that much remains to be done.

#### 6.6.2 Theoretical significance

This study is of theoretical significance within the context of academic literature regarding changes in teachers' work under global capitalism. As outlined in Chapter Two, teachers are simultaneously subject to changes that decrease and increase their control over the labour process of teaching. Conceptualisations of teachers' at work and within society more generally focus on the extent to which teachers are or are not autonomous professionals (Hall 2004; Wotherspoon 2004; Apple 1988; Smyth 2001; Ball 1993; Robertson 2000). This thesis lends support to the notion, as expressed in literature on teachers' work summarised in Chapter Two, that teachers continue to be situated within a contradictory professional position given that they are subject increasingly to controls, but also that they have opportunities for exercising autonomy. Expanding on this literature (for example Wotherspoon 2004), the thesis situates teachers as cultural mediators who continuously negotiate between the often competing agendas of governments, students, parents, and communities.

The focus group and survey data speak to theoretical concepts relating to teachers' work globally and in Saskatchewan, as outlined in Chapter Two, in overt and subtle ways. The focus group and survey data subtly indicate that devolution involves a degree of authenticity and contrived collegiality given the competing demands of teaching professionals, communities, and governments. As for service partnerships, much has been said in this thesis with respect to the dominance and inadequacy of school-linked services, especially when compared to students' needs and the utility of integrated services. The focus group data, underscore the progress that schools have made in cultivating community engagement and inclusion in learning. However,

subtle nuances within the data suggest teachers rely on community and families as a latent resource to support educational improvement, but in very specific ways, as a source of cultural knowledge for example.

As for responsiveness, the focus group data support the notion that both quasi-market and social justice dynamics have resulted from teachers' attempts to meet the needs of, and include families and students in shared leadership and responsibility for education. However, the data in this study do not speak to the extent to which quasi-market dynamics are consistent with endeavours to achieve social justice or healing more generally with Aboriginal peoples. Though, with regard to culturally plural communities, the focus group data indicate that quasi-market type dynamics may be an impediment to social justice for Aboriginal peoples within the context of mixed communities experiencing high levels of "racial" conflict. The survey and focus group data do not address questions regarding the relationship between individual determinations of educational needs, right or wrong, and the relationship between school or learning choice and social justice.

To be efficient and effective in the delivery of education programming may very well be a means to ensure "good value" for Canadian's money, but productivity may also be an impediment to change. Taken on its own, a focus on productivity may very well help teachers to better meet established educational goals, and to save money. However, combining such a request with demands that teachers do more and provide services for which they are not trained, because they are obliged at the time of crisis, is not wise and simply a means to failure. This is especially true in a community context where people are working to rebuild families and social-community networks following colonisation and the consequences of residential schooling. Creating social capital in Aboriginal communities and, thus improving the context for learning requires not only a significant monetary investment beyond what has already been made, but also professionals who are trained to address social issues. Indeed, everyone is responsible for preparing children to learn and in supporting other community members toward

success in learning and life, but teachers require support so they can focus on improving their students' education outcomes.

This research is of further theoretical relevance within the context of a broader program of research being conducted on teachers' work in Aboriginal communities at the University of Saskatchewan. The thesis, as does other research conducted within the teachers' work in Aboriginal communities program, contributes new knowledge about teachers' work in Aboriginal communities, specifically so that the members of learning communities can more aptly understand the successes and challenges teachers encounter in working to improve education for Aboriginal children and youth. Most importantly, this study provides evidence to support and facilitate the ever-growing momentum for Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan.

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## Appendix "A": Research guides

### Focus Group Guide

Prior to group:

Set up recording equipment and prepare tapes  
Set up presentation equipment and prepare presentation  
Set up break

Introduction (20 minutes)

Ask for and answer any questions the participants may have about the study  
Distribute and collect statement of informed consent forms  
Hand out name-cards and markers to participants  
Explain the purpose of the recording device and etiquette for group discussions  
Group introduction (around the table)

Introduce yourself. Describe the Aboriginal education initiatives in your school and/or jurisdiction.

(1) Section One: Open ended discussion (70 minutes)

Prompt discussion using the following questions/statements:

- (a) Relate a positive experience you had with any part of the Aboriginal education initiative in your school/jurisdiction
- (b) Relate a disappointing experience you had with any part of the Aboriginal education initiative in your school/jurisdiction
- (c) What would you change about any aspect of Aboriginal education initiatives in your school/jurisdiction?
- (d) What would you retain if changes were made to Aboriginal education initiatives in your school/jurisdiction?

(2) Coffee Break (10 minutes) Listen

(3) Section Two: Structured discussion (70 minutes)

Present a table (formulated based on the survey) in each of the dimensions below and ask the associated question (take field notes):

- (a) Community and school

- (b) Student background and concerns
- (c) Curriculum and funding
- (e) Aboriginal education initiatives and teaching
- (f) Workplace and training

Sample question-How does the “average hours per-week spent on teaching overall” table relate to your experience as a teacher?

Conclusion (10 minutes)

Closing remarks

Invitation to contact research team for research reports

Take names of those who would like a final summary in 2004

Pack recording and presentation equipment

### **Interview Guide**

Introduction (15 minutes)

Ask for and answer any questions the participants may have about the study

Distribute and collect statement of informed consent form

Explain the purpose of the recording device.

Ask participant for their background information and how long they have been in their current position.

(1) Section One: Open ended discussion (40 minutes)

Prompt about their field of expertise to get the discussion moving

(2) Section Two: Structured discussion (40 minutes)

Present a table formulated based on the survey in each of the dimensions below and ask the associated question (take field notes):

- (a) Community and school
- (b) Student background and concerns
- (c) Curriculum and funding
- (d) Aboriginal education initiatives and teaching
- (e) Workplace and training

(3) Section Three: Opportunity for final comments

Ask questions based on any contradictions between sections one and two or a lack of clarity about what was concluded.

Ask the participant if they would like to add anything else to the discussion that may have been omitted in sections one and two.

Conclusion (5 minutes)

Pack recording and presentation equipment  
Set up release of transcript meeting

## Appendix "B": Research forms

### **Statement of Informed Consent: Focus Group**

The following is a statement of informed consent for a focus group on "Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities". Dr. Terry Wotherspoon and Jason Doherty from the Department of Sociology at the University of Saskatchewan are conducting the study. The following statement must be read and signed by participants if they wish to participate in the focus group according to ethical requirements of the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to hold a group interview to find out about Teachers' Work and the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. We will discuss our general ideas about: a) community and school, b) student background and concerns, c) curriculum and funding, d) Aboriginal education initiatives and teaching, e) workplace and training.

I understand that the study involves a focus group interview that lasts three hours or less, which will be audiotaped. The focus group will be divided into two parts including an open discussion and an examination of results from an ongoing survey on "Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities". In the first section, you will be asked to explore current dimensions of teachers' work and Aboriginal education initiatives specific to your experience. Part two will include a group discussion of five questions based on the survey. Each activity will last between fifty and eighty minutes with a ten-minute break in between.

I understand that because of this study, there could be violations of my privacy. To prevent violations of my own or others' privacy, I have been asked not to talk about any of my own or others' private experiences that I would consider too personal or revealing.

I also understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group by not disclosing any personal information that they share during our discussion.

I understand that I may not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study, but that my participation may help others in the future.

The data will be safeguarded and securely stored by Terry Wotherspoon and Jason Doherty at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years. You may request that your data be excluded from the study at any time by contacting the researchers in writing through the address below or by withdrawing from the focus group.

I understand that all the information I give will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law and that the names of the people in this study will be kept confidential. Your name will at no time be attributed to anything reported. The focus group audio recording will be transcribed for accuracy when reporting. Names, dates, and places will be changed when using direct quotations for illustration in research reports. The data will be used in conference style

presentations, publication in academic/teaching journals, and made available to participants in research reports.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that if I wish to withdraw from the study or to leave, I may do so at any time, and that I do not need to give any reasons or explanations for doing so. If I do withdraw from the study, I understand that this will have no effect on my relationship with The University of Saskatchewan or any other organization or agency.

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the research team at the address below if you have any questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on November 8, 2001. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research Services (306-966-4053). The results of the study will be available periodically until the end of the study in 2004 and may be obtained by contacting the researchers at the address below.

I have read and understand the description provide above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent has been given to me for my records.

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Signature of participant

---

Date

---

Signature of researcher

Researchers:

Terry Wotherspoon (Professor)  
Jason Doherty (Ph.D. Candidate)  
Department of Sociology  
University of Saskatchewan  
9 Campus Drive  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A5  
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Office of Research Services:

Phone (306) 966-6925  
Fax (306) 966-6950  
e-mail:  
"wotherspoon@usask.ca"

University of Saskatchewan  
Kirk Hall Room 210  
117 Science Place  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
S7N 5C8

Phone (306) 966-4053

(The second page was duplicated for the researchers)



## **Statement of Informed Consent: Interview**

The following is a statement of informed consent for an interview on “Teachers’ Work in Aboriginal Communities”. Dr. Terry Wotherspoon and Jason Doherty from the Department of Sociology at the University of Saskatchewan are conducting the study. The following statement must be read and signed by the participant if they wish to participate in the interview according to ethical requirements of the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to hold an interview to find out about Teachers’ Work and the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives in Saskatchewan and Manitoba; we will discuss our general ideas about: a) community and school, b) student background and concerns, c) curriculum and funding, d) Aboriginal education initiatives and teaching, e) workplace and training.

I understand that the study involves an interview that lasts two hours or less, which will be audiotaped. The interview will be divided into three parts including an open discussion, an examination of results from an ongoing survey on “Teachers’ Work in Aboriginal Communities”, and an opportunity for final comments. In the first section, you will be asked to explore current dimensions of teachers’ work and Aboriginal education initiatives specific to area of expertise. Part two will include a discussion about five questions based on the survey. You will have an opportunity for final comments in the third segment of the interview. Each stage of the interview will last between thirty-five and forty minutes.

I understand that I may not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study, but that my participation may help others in the future.

The data will be safeguarded and securely stored by Terry Wotherspoon and Jason Doherty at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years. You may request that your data be excluded from the study at any time by contacting the researchers in writing through the address below.

I understand that all the information I give will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law and that the names of the people in this study will be kept confidential. Your name will at no time be attributed to anything reported. The interview audio recording will be transcribed for accuracy when reporting. Names, dates, and places will be changed when using direct quotations for illustration in research reports. The data will be used in conference style presentations, publication in academic/teaching journals, and made available to participants in research reports.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that if I wish to withdraw from the study or to leave, I may do so at any time, and that I do not need to give any reasons or explanations for doing so. If I do withdraw from the study, I understand that this will have no effect on my relationship with The University of Saskatchewan or any other organization or agency.

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the research team at the address below if you have any questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on November 8, 2001. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research

Services (306-966-4053). The results of the study will be available periodically until the end of the study in 2005 and may be obtained by contacting the researchers at the address below.

I have read and understand the description provide above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent has been given to me for my records.

---

Signature of participant

---

Date

---

Signature of researcher

Researchers:

Jason Doherty (Ph.D. Candidate)  
Terry Wotherspoon (Professor)

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(The second page was duplicated for the researchers)

### **Explanation of Research: Focus Group (initial)**

The purpose of this focus group is to explore key dimensions and practices associated with Aboriginal education initiatives as you experience and make sense of them on a daily basis as an educator. The focus group is divided into two parts including both a question and answer-based discussion and an open exchange about any aspect of teachers' work and Aboriginal education initiatives that you feel is important. In each section you will be asked to share any part of your experience as a teacher in relation, however, not limited to: a) working conditions and training opportunities, b) economic status and student ancestry, c) programming/curriculum and funding, d) community and school, e) educational achievement and Aboriginal students.

The focus group will begin after the informed consent and confidentiality forms have been signed and collected from all participants. Prior to the first section of the focus group, the

teachers will be asked to introduce themselves (in two minutes or less) and describe the Aboriginal education initiative running in their school. The moderator will facilitate the introduction and subsequent focus group in the first section by using general prompts and in the second section by presenting survey data and asking questions. Focus group members may pass on any prompt/question or leave the group at any time without explanation or question from the moderator or fellow participants.

In the first section the moderator will ask the teachers to relate any part of their experience that they would like to share based on four general prompts. For example, the first general prompt is “relate a positive experience you had with any aspect of the Aboriginal education initiative in your school or jurisdiction”. Group members will be given two minutes to think about their response and then asked to relate a piece of their history to the rest of the group in four minutes or less. At the end of the first section, the moderator will give any participant who would like to make a final comment or add an additional thought an opportunity to do so. The first section can last up to an hour depending on the length and number of responses.

The second section will begin following a ten-minute coffee break. The facilitator will present four tables and associated questions, one table and question for each key dimension, in succession. Between each presentation, the educators will be asked to formulate an answer or response to the data based on their individual situations and practice. Group members will be given four minutes or less to respond and a comment sheet to fill out if they have additional thoughts. The tables and questions have been formulated based on a survey, conducted over the last two years, of educators working in Saskatchewan and Manitoba Aboriginal communities. The second section can last up to an hour depending on the length and number of responses.

This research is being conducted in the context of several reports, policies and initiatives to provide content, programming and support relevant to Aboriginal people. Experts in the field of Canadian education suggest that teachers are key players in the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives, but there is a limited knowledge base, to date, on how teachers view their roles in these regards. The focus group, then, is intended to contribute to new knowledge about teachers’ work in Aboriginal communities that may ultimately help to ensure that school personnel and members of those communities will better understand and support one another. The research team invites the participants to contact them, at the address below, for a research summary to be available on a periodic basis until the end of the study, December 2005, at which time a research report will be published.

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## **Explanation of Research: Focus Group (Modified)**

The purpose of this focus group is to explore key dimensions and practices associated with Aboriginal education initiatives as you experience and make sense of them on a daily basis as an educator. This research is being conducted in the context of several reports, policies and initiatives to provide content, programming and support relevant to Aboriginal people. Researchers in the field of Canadian education suggest that teachers are key players in the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives, but there is a limited knowledge base, to date, on how teachers view their roles in these regards. This study intends to contribute new knowledge about teachers' work in Aboriginal communities to existing education literature and may help school personnel and members of those communities to further understand and support one another.

The focus group follows up a survey conducted on Teachers' work in Aboriginal communities over the last two years in your division/school and others in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The focus group is divided into two parts including both a question and answer-based discussion and an open exchange about any aspect of teachers' work and Aboriginal education initiatives that you feel is important. In each section you will be asked to share any part of your experience as a teacher in relation, however, not limited to: a) working conditions and training opportunities, b) economic status and student ancestry, c) programming/curriculum and funding, d) community and school, e) educational achievement and Aboriginal students. The focus group usually takes an hour to complete but depends largely on the size of the group.

The research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and has received ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioral Science Research. All information shared during the course of the focus group will be kept confidential and the names of the people in this study will be kept confidential. Your name will at no time be attributed to anything reported. The focus group audio recording will be transcribed for accuracy when reporting. Names, dates, and places will be changed when using direct quotations for illustration in research reports.

I would be pleased to present and discuss the survey data with you and other teachers and community members. The research team thanks you in advance for your time and attention to our research program. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at [jad958@mail.usask.ca](mailto:jad958@mail.usask.ca) or by phone at (306) 374-1607.

Yours sincerely,

Jason Doherty  
Department of Sociology  
University of Saskatchewan

## Focus Group Honorarium: Release Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (please print full name), have received twenty-five dollars for participating in a focus group/interview on "Teachers Work in Aboriginal Communities", conducted by Jason Doherty from the University of Saskatchewan.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness

### Explanation of Research: Interview (original)

The purpose of the interview is to find out about your perspective of Aboriginal education initiatives and CONTACT FIELD OF EXPERTISE IN CASE NAME. The interview will last approximately two hours and be divided into three parts including: a) an open discussion, b) an examination of results from a survey on "Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities" completed in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and c) an opportunity for final comments. Select representatives in the areas of education administration, teachers' associations, and Aboriginal education delivery are also being interviewed as expert non-teacher participants. Your interview will be used in research reports as a non-teaching and expert account as a CONTACT TITLE.

In the first section, the researcher will ask about your background as a CONTACT TITLE and the number of years you have been working in CONTACT FIELD. Based on general prompts from the interviewer, you will be asked about your perception of teachers and their role in providing education to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. The first section of the interview is also an opportunity for you to highlight and relate any concerns you feel are relevant to the discussion. This section of the interview will last approximately between thirty-five and forty minutes.

In the second section of the interview, the researcher will present five tables and an associated question in succession. Each table and question will deal with one of the five key dimensions concern teachers and their role in providing education to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. The five dimensions are: a) working conditions and training opportunities, b) economic status and student ancestry, c) programming/curriculum and funding, d) community and school, e) educational achievement and Aboriginal students. Following each presentation you will be asked about your responses to the tables as it relates to your field of expertise. The tables and questions will be formulated based on an ongoing survey on "Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities" being conducted by the researchers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The second section will last approximately between thirty-five and forty minutes.

In the third part of the interview, you will have an opportunity for final comments or additional thoughts about the subject of discussion. The participant may pass on any prompt/question or cease the interview at any time without explanation or question from the researcher.

This study is being conducted in the context of several reports, policies and initiatives to provide content, programming and support relevant to Aboriginal people. This interview, then, is intended to contribute to new knowledge about teachers' work in Aboriginal communities that may ultimately help to ensure that school personnel and members of those communities will better understand and support one another. The research team invites the participants to contact them, at the address below, for a research summary to be available on a periodic basis until the end of the study, December \_\_\_\_\_, at which time a research report will be published.

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### **Explanation of Research: Interview (modified)**

The purpose of the interview is to find out about your perspective of Aboriginal education initiatives and CONTACT FIELD OF EXPERTISE IN CASE NAME. The interview will last approximately two hours and be divided into three parts including: a) an open discussion, b) an examination of results from a survey on "Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities" completed in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and c) an opportunity for final comments. Select representatives in the areas of education administration, teachers' associations, and Aboriginal education delivery are also being interviewed as expert non-teacher participants. Your interview will be used in research reports as a non-teaching and expert account as a CONTACT TITLE.

In the first section, the researcher will ask about your background as a CONTACT TITLE and the number of years you have been working in CONTACT FIELD. Based on general prompts from the interviewer, you will be asked about your perception of teachers and their role in providing education to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. The first section of the interview is also an opportunity for you to highlight and relate any concerns you feel are relevant to the discussion. This section of the interview will last approximately between thirty-five and forty minutes.

In the second section of the interview, the researcher will present five tables and an associated question in succession. Each table and question will deal with one of the five key dimensions concern teachers and their role in providing education to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. The five dimensions are: a) working conditions and training opportunities, b) economic status and student ancestry, c) programming/curriculum and funding, d) community and school, e)

educational achievement and Aboriginal students. Following each presentation you will be asked about your responses to the tables as it relates to your field of expertise. The tables and questions will be formulated based on an ongoing survey on "Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities" being conducted by the researchers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The second section will last approximately between thirty-five and forty minutes.

In the third part of the interview, you will have an opportunity for final comments or additional thoughts about the subject of discussion. The participant may pass on any prompt/question or cease the interview at any time without explanation or question from the researcher.

This study is being conducted in the context of several reports, policies and initiatives to provide content, programming and support relevant to Aboriginal people. This interview, then, is intended to contribute to new knowledge about teachers' work in Aboriginal communities that may ultimately help to ensure that school personnel and members of those communities will better understand and support one another. The research team invites the participants to contact them, at the address below, for a research summary to be available on a periodic basis until the end of the study, December \_\_\_\_\_, at which time a research report will be published.

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## Appendix "C": Community schools material

### **Explanation of Research-Focus Group**

We are conducting focus groups as part of the Community Schools Data Collection Project. This project has three main objectives:

- (1) to gather information to increase understanding of the progress and challenges encountered in community education practice;
- (2) to provide baseline data about indicators of community education, providing support for provincial and school division policy and program development over time; and
- (3) to support schools in strengthening the capacity of the staff, and the school community to collect and to use data that will inform decisions and action planning about learning and the well being of children, young people and their families.

The focus groups will help achieve these goals by exploring how staff and community members contribute to and are linked to learning in their school and community supplementing current survey data. We are hoping that participants will have sufficient opportunity to provide their views on several core issues.

Each focus group is likely to take up to two and a half hours, including time for refreshments and a break. They will be conducted by researchers from the University of Saskatchewan, who will facilitate the conversation by asking general questions. The questions will cover topics under six key areas: participation in community schooling, how community schools meet the varied educational needs of students and community members, shared leadership in making decisions about education, how we can learn together by creating an environment for life-long learning, and shared responsibility for learning by everyone.

Please find attached a Statement of Informed Consent Form outlining your rights and our obligations in this research. The Sociologists from the University of Saskatchewan are regulated by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant and our obligations as researchers may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research Services-contact information following the informed consent form.

### **Focus Group Consent Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in a focus group for the purpose of providing information that will be used in the Community Schools Data Collection (CSDC) Project, 2004. The project seeks to collect data from several sources, including survey and focus groups and provincial learning assessments, over several years, in order to monitor progress, to identify promising practices, and to increase the capacity of schools and communities to use data to inform continuous improvement.

I have read the information letter that outlines the purpose and nature of the CSDC project. I understand that my participation in this focus group will take approximately 2.5 hours. I understand that I am not obligated to respond to any question and, should I decide I no longer



wish to participate, I may leave at any time. The focus group session, including my contributions, will be recorded by a note taker in order to provide data for the project. The data will be analyzed and reported on an aggregate basis only, and no identifying information will be employed that will attribute comments or other details to any specific individual. I understand that I may withdraw my contribution/data from the study at any time and can do so by contacting Dr. Bernard Schissel or Dr. Terry Wotherspoon at the University of Saskatchewan (contact information below).

I understand that the researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. I will respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and I am aware that other focus group participants may not respect my confidentiality.

The data will be stored in a locked office (Room 1015 Arts or equivalent office designated by the Department Head and College) at the University of Saskatchewan for a period of five years. There will be no personal identifying information, other than a reference code to a list kept in a separate locked location, on questionnaires, interview tapes, and transcripts. Dr. Bernard Schissel and Dr. Terry Wotherspoon will be responsible for the storage of data.

The data for each designated Community School that participates will be aggregated and become part of the final document provided to Saskatchewan Learning by University of Saskatchewan researchers. The provincial report will not attribute statements to any particular individual or school in order to protect anonymity.

This research project has been approved by the Behavioural Science Ethics Committee of the University of Saskatchewan. Any questions or concerns about this research can be directed to Bernard J. Schissel or Terry Wotherspoon at (306)966-6924 or the Office of Research Services at (306)966-2084 – out of town participants may call collect to these numbers.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

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Participant	Date
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Researcher	Date
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