Forging Coalitions in Aboriginal Education: Exploring Aboriginal-Settler Relationship Building in Public School Contexts

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine how educators understand what it means to equitably and respectfully build relationships in Aboriginal education within the K-12 public education system. This study is conducted with an eye to the impacts of colonialism on both intragroup relationship-building strategies amongst Aboriginal educators, and intergroup engagements between Aboriginal and Settler colleagues. Specifically, I am interested in the systemic challenges that underpin Aboriginal peoples’ and Settler Canadians’ intra and intergroup attempts to work together in ways that create positive social change.

The research for this dissertation involved speaking with 15 educators, of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry, regarding how they understood both intra and intergroup relationship building, and their investments in and commitments to Aboriginal education. Semi-structured interviews and one group interview were conducted. These data were analyzed through critical discourse analysis and hyperRESEARCH, a qualitative analysis software program. Interviews were coded and further theorized against a backdrop of coalition politics, Indigenous scholarship, post-structuralism, and standpoint theory.

The study builds on the work of scholars that include Susan Dion (2009), Paulette Regan (2010), and Verna St. Denis (2007; 2010), among others, who contend that, in order for change to take place, educators must be willing to question and disrupt how they knowingly and unknowingly contribute to the production of colonial discourses in the various milieus in which they participate. Following Regan (2010), my study is motivated by hope and possibility within education for reimagined relationships between Aboriginal peoples and Settler Canadians, while recognizing the very slow, “drop by drop” nature of change (Armstrong, 2004). The terrain of Aboriginal education is a rough and contested site of struggle. However, the possibility for imagining a better future resides in coming to an understanding of how our identities, investments in and ways of relating to one another have been and continue to be informed by the legacy of colonialism and racism.

Keywords: Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relationships; coalition politics; identity politics; colonialism; standpoint theory
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The scholars and mentors whom I have had the privilege to work with also supported my academic journey. I thank Dr. Dolores van der Wey, my senior supervisor, whose mentorship and expertise has been integral to the development of this dissertation. Throughout our relationship, she has given generously of her time, her knowledge, and support. Her keen analysis and guidance pushed me to continuously improve my work, and her encouragement assisted me through times of difficulty. For these reasons, and many more, I am grateful for our collaboration. I am also appreciative of the input and support from my committee members, Dr. Suzanne de Castell and Dr. Donna Deyhle. Dr. de Castell's thorough and insightful feedback served to sharpen my arguments, and Dr. Deyhle's thought-provoking questions kept me focussed on the overall shape I wished the thesis to take. It has been a pleasure to work closely with these three outstanding scholars.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Research

“Many Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal support workers report incidents of lack of respect for them and for their heritage by colleagues. Sometimes they are ignored and comments made as if there were no one there who might be hurt by the comments [...] It is the responsibility of all teachers not only to ensure that they are not making racist comments but also to challenge racist comments from colleagues. Beyond that, we should all be working to ensure that our staffrooms, as well as classrooms and school grounds, are welcoming at all times to Aboriginal colleagues” (British Columbia Teachers Federation [BCTF], 2002, p.48).

“…colonial power does not operate in a simple vertical way from the institutions in which they appear to be constituted, but instead, operates dynamically, laterally, and intermittently […] the repressive structures of colonialism operate through an invisible network of filiative connections, psychological internalizations, and unconsciously complicit associations” (Kaomea, 2005, p.35).

I begin the thesis with a juxtaposition of the above excerpts because both, in their own way, point to the necessity for, and the challenges of, building relationships in Aboriginal education contexts within an education system predicated upon colonialist
ideology and values. The first selection comes from a 2002 British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) report entitled Beyond Words: Creating Racism-Free Schools for Aboriginal Learners, specifically, within a section called “Resources for School Improvement,” which offers teachers suggestions regarding how they can work to ensure that schools are safe and respectful spaces. While the document importantly takes note of the discrimination that many Aboriginal educators experience within public school contexts, it does so by framing racism within a discourse of individual accountability. By construing racism as a problem that can be dealt with simply by refraining from racist comments, the report fails to consider how racism is “a systematic and political problem of unequal power relations” (Schick, 2010, p.47).

The tendency to frame racism as an individual, rather than systemic issue, is prevalent throughout the report. For example, the BCTF defines racial discrimination as “when someone is bothering, threatening, or treating a person unfairly because of the colour of their skin, ethnic or cultural background, religion or country that they come from” (p.14). They identify forms of racism as being, among others: name-calling, physical assault, verbal abuse or threats, and insulting pictures or articles (ibid.). Throughout the report are checklists for teachers to determine whether or not their classrooms and their schools are inclusive (pps. 26 and 45, respectively). The report also contains case studies to consider, such as: how a teacher might handle name-calling of an Aboriginal student (p.61), how a teacher might handle racist discussion of an Aboriginal student in the staff room (p.63), or how a teacher might handle racist

1 The term ‘Aboriginal education’ is typically used to signify education “based on the cultures and spirit of First Nations, designed and implemented by First Nations” and that is inclusive of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Hampton, 2000, p.209). This is distinguished from the ‘education of Aboriginal students,’ (often referred to as Aboriginal education) which is education designed by Aboriginal people specifically for Aboriginal learners. Within the context of this research, I use the term ‘Aboriginal education’ to refer to the broad range of programs and services offered to both Aboriginal and Settler educators and students within the Districts from which study participants were recruited. This includes: educational programs designed specifically for Aboriginal students, such as pull-out programs, where Aboriginal students learn about Aboriginal cultures and traditions outside of class time; one-on-one or group tutoring support for Aboriginal learners; in-class lessons and modules on Aboriginal peoples that are taught to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students during class time; and in-service teacher training, curriculum development, and support. As both Settler and Aboriginal educators design many of these programs, Aboriginal education contexts present an opportunity to examine how educators in these settings coalesce with one another.
bullying by other students in a high school setting (p.68). The BCTF’s stance on institutional and systemic racism or other broader societal factors that might impact student success in school, such as poverty and colonization, is cursorily summed up in one paragraph, advising potentially interested teachers to contact the Aboriginal Education coordinator of the organization. It reads:

“Deep-rooted institutional/systemic racism and colonialism/colonization are more pervasive and complicated. The impact on the curriculum and Aboriginal students is significant and long lasting. To learn more about institutional racism, colonialism/colonization, and systemic racism (as these apply to Aboriginal people), please contact [anonymous].” (British Columbia Teachers Federation [BCTF], 2002, p.22).

By not explicitly engaging teachers in an examination of systemic racism and colonization and, instead, directing them to an Aboriginal Education coordinator, the report situates the problem of institutional inequity as one specific to Aboriginal people, thereby excluding Settlers from responsibility for addressing a shared colonial legacy (van der Wey, 2012). Although the report claims that educators will “have a variety of tools to challenge racism” (p.22) in their schools and classrooms, by focussing on racism as an individual problem, the authors have negated the legacy of colonialism and, by extension, the social and political processes of inclusion and exclusion that are at the heart of inequity for Aboriginal peoples in Canada.²

² Following Roxana Ng (2004), I define racialization as “the process whereby groups of people are reified as different ‘races’ based on their biological and phenotypical characteristics” and whereby such processes of classification and representation are used by various groups to distinguish themselves from an ‘other’ (p.42). With respect to Aboriginal peoples, racialization has historically been used against Aboriginal peoples to justify continued subjugation (St. Denis, 2007). Further, I understand racism to be “both the ideology and practice of inferiorizing and excluding groups of people by virtue of their ‘race’, bearing in mind that racial differences are socially constructed” (Ng, 2004, p.43).
Native Hawaiian scholar, Julie Kaomea (2005) builds upon Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) metaphor of the rhizome to describe the insidious ways in which colonial power can operate. A rhizome is a subterranean root system that spreads horizontally across the ground (such as bamboo, rhubarb, and ginger) and grows from several points, rather than one taproot. Following Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffen (1998), Kaomea (2005) argues that, like the rhizome, colonialism maintains potency through a network of oppressive structures that can be both invisible and surreptitious. For this reason, the rhizomatic nature of colonialism makes it difficult to combat “because of the intermittent, overlapping, and intertwining nature of its operation. A rhizome may be broken or shattered at a given spot, but will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (p.35). Thus, while individual occurrences of racism are important to address, I argue that they are offshoots of a larger colonial network, which is maintained via racism, classism, sexism, and other interlocking systems of oppression. In this dissertation, I analyze the possibilities of, and challenges to, inter and intragroup relationship building in Aboriginal education contexts with an eye to the rhizomatic nature of colonialism.

The passages I began with are also indicative of a resistance on the part of many Settler peoples to acknowledge and address the systemic nature of colonialism and, by extension, to challenge our own complicity within such a network. Lenape-Potawatomi educator, Susan Dion (2009) notes that Canadians’ refusal to know themselves as a

3 In this dissertation, I primarily use the term ‘Aboriginal’ to refer to First Nations, Métis, Inuit, mixed-blood and non-Status Indians in Canada. ‘Indian’ and ‘Native’ will be taken up when writings of the time have used such terminology, as with the residential school era. When citing backgrounds of Indigenous scholars, I will recognize tribal affiliations, where known. Otherwise, Canadian Indigenous scholars will be referred to as ‘Aboriginal,’ while Indigenous scholars from the US will be referred to as ‘Native American,’ as per common usages unless they indicate their particular affiliation. While the Dean’s Accord for Indigenous Education (2010) recommends the use of the term ‘Indigenous’ to acknowledge both issues in Canadian Aboriginal education contexts and educational issues in other international contexts, the authors of the Accord acknowledge terms such as ‘Aboriginal,’ ‘First Nations,’ ‘Inuit,’ ‘Métis,’ are reflective of the “diverse, complex, and evolving nature of Indigenous identities in Canada,” (Archibald, Lundy, Reynolds & Williams, 2010, p.1). Additionally, I use the term ‘Aboriginal’ in order to ensure that I am being consistent with the terminology used within the work contexts of participants. Following Paulette Regan (2010), I use the term ‘settler’ to refer to “Euro-Canadians whose ancestors came to Canada during the colonial period [and] also to more recent immigrants from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds who are part of contemporary settler society” (p.240).
product of historical processes to date is upheld by a system that continues to benefit non-Aboriginal people, not just the European settlers of years gone by. This denial of the insidiousness of colonization “creates a barrier allowing Canadians to resist confronting the country’s racist past and the extent to which that past lives in the present, deep in the national psyche. The need to deny racism in Canada’s past resurfaces again and again in its present” (p.57). As one who began an ongoing process of decolonization over ten years ago, I have come to recognize the pervasiveness of colonial discourses in structuring both the identities of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and the relationships between us. The difficulties that I have had in this continuing process of decolonization have also affirmed to me the need to unpack how we come to such understandings and to recognize that our ways of knowing are reflexive of the ways in which we – Settler and Aboriginal Canadians alike – relate to one other. As Dion (2009) maintains, engaging Canadians in the work of acknowledging and unpacking our understandings about Aboriginal peoples is the first step towards the cultivation of more equitable relationships between Aboriginal and Settler Canadians.

Motivated by a belief that “a new and better relationship between Aboriginal people and Canadians requires that we must all attend differently to our shared history” (Dion, 2009, p.54), this thesis attempts to come to more nuanced understandings of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships in Canada in education contexts. This has been undertaken through a small-scale study, using ethnographic methods, which documents the narratives of fifteen Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators working in Aboriginal education contexts. The study builds on the work of scholars, such as Susan Dion (2009) and Settler scholar Paulette Regan (2010), who argue that critically self-reflecting on our relationship to the past is a crucial aspect of creating and sustaining empowering intergroup collaborations. These scholars contend that, in order for change to take place, Settlers must be willing to question and disrupt how they knowingly and unknowingly contribute to the production of colonial discourses in education contexts. Through this investigation, I have engaged participants in an examination of the conditions that they perceive to be integral to relationship building with the aim to identify strategies that challenge the colonial legacy that defines Aboriginal and Settler Canadian relations (Regan, 2010).
1.2. The Research: Context and Questions

Throughout my years of involvement in Aboriginal education, I have grown cognizant of the ways in which the stories I learned about Aboriginal people have structured and informed my own identity construction as a Settler Canadian ally. Through my ongoing relationship, I continue to ask myself what stories I still believe in? What stories do I reject? What investments am I making and why? What identity do I now assume, and what definition of Aboriginal people is it predicated on? An ongoing critique of my own investments and motivations for being involved in Aboriginal education initiatives has heightened my realization of the pervasiveness of colonial narratives, predicated upon the racialization and subjugation of Aboriginal peoples, in structuring our identities. Stories of Aboriginal people as deficient, anachronistic, and helpless are made official through policy, taught to us in classrooms, and reinforced through media. They influence the Canadian national imagination with disastrous consequences. These stories, which run rampant, have the potential to wreak havoc on the self-esteem of Aboriginal youth and support Eurocentric views of superiority and paternalism. In deconstructing Canadian metanarratives, it is important to recognize that the colonial encounter has shaped the identities of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike (Dion, 2007). All of us are implicated, and our identities informed, by an investment in these stories. Uncovering what one believes and one’s investments for believing it is a crucial step in speaking out and offering counter-stories to these overarching Canadian narratives. For this reason, the goal of this research is to unpack how Canadian metanarratives influence educators’ motivations to engage in Aboriginal education contexts and what this influence might look like, particularly with respect to

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4 Following Dion (2009) I use the term ‘investments’ to refer to the time and energy invested by individuals in particular ideologies and discourses that structure, or scaffold, their approaches to Aboriginal education. For example, drawing on her work with teachers, Dion observes: “What I hear in teachers’ work is the way in which their approach to teaching the stories [of Aboriginal peoples] is structured by a complex grid of ideas about what was required of them as professionals and what they, in wanting to be good teachers, are invested in” (p.177). As such, I am interested in how investments in particular discourses underpin educators’ motivations to participate in Aboriginal education initiatives.
building relationships with one's colleagues. As such, I have foregrounded the following questions:

1. What investments underpin Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators’ motivations to participate in Aboriginal education initiatives in urban public school contexts?

2. Do these educators deem it important to form relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues with respect to Aboriginal education contexts? If so, how do they form relationships?

These research questions shaped the design of this study, which primarily consisted of two stages: (1) semi-structured individual interviews wherein participants were asked questions related to the overarching research questions mentioned above; and (2) a follow-up semi-structured group interview in which participants reflected on key themes that I had identified through qualitative data analysis, which included the transcription, and coding of participant responses. Through this research design, I engaged participants in an exploration of the nuances of relationship building in Aboriginal education contexts.

Education is a political act, and pedagogy is not innocent. Because educators work in contexts of power that both enables and constrains what is taken as valid, it is important to understand how they operate as historically situated socio-political agents within the contexts in which they work in order to enact what Simon (1992) terms a ‘pedagogy of possibility.’ Such a pedagogy requires “the construction of educational practices that both express and engender hope” that equitable education is feasible and

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5 In my original research design, a third research question also informed the development of the semi-structured interview questions I presented to participants. This was: “(3) How do these educators define ‘Aboriginal education’? Who do they identify as being responsible for teaching about Aboriginal education? Who do they identify as needing to learn about Aboriginal education?” However, as I progressed with my analysis of the data, the themes, which were the most applicable to the research goals of the study, were coded from questions formulated under the umbrellas of the first two research questions. While I had expected participants might provide further comment on relationship building through their discussions on Aboriginal education, they instead responded in ways that reiterated much of what has been written about in current scholarship with respect to curricular content (see for example, Battiste, 1995; Curwen Doige, 2003). For this reason, I focussed on those responses that provided insight on the nuances of relationship building in Aboriginal education contexts.

6 The original research design also included an online survey. However, I address in Chapter 3, an ongoing job action in both sites of study limited the efficacy of this method of data collection.
attainable (Simon, 1992, p.4). Following Regan (2010), my study is motivated by hope and possibility within education for equitable relationships between Aboriginal peoples and Settler Canadians, while recognizing that change can be slow and processual (Thompson, 2003). The terrain of Aboriginal education is a rough and contested site of struggle. However, the possibility for imagining a better future resides in coming to an understanding of how our identities, investments and ways of relating to one another have been and continue to be informed by the legacy of colonialism and racism.

1.3. My Positionality as Researcher

As a witness, I am called upon to listen and remember. As a witness, I have an obligation to listen and to pass on that which I have heard, seen, and felt, not just as an individual but as an individual connected with others (Dion, 2009, p.18).

As a doctoral student of Anglo-Celtic Settler descent interested in working in Aboriginal education contexts, my privileged position has troubled me and prompted me to examine my desires for wanting to engage with this work. My desire to connect with educators in order to understand how they navigate inter and intragroup relationships is rooted in my own biography of relationship to Aboriginal peoples, which is constantly ongoing and remembered differently as a result of my own lived experience (Dion, 2009). The incident that prompted my awareness of a relationship to Aboriginal peoples occurred during the third year of my undergraduate degree while I was working at a theatre troupe for a summer job.

The year 2004 marked the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain’s first visit to the Atlantic region, historically known as Passamaquoddy territory. The director of the theatre troupe wanted to commemorate the occasion by writing a play about the French-Native encounter. Drawing on stereotypical representations of Nativeness, we adapted the Pocahontas story to Samuel de Champlain’s first visit. Much like John Smith, Samuel de Champlain would fall in love with a Passamaquoddy girl, with lots of animals singing and dancing about to provide comic relief. Before the play was set to launch, the troupe director invited Elders from the local First Nation reserve to screen the play. The reception was not what we had anticipated.
After the viewing, the Elders had us sit in a circle and shared their thoughts with us. The memory of one Elder who spoke has stayed fresh in my mind. When she spoke, she was calm and her tone steadied by a weight of knowing – of living – oppression. She informed us that our rendition was the same as casting stones, that although we were trying to be funny, the historical relationship between Settlers and Aboriginal people was anything but humorous; it was a history of exploitation, co-optation, and subjugation. We had to understand this history and convey that in our play. We had to know that what happened during those first encounters was unjust and that the legacy of oppression continues.

The experience changed my life and set me in the direction of both my Masters and current Doctoral program. As a witness to this alternative story of Aboriginal people as told by the Elders, I was prompted to think critically about my own historical and cultural relationship to the story being told. In experiencing the story, I became an active participant, where I was called into action by my feelings of guilt and shame and overwhelmed with “a need to know and understand what occurred and why it unfolded as it did” (Dion, 2009, p.51). As a result, I challenged my position of a “perfect stranger” to Aboriginal people by enrolling in courses on Aboriginal education, Aboriginal history, and urban Aboriginal issues in order to remedy my lack of knowledge (Dion, 2009). Such is where the story of my relationship to Aboriginal people often begins.

Through a closer reading of Dion’s (2007; 2009) work, I now realize that although this experience provided the catalyst for me to actively confront my lack of knowledge about the history of Aboriginal/Canadian relations, my relationship with Aboriginal peoples has been ongoing since childhood, when I was exposed to stories like *Hiawatha: The Brave Hunter* (Walt Disney Productions, 1979) and films like *Peter Pan* (Walt Disney Productions, 1953) which portrayed and reaffirmed the imaginary Indian of national imagination (Francis, 1992). As Dion (2007) makes clear, the “perfect stranger” relationship is not only based around what one comes to know, but also includes what one does not know and refuses to know (p.331). A relationship is present, despite an absence of awareness, through our “learned ignorance” and “historical amnesia” (Dion, 2009; 2005). Through an interrogation of my own relationship to Aboriginal people, I now recognize that what structured and informed my approach to Aboriginal issues,
even when I believed I was ‘doing good,’ were “dominant stories that position Aboriginal people as, for example, romantised, mythical, victimized, or militant other’ that enabled me to position myself as a “respectful admirer” and “moral helper” (Dion, 2007, p.331). My impetus to continue on and conduct Master’s research on Aboriginal education was driven by a construction of myself as ‘helper.’ Through my involvement and immersion in Aboriginal education, I believed I could ‘help’ Aboriginal people by teaching them about how to ‘work the system’ so that they could ‘break through’ the barriers set in-front of them. At the time, I believed this to be a noble and worthy goal, not realizing that the construction of myself as ‘helper’ was predicated upon the belief that Aboriginal people were victims in need of dominant culture assistance. Though my intentions were good, good intentions do not absolve me from critically engaging why I chose to involve myself in the work in the first place.

Through engaging with and critically reflecting on my past, I am brought to a newfound awareness of the ways my past informs my present relationship with Aboriginal people and myself as a Settler. Like the stories of Aboriginal people as victims that I was taught to believe in, I wonder what other beliefs I have internalized. What stories do I still believe? Conversely, what stories do I, in turn, reject? The recognition that taken-for-granted narratives have inscribed my identity, investments, and commitments in Aboriginal education in a multitude of ways underpins my interest regarding how this plays out for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators who work together in Aboriginal education contexts. How do dominant discourses influence their identities and motivations for involvement? How do they affect how these educators enact solidarity? I move now to an overview of how I have explored these questions within the thesis.

1.4. Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. In Chapter 2, I examine three themes that lay the groundwork for the rest of the dissertation that are based upon a need to contextualize participants’ responses within a broader socio-historical framework. These are: national apologies and reconciliation initiatives in a Canadian context; Aboriginal identity politics; and coalition politics. In Chapter 3, I introduce my theoretical
framework, discuss how the participants and sites of study were chosen, and outline my methodological approach. I also describe each research phase separately and explain who the participants are, how they were recruited, and the consent process. This discussion is preceded by an overview of the methodology for this study. The chapter closes with a discussion of my methods of analysis, issues of validity and ethical considerations.

In Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, I engage with the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and group interview with participants. In Chapter 4, I reflect on how and why Aboriginal workers might be discriminated against within schools. I begin from Puwar’s (2004) premise that Aboriginal staff members are ‘space invaders’ in that they occupy positions for which they are not the somatic norm. As such, Aboriginal staff are often ‘ethnically slotted’ into roles based on Settler conceptualizations of the work for which they are fit. From here, I draw upon participant responses in order to examine the ways in which Aboriginal workers might be ostracized. I demonstrate that Aboriginal employees face both psychic and physical barriers to finding a ‘place’ within schools. In Chapter 5, I begin with a discussion of the complexity of relationships within Aboriginal education teams. I also consider how the colonial influence on Aboriginal identity politics affects intragroup cohesion and draw upon critical women-of-colour feminists and activists to support the claim that healing from colonial trauma, in part, entails breaking the silence around the shame of oppression. In Chapter 6, I revisit issues I presented in Chapter 2 by exploring, in further detail, the difference between knowing and acknowledging the colonial legacy and understanding its relationship to the present. I then move to explore how Settler/colonial myths, like colour-blindness, meritocracy, and individual blamelessness serve to obstruct a willingness to explore critical discourse that challenges naturalized frameworks. I then draw upon interview excerpts and critical theorists to highlight respectful protocols that may enable the conditions for reparative inter-group coalitions to form. In Chapter 7, I return to themes introduced in earlier chapters to argue that the ongoing invisibility of Aboriginal educators within schools is, in part, the result of the continued failure of institutions to acknowledge and address ongoing social and racial oppression. I then analyse the concept of fear and postulate how it may act as an impediment to coalition building. Finally, I move to consider the coalitional possibilities that may arise from making a shift from learning ‘about’ to
learning ‘from’ the experiences of Aboriginal peoples. In Chapter 8, I return to my research questions and goals and review where unexpected results emerged. I also discuss the significance that this particular study, which focussed on an in-depth exploration and interpretation of the experiences of educators working in Aboriginal education contexts, might have for relationship building in broader K-12 education contexts and beyond. I then examine the implications for theory, research, and practice in the field of Aboriginal education, and conclude by identifying possibilities for future research.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction: An Overview of Research on Aboriginal/Settler relationship building in Canadian Education Contexts

Research on Aboriginal/Settler relationship building in Canada, has, on the whole, been written from a macro-level perspective. A plethora of literature can be found discussing relationship building in a variety of different areas, including: the historical relationship that Aboriginal peoples have had with the Government of Canada (Miller, 2000; Thornton, 2001); the relationship of Aboriginal peoples to the Canadian criminal justice system (Todd, 2001; Wall, 2001); the relationship of Aboriginal peoples to land claims and environmental issues (Struthers, 2010; Vernon, 2010); and Aboriginal/Settler research relationships (Battiste, 2008; Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996). Although the relationship of Aboriginal peoples to education initiatives, such as the Canadian residential schools system, has received considerable attention (see, for example, Axelrod, 1999; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Barman, 1995; Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986, 1987; Bear Nicholas, 2001; Brant-Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Haig-Brown, 1988; Longboat, 1987; Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999), research on Aboriginal/Settler relationship building in education is an under-examined area of study.

Susan Dion (2009), Cree/Métis scholar, Verna St. Denis (2007), and Paulette Regan (2010), are three intellectuals who have explored Aboriginal/Settler relationship building in education contexts in depth. In Braiding Histories, Dion (2009) investigates what happens when three intermediate level teachers utilize stories of Aboriginal people as instructional materials in their classrooms. Through the work that she does with these teachers, Dion illustrates how one’s investments in particular narratives and identities structure what Settlers are ‘willing to know’ about their relationships to Aboriginal people. St. Denis (2007), in her article, “Aboriginal Education and Anti-racist Education: Building
Alliances Across Cultural and Racial identity” argues that alliances between Aboriginal and Settler Canadians can be created through an acknowledgement that colonialism and racialization has affected us all. She adds that coalitions can be forged through a commitment to challenging these oppressive structures. Finally, Regan (2010) argues that in order for Settler individuals to fully participate in processes of reconciliation, they must re-evaluate their relationship to Aboriginal people by undergoing a process of decolonization, and ‘unsettle,’ the persistent myth of the Canadian peacemaker. This, she argues, will allow Settler people to make space for an Aboriginal counter-narrative in order to prevent the continuation of colonial relationships between Aboriginal and Settler peoples. These three perspectives on Aboriginal/Settler relationship building have been highly influential in the development of this present study.

Building on the work of these scholars, my doctoral research involved interviewing both Aboriginal and Settler educators working in Aboriginal education contexts in urban public schools regarding their perceptions of and experiences with relationship building. While other studies (Dion, 2009; St. Denis, 2010) have worked with Settler and Aboriginal participants, independently, regarding their experiences of relationship building in public school settings, there is a dearth of studies that focuses on both groups. With the exception of Alison Jones (Pakeha7) and Kuni Jenkins (Maori) (1999) who examine the problematics of cross-cultural dialogue between Maori and Settler university students, few studies have explicitly addressed Aboriginal/Settler relationship building in Aboriginal education contexts. Further, while the aforementioned studies focus on teacher-to-student, teacher-to-teacher, and student-to-student, relationships, respectively, I have expanded my scope to include Aboriginal Support Workers8 and Aboriginal Resource Teachers because they, like mainstream classroom teachers, also play important roles in Aboriginal education settings. To elaborate, Aboriginal Support Workers are generally responsible for assisting First Nations students with their studies and encouraging their participation in the broader school community.

7 A Maori language term used to describe New Zealanders who are of European descent. Jones (1999) explicitly identifies herself as ‘pakeha.’
8 ‘Support Workers’ is a blanket term that I am using to describe a position that was given a different job title in two school districts wherein I conducted research. I have done this in order to protect participant anonymity and to ensure that the districts to which participants belong are not easily identifiable.
through tutoring, monitoring student attendance, and acting as a bridge between First Nation families, the school, and other relevant community agencies in order to ensure socio-economic needs are being met. Aboriginal Resource Teachers are relied upon to support classroom teachers in selecting instructional strategies that will best meet the need of First Nations students, develop and implement Aboriginal education plans, in consultation with the classroom teacher, and provide in-service training about Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogy. The use of the term ‘teachers,’ as defined in the contexts of the studies mentioned above, is limited to mainstream classroom teachers. In this study, my aim is to broaden the definition of who is typically perceived of as an ‘educator’ by illuminating the experiences of those who occupy other education roles, roles that are equally integral in the education and mentoring of Aboriginal students.

With this distinction in mind, there is a paucity of research regarding micro-level perspectives of Aboriginal and Settler educators’ views of relationship building in education contexts. The most recent study to emerge that discussed issues of relationship building within schools is St. Denis’s (2010) cross-Canada report entitled “A Study of Aboriginal Teachers’ Professional Knowledge and Experience in Canadian Schools” in which she assessed the professional knowledge of Aboriginal teachers with regards to how better to promote and support the success of Aboriginal education initiatives in public schools. Using critical ethnographic methodology, St. Denis recruited 59 Aboriginal teachers from nine different regions across Canada. These individuals participated in online questionnaires and focus group interviews that solicited their views regarding their professional knowledge and experience, their “philosophy of teaching; integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives into the curriculum; racism in education; and allies of Aboriginal education” (p.7). There were many overlaps regarding what people said with respect to the participants in St. Denis’s study and my own. However, there were some important differences and elaborations, which will be explored in subsequent chapters.

In this literature review, I highlight three themes that have informed my interpretation of participant voices and that will assist the reader in understanding the issues in Aboriginal education that have been foregrounded in participant narratives. These are: national apologies and reconciliation initiatives in a Canadian context;
Aboriginal identity politics; and coalition politics. What follows in subsequent chapters links back to these themes and, for this reason, it is important to examine them here. I begin by interrogating the current Canadian climate of apologies and reconciliation with respect to Aboriginal peoples and consider how the desire for many Settlers to avoid personal responsibility for colonialism can play out at a political level (see for example Regan, 2010; Mackey, 2013). Drawing upon Australian scholar, Sara Ahmed’s (2005) article “The Politics of Bad Feeling,” I explore both the 1998 “Statement of Reconciliation,” delivered by then-Minister of Indian Affairs, Jane Steward, and the 2008 official “Statement of Apology to former members of Indian Residential Schools” delivered by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. I problematize the underlying racist and colonialisit attitudes of these government statements and, following Regan (2010), consider what makes an apology genuine. I then explore the notion of identity politics, arguing that, rather than critiquing essentialist discourses that may be employed by Aboriginal communities and groups, it is useful to recognize the socio-historical and colonial influences upon Aboriginal identities. Finally, I investigate the notion of coalition politics, drawing upon both Settler and Indigenous scholars to examine what it might mean to work in coalition.

2.2. A Sorry State: Apologies and Reconciliation in an Aboriginal Canadian Context

2.2.1. Introduction

“How do powerful negative human impulses and emotions, including the desire to avoid personal responsibility for unwelcome feelings and impulses, play themselves out at a political level?” John Mack, (1990, p.69, cited in Burack, 2004, p.112).

According to literary critic, Deena Rymhs (2006), the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can be characterized as “an age of forgiveness” (p.109). From South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-1998), to Britain’s apology to the Maori (1995), to Australia’s National Sorry Day (est. 1998), national apologies have become the strategy du jour of revisiting national history and attempting to reconcile the past with the present. In this section, I interrogate the current political climate of
‘reconciliation’ between Aboriginal peoples and the Government of Canada by analyzing both the 1998 “Statement of Reconciliation” and the 2008 Official Apology. Drawing upon the work of Paulette Regan (2010), I consider what makes an apology authentic and ask what the respective ‘criteria of authenticity’ that she outlines says about the ideology uppinning the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian state. I also include an anecdote from a guest presentation I did with a group of pre-service teachers enrolled in an Indigenous education module at a Western Canadian university to illustrate the pervasive investment that Settlers have in national myths of benevolence, which contribute to and sustain intergroup divisions.

2.2.2. ‘Who gets to be proud?’: Reclaiming a National Identity Through Shame

In her analysis of the Australian national apology to Aboriginal peoples, Sara Ahmed (2005) explores what it means for a nation to reaffirm its identity through performing shame. She identifies what she terms the “politics of a bad feeling” wherein feelings, such as shame, declared or named within public culture become crucial to processes of reconciliation and national identity building. For example, within public displays of apology, the ‘others’ being offered the apology become the object of feeling and are thereby “indebted by the extension of feelings towards them” (p.75). Ahmed maintains that to declare that the nation ‘feels bad’ about others becomes empowering to the nation because it entails a public display of shaming before others. Rymhs (2006) adds to Ahmed’s argument, suggesting that to ask for forgiveness does not imply that it is granted. In essence, the logic of national reconciliation allows governments to “forgive themselves” (Rymhs, 2006, p.108). In the process, the power relations that allow the nation to ‘feel better’ about itself are erased. As Ahmed (2005) elaborates,

National shame can be a mechanism for reconciliation as self-reconciliation, in which the ‘wrong’ that is committed provides the grounds for claiming a national identity. Those who witness the past injustice through feeling ‘national shame’ are aligned with each other as ‘well meaning individuals’... In other words, our shame means that we mean well, and can work to reproduce the nation as an ideal (p.77 italics in original).
Through this process, a national identity in which we can take pride is recovered. However, as Ahmed asks, “who gets to be proud?” (p.79). By recovering the ideal of the nation through apology, the nation, at once, ‘re-covers’ the brutal history of oppression by locating it in the past, rather than acknowledging it as an ongoing reality. The violence of oppression becomes appropriated by the nation as a condition for national pride: “if we recognize the brutality of that history through shame, we can be proud” (p.78). At the same time, Ahmed states that she does not wish to deny the possibility of solidarity with the oppressed.

However, such gestures can only count as gestures of solidarity insofar as they do not block the hearing of others. My critique suggests that to claim solidarity through declarations of bad feeling is problematic insofar as it takes the declaration as ‘sufficient grounds’ for solidarity. Solidarity, I would argue requires much harder work… Perhaps solidarity only works when sentiments solidify into actions (p.81).

As the old adage goes, ‘actions speak louder than words.’ In the following subsections, I explore in further depth how national apologetic statements have not solidified into actions and what this says about the underlying colonial attitudes held by many Settler citizens of the Canadian state.

2.2.3. Renewed Relationships: The Age of Forgiveness in an Aboriginal Canadian Context

Within Canada, the ‘age of forgiveness’ was arguably ushered in with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (hereafter referred to as RCAP), which then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney established following the armed confrontations between the Kanesatake Nation and the Canadian army at Oka in 1990 (Brant Castellano, 1999). The Commission’s mandate was to:

investigate the evolution of the relationship among aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit, and Métis), the Canadian government, and Canadian society as a whole. It should propose specific solutions [...] to the problems which have plagued those relationships and which confront aboriginal peoples today.

When it was finally published in 1995, the report spanned five volumes and included 440 recommendations (Brant Castellano, 1999). In particular, Volume One: Looking Forward
Looking Back (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996) spoke to the need for renewed relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. As the authors elaborate:

After so much misunderstanding, anger, alienation and division, the time has come to repair the fractures in relations between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society. This healing will occur when the various components that make up Canadian society come together to embrace and affirm the fundamental principles that promote balanced and mutually beneficial co-existence (p. 644).

However, despite the comprehensiveness and magnitude of RCAP, little has been done to realize the recommendations set out by the Commission (Brant Castellano, 1999).

Two years following the release of RCAP, the Government of Canada issued Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan, which called for renewed partnerships with Aboriginal people and a joint investment in the growth of strong, healthy Aboriginal communities. At the January 7, 1998, unveiling of Gathering Strength, Jane Steward, then-Minister for Indian and Northern Affairs, delivered a “Statement of Reconciliation”, which recognized the Government of Canada’s role in the development and administration of residential schools. On behalf of the Government of Canada, Ms. Steward stated:

Sadly, our history with respect to the treatment of Aboriginal people is not something in which we can take pride. Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of Aboriginal culture and values. As a country, we are burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of Aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures, and outlawing spiritual practices. We must recognize the impact of these actions on the once self-sustaining nations that were disaggregated, disrupted, limited or even destroyed by the dispossession of traditional territory, by the relocation of Aboriginal people, and by some provisions of the Indian Act. We must acknowledge that the result of these actions was the erosion of the political, economic and social systems of Aboriginal people and nations.

Against the backdrop of these historical legacies, it is a remarkable tribute to the strength and endurance of Aboriginal people that they have maintained their historic diversity and identity. The Government of Canada today formally expresses to all Aboriginal people in Canada our profound regret for past actions of the federal government, which have
contributed to these difficult pages in the history of our relationship together.

One aspect of our relationship with Aboriginal people over this period that requires particular attention is the Residential School system. This system separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their own languages and from learning about their heritage and cultures. In the worst cases, it left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in Aboriginal communities to this day. Tragically, some children were the victims of physical and sexual abuse.

The Government of Canada acknowledges the role it played in the development and administration of these schools. Particularly to those individuals who experienced the tragedy of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools, and who have carried this burden believing that in some way they must be responsible, we wish to emphasize that what you experienced was not your fault and should never have happened. To those of you who suffered this tragedy at residential schools, we are deeply sorry (Stewart 1998, in Battiste, 2004, pp.6-7).

Reactions to the “Statement of Reconciliation” were mixed, with several Aboriginal leaders dismissing the statement as insincere (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). The insincerity of the statement was attributed to a number of factors. For one, while then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien was in Ottawa at the time, he did not deliver the statement, nor did he attend the ceremony (MacLachlan, 2010). Further, the “Statement of Reconciliation” was not considered to be part of Canada’s official parliamentary or legal record; instead, it was posted to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs website (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). For many Aboriginal leaders, the “Statement of Reconciliation” did not follow the apologetic ritual expected of state apologies. In his testimony during the 2005 Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Chief Robert Joseph of the Kwagiulth Nation, expressed that, in order for an apology to be legitimate, “It must be understood and performed symbolically in terms of the ritual that it is… transformation cannot occur unless the key players in the ritual are involved—the apology, the Prime Minister, and the House of Commons” (cited in Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p.10).

On this point, it is worth exploring in further depth how Western society typically defines an apology. Sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis (1991) defines an apology as “first and foremost, a speech act. Between individuals, its compelling and poignant qualities
derive primarily, but not exclusively, from oral utterance in the immediate presence of another" (p.22). Tavuchis adds that, in the initial stages of an apology, there is the ‘naming’ of the offence, either explicitly, or through an implicit reference that presumes common knowledge of what has occurred. Following this is the apology itself, “whose centerpiece is an expression of sorrow and regret” (23). Finally, Tavuchis contends that a reaction from the offended party is needed to complete the apologistic process, whether through acceptance, refusal, or acknowledgement while deferring a formal response. These, he alleges, are “the minimal analytic requirements for the production of an apology” (ibid.). Outside of these basic elements of an ‘authentic’ apology, Tavuchis contends that “offers of reparation, self-castigation, shame, embarrassment, or promises to reform… are inessential because, I submit, they are implicit in the state of ‘being sorry’ ” (p.36). In addition, as part of the performance of apology, Tavuchis reiterates, “Whatever else is said or conveyed, an apology must express sorrow. If the injured party believe that the offender is genuinely sorry, additional reassurances are superfluous” (ibid.). This formula, complete with a ‘sincere’ performance of said apology, is hallmark in Western conceptualizations of what makes an apology acceptable and authentic.

In her exploration of the cross-cultural differences and conceptualizations and uses of apologies, political scientist Alison Dundes Renteln (2008) observes that the perceived sincerity of an apology is, primarily, a Western preoccupation. She contends that speech act studies are highly ethnocentric, in that Western scholars use patterns of English speech to generalize about language rules worldwide. For example, Renteln observes that, from the Japanese point-of-view “apologies serve not only to address past misconduct but also to anticipate future transgressions” (p.65). She adds that, while the Japanese prefer apologies to be direct and accompanied with compensation, American apologies are more muted, with Americans attempting to explain their behaviour rather than directly accepting accountability. Further, Renteln maintains that Japanese believe their apologies are offered on behalf of a broader social network, in contrast to Americans, who limit the sphere of accountability to which their apology applies.
Renteln’s (2008) observation can equally extend to mainstream Canadians’ views on the purposes and functions of apology. With respect to the 1998 Statement of Reconciliation offered by Ms. Steward, political scientist Melissa Nobles (2008) observes that many newspaper editorials endorsed the Statement and saw the gesture as evidence of the government’s greater attention to accountability and democratic governance. Interestingly, she adds that while the Canadian public supported the Statement, “only 51 percent thought that the government was apologizing on their behalf. The rest, evidently, did not view the issue as one of collective guilt” (p.76). Nobles further proposes that then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien did not deliver nor sign the Statement in order to distance the government from being fully implicated. Drawing upon press reports, Nobles concludes that, by being absent from the declaration of the Statement, Jean Chrétien “signalled that he did not fully support RCAP by withholding the full weight of the government’s imprimatur, which only his presence could provide… Finally, he did not want his presence to be perceived as an admission of government guilt and thus introduce liability for sexual abuse at the residential schools” (p.75). The lack of an explicit admission of culpability on the part of then-Prime Minister Chrétien proved dissatisfactory to First Nations’ organizations, and pressure mounted for the government to issue an official apology.

Adherence to apologetic ritual was realized when, on June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a formal apology on behalf of the Government of Canada for the abuses sustained by Aboriginal peoples and communities during the residential school era. In contrast to the 1998 “Statement of Reconciliation,” Harper personally delivered the apology in the House of Commons, followed by statements from all political parties. The ceremony also included a response to the apology by then-Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Phil Fontaine, who was accompanied by leaders from Canadian Métis and Inuit populations. As Alice MacLachlan (2010) observes, “this was the first time indigenous leaders had been invited onto the floor of the house in their capacity as representative of nations and had been granted permission to speak in that capacity” (p.379, italics in original). For MacLachlan (2010), the evidence that the apology delivered by Prime Minister Harper was genuine is “overwhelming” (p.379).
Eva Mackey (2013) presents an alternative view of the significance of Harper’s apology. She states that, if an apology is part of an interactive dialogic exchange, then acceptance or non-acceptance of the apology is very important. She adds that the ability to hear, respect, and respond to the other, and to remain open to transformation from the encounter, are important considerations in authentic dialogic exchanges. “This requires that the apologizer not assume a particular response, and not seek to make the one receiving the apology conform to pre-scripted or ‘predetermined ends’” (p.55). Analyzing mainstream media and government actions in the days leading up to the apology, Mackey suggests that both the mainstream press and the government “appeared to expect that Aboriginal people would accept the apology and yet they did not require that Aboriginal people actually do so” (ibid., author’s emphasis). For example, while Aboriginal people were present in the House of Commons to respond to Harper’s apology, only the day before, “Harper said he ‘would not alter parliamentary tradition’ by letting them in. The Aboriginal leaders were finally, at the last moment, invited to reply” (ibid.). Further, before Harper delivered the apology, he stated that the apology and other programs ‘are the foundation’ of a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians (cited in Mackey, 2013, p.55). Mackey problematizes this statement, asking how Harper would know that the Apology constituted the foundation of a new relationship before it was announced, and before he knows whether or not Aboriginal peoples will accept the statement. For Mackey, such an assumption indicates “that the apologizer, representative of a state that has inherited the benefits of those policies, feels entitled not only to forgiveness, but also that he feels entitled to define and speak for Indigenous people before he even voices regret” (ibid.).

It is noteworthy, for Mackey (2013), that many Aboriginal organizations acknowledged, but did not accept, the apology. For example, while Phil Fontaine stated that he “bears witness” to the apology, he did not say that he has accepted it (cited in Mackey, 2013, p.57). Other Aboriginal representatives defined the terms on which they would accept the Apology. Beverly Jacobs of the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) asked “‘what is it that this government is going to do in the future to help our people? What is going to be provided? That is my question. I know that is the question from all of us. That is what we would like to continue to work on, in partnership’” (cited in Mackey, 2013, p.57). Grand Chief Edward John stated, “‘the true
test of Harper’s words will be his government’s actions to help our children have a better future than their parents and grandparents” (cited in Mackey, 2013, p.57). Mackey notes that, while these responses challenge the Government of Canada to locate the apology within a broader process of reconciliation, they received little attention in mainstream media. From Mackey’s perspective, this indicates that the apology was never intended to initiate ‘real dialogue’ and that, by adhering to apologetic ritual “the government assumed that it was entitled to, and that it implicitly received, acceptance and forgiveness simply by speaking contrition” (p.58). In the years since the apology was delivered, this assumption, of presuming one is entitled to forgiveness, has proven misguided.

Since the apology was uttered in the House of Commons, actions (or rather, lack thereof) have spoken louder than words. On December 10, 2012, thousands of Aboriginal peoples and communities rallied together to hold a National Day of Protest in order to dispute Bill C-45, a Federal government Omnibus bill which includes proposed changes to the Indian Act, the Navigable Waters Protection Act, the Fisheries Act, and would allow individual band members to lease out parcels of land without community support (APTN National News, Nov 21, 2012). These changes were proposed without consultation with Aboriginal communities, and protestors stated that the proposed changes were in violation of their Treaty rights. As Regena Crowchild, a treaty consultant with the Tsuu T’ina nation, expressed to The Calgary Herald newspaper: “They’re not giving us proper opportunity to address our concerns or talk to them about it… They want to amend the Indian Act without consulting us. All this legislation is just moving towards making us ordinary Canadians with no treaty rights.” (cited in Stark, Dec 11, 2012). Although Harper (2008) stated “There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again,” (para. 9) there is no evidence to support that they were ever gone. Indeed, the colonial attitudes that birthed the residential schooling system are arguably still alive and well. One only

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9 For the full transcript of the Apology, please see Appendix A
needs to briefly survey current media articles related to the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadians to see that this continues to be the case.\textsuperscript{10}

Like Mackey (2013), Paulette Regan (2010) also examines what makes an apology genuine. She states that, according to political scientist Matt James (2008), the Prime Minister’s official apology could be considered authentic. James outlines eight criteria for an authentic political apology:

(1) [it] is recorded officially in writing; (2) names the wrongs in question; (3) accepts responsibility; (4) states regret; (5) promises non-repetition; (6) does not demand forgiveness; (7) is not hypocritical or arbitrary; and (8) undertakes – through measures of publicity, ceremony, and concrete reparation – both to engage morally those in whose name apology is made and to assure the wronged group that the apology is sincere (James 2008, p. 139 in Regan 2010, p.180).

While Harper’s Apology may have differed from the 1998 “Statement of Reconciliation” in the way that it met the above criteria, Regan points out that the Apology lacked consideration of Indigenous criteria for restitution and apology.

Regan (2010) identifies the use of storytelling, oral tradition, and witnessing in a culturally appropriate ceremonial location, like a feast hall or circle, as key components of Indigenous restitution. While she recognizes that the House of Commons apology featured Aboriginal representatives, she maintains that their presence can be seen as tokenistic when the “long history and practice of Indigenous diplomacy, law, and peacemaking” is not recognized (p.184). Regan alleges that history will continue to repeat itself if, as a country, we fail to make the linkages between the problematic history

\textsuperscript{10} As an example, CBC recently reported that an electronics teacher from Winnipeg, Brad Badiuk, was put on administrative leave for making racist remarks about Aboriginal people on his Facebook page. The comments were posted in relation to a post made by a colleague regarding John Ralston Saul’s (2014) book \textit{The Comeback}, which, in part, asserts the importance of rebuilding relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. Badiuk’s comments to this announcement are as follows: “Oh Goddd [sic] how long are aboriginal people going to use what happened as a crutch to suck more money out of Canadians? The benefits the aboriginals enjoy from the white man/europeans [sic] far outweigh any wrong doings that were done to a concured [sic] peo" (Gonzalez, 2014, paras. 4-5). By making these racist utterances, Badiuk denies the impact of colonialism on Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relationships and negates the history of oppression upon which his identity as a Settler/colonial is based.
of Aboriginal-Settler relations and current attitudes and policies. She contends that what is needed is an approach to cross-cultural dialogue that includes a “more conscious intent to recognize” Aboriginal peoples (p.188). The authenticity of our interaction will be determined by the nature of our intention: are we engaging in a “paradigm shift from a culture of denial to the making of space for Indigenous political philosophies and knowledge systems as they resurge, thereby shifting cultural perceptions and power relations in real ways,” (p.189) or are we merely paying lip service and engaging in yet another performance of political correctness? The political turmoil that has played out between Aboriginal peoples and the Government of Canada in the years following the Apology would seem to indicate the latter.

2.2.4. Discursively Analysing the Residential School Apology with Pre-service Teachers: A Vignette

In April of 2013, I had the opportunity to facilitate a critical discourse analysis of the 2008 federal Residential School Apology with a group of keen, inquisitive pre-service teachers enrolled in an Indigenous education module at a Western Canadian university. I first explained to them some principles of discourse analysis through the use of a powerpoint, wherein I explained: the difference between semantics and pragmatics, forms of analysis, (such as framing, foregrounding, and backgrounding), and an explication of the way in which social and political issues, ideologies, and power relations are reflected in discourse (Paltridge, 2006). I then prompted them, in pairs, to apply these principles of analysis to the Apology. The ensuing class discussion was rich with insight and thoughtful analysis. However, while many students problematized what they perceived to be the underlying attitudes of the Apology, there were some who resisted the critique.

One student asserted, “we found positives in there. It’s not all bad,” and suggested that the Apology was representative of Harper’s political platform and his public perception: “If he had said Jack Layton’s speech, it wouldn’t have sounded sincere.” Another student contended that the Apology was indicative of Harper’s

11 For a detailed lesson plan, refer to Appendix B
commitment to a renewed relationship with Aboriginal peoples and asked, “What is the point of us critically tearing the Apology apart? How will this discussion further the project of reconciliation?” The question was an interesting challenge to the class, and the tension was palpable. One student responded that the purpose of discursively analyzing the apology wasn’t to ‘tear it apart’ for its own sake; it was about unpacking the underlying attitudes that the Apology expressed. The student who posed the question of purpose then suggested that the Apology was performative and, thus, purposeful, in that it committed the government to atone for its past mistakes regarding Aboriginal peoples. At this point, I interjected to introduce to the students Ahmed’s (2012) concept of non-performativity and asked them to consider the Apology as a non-performative utterance in their ongoing analysis of the speech.

Ahmed’s (2012) definition of non-performativity is influenced by the works of both John Austin (1962) and Judith Butler (1993). For Austin, an utterance is performative when it does what it says; that is, when an act is performed by virtue of an utterance. For example, when a judge issues the verdict ‘you have been sentenced to six months in jail’ this can be considered a performative speech act because of the perlocutionary force of the speaker that allows her to put into effect that which she names. Building on Austin’s analysis of speech acts, Butler (1993) defines the performative as the reiterative practices through which discourse generates the effects that it names. Ahmed (2012) extends upon this definition of performativity to suggest that, “in the world of the non-performative, to name is not to bring into effect… Such speech acts are taken up as if they are performatives (as if they have brought about the effects they name), such that the names come to stand in for the effects” (p.117). In the case of the Apology, I argued, the conversion of Settler guilt into a source of national pride via public declaration allows the Canadian government to distance itself from delivering meaningful actions. For this reason, the Apology is non-performative in that it does not bring about the effects that it names. Indeed, as is indicated in the opposition to Bill C-45 (see above) and the
increasing vocalism of grassroots movements like IdleNoMore\textsuperscript{12}, little has been done to ‘renew’ relations in the years following the 2008 Apology.

While my time with the student-teachers from the Indigenous education module was enriching and rewarding, I wanted to include this particular moment of the group discussion to illustrate the pervasive Settler belief that speech-acts and the adherence to apologetic ritual are sufficient mediums of atonement, as Tavuchis (1991) suggests above. Therefore, the Apology can be interpreted as a ‘tick-box’ approach to reconciliation, a “discursive balm against historical injustices” that have no profound implications because the words come to stand in for any implied action (Rymhs, 2006, p.107; see also Ahmed, 2005 & Mackey, 2013). The accepted normality of this kind of approach to relationships with Aboriginal peoples also permeates many encounters that Aboriginal educators have with their non-Aboriginal colleagues.

Within the province of British Columbia (BC), discourses of ‘reconciliation’ are being played out at the level of public school education in the form of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (hereafter referred to as EAs), which are commitments made between school districts and Aboriginal communities in order to “enhance the achievement of Aboriginal students” (BC Ministry of Education, 2012). While EAs are intended to improve the performance of Aboriginal students, my interviews with educators revealed frustration over the lack of movement in Aboriginal education and a perceived inefficiency of these documents. In Chapters 4 and 6, I explore in further depth how the current climate of reconciliation plays out in education systems and how the colonialist attitudes of the Canadian government, as seen in Harper’s adherence to apologetic ritual, is mirrored within schools and administrative teams, most particularly in BC with the advent of EAs. These agreements, and their

\textsuperscript{12} IdleNoMore is a grassroots Indigenous movement that began as a series of teach-ins in Saskatchewan protesting bills, like C-45, that would erode Indigenous sovereignty and environmental protections. The movement was catalyzed on December 10, 2012, when thousands of people across Canada gathered for a National Day of Action to protest neo-colonial policies and ongoing government paternalism. While newspaper coverage has diminished in subsequent months, the movement continues to host events and raise awareness of Indigenous rights and sovereignty both nationally and internationally.
applicability to Aboriginal education contexts in BC, are described in further detail in the following section.

2.2.5. Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements in BC

An EA is the primary document used by a school district in the province of BC to articulate their mandate for Aboriginal education and their relationships and responsibilities to the Aboriginal students they serve. The creation of these documents came into effect after the BC Minister of Education, the Chiefs Action Committee, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, and the President of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 1999 to signal their recognition that BC schools had not been successful in providing Aboriginal students with a quality education (BC Ministry of Education, 2012). This acknowledgement was derived from Aboriginal student performance data collected by the Ministry of Education, which indicated that Aboriginal students, at both elementary and secondary levels, were consistency performing at levels lower than their non-Aboriginal peers in reading, writing, and numeracy (Morin, 2004). This is a working agreement between a school district, all local Aboriginal communities and the Ministry of Education.

Each school district in BC was responsible for the development of an EA specific to the needs of their district and in conjunction with the local Aboriginal communities whom they serve. Morin (2004) maintains that the EAs were designed to enhance the achievement of Aboriginal students in public schools by establishing a partnership between Aboriginal communities and school districts that involved “shared decision making and specific goal setting to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students” (p. 201). This included the development of Aboriginal Education Committees, which were comprised of: (1) representatives from school administration, such as a District
Vice Principal of Aboriginal Education\textsuperscript{13}; (2) staff, such as Aboriginal Education support workers, mainstream classroom teachers, etc.; (3) student representatives; and (4) community spokespersons, for example, parents or other representatives from local Aboriginal communities. The intent of these committees was to, among other things, identify ways in which districts could meet the academic and cultural needs of Aboriginal students, to identify key performance indicators and benchmarks of student performance, and to identify strategies for increasing knowledge of, and respect for, Aboriginal culture, language, and history, within the broader school community in order to facilitate a better understanding of Aboriginal people (Stewart, 2004). As an EA, ideally, symbolizes a commitment by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders to work towards the improvement of Aboriginal education, I felt it an opportune document around which to analyze how Aboriginal and Settler educators form relationships within Aboriginal education contexts. However, as I detail Chapters 4 and 5, while EAs are seen as statements of commitment made by districts to the improvement of Aboriginal education, they often come to stand in for institutional follow through and, further, can be sources of both inter and intragroup tension. From here, I now move to explore some of the effects of colonialism on Aboriginal identity politics.

2.3. ‘You’re not the Indian I had in mind’: The Effects of Colonialism on Aboriginal Identity Politics

2.3.1. Introduction

An unforeseen topic that recurred in some of the interviews I conducted was the intragroup tension that 6 participants, who worked together within an Aboriginal

\textsuperscript{13} The title ‘District Vice Principal of Aboriginal Education’ refers to an upper-management level position responsible for, among other things, identifying current and future Aboriginal education needs for the district and participating in the development of strategies and programs to address those needs by providing leadership in curriculum development, staff development and ensuring that commitments and benchmarks identified within mandated documents, such as those found within an EA, are carried out. Together, Aboriginal Resource Teachers and Support Workers, described earlier in the chapter, are team members within Aboriginal Education Departments. They report to the District Vice Principal of Aboriginal Education and can be involved in the creation of EAs.
education team at one of my sites of study, revealed to me through their individual interviews. Before I continue, I must clarify that, as researcher and member of Settler society, I recognize the easy potential to succumb to ‘theoretical imperialism’ by making it seem as though I’m asserting, from my position as a Settler scholar, a ‘correct’ way of being Indigenous or a ‘correct’ way of navigating intragroup tensions (Frankenberg & Mani, 1996). However, as a witness to the testimonies of the participants in this research, I interpret my responsibility as needing to pass on what I have been told in the hope that others may learn from the experiences and insights of participants (Dion, 2009). This obligation, of course, does not extend any right to say how to be Aboriginal. Indeed the belief that one is entitled to do so is where some of the roots of inter-group tensions arise; that is, when individuals feel as though they have the right to name someone else’s reality (Reagon, 1983). My intent, as witness to the testimonies of these educators, is to demonstrate how the intragroup tensions experienced by the participants of this study can be understood as socially and historically shaped through processes of colonization, racialization, and imperialism (St. Denis, 2007).

Images of the romantic Indian versus the savage primitive have existed in European imagination since the time of contact (Francis, 1992). For this reason, contemporary Indigenous identity is highly political and deeply entrenched in bodies of law written by colonial governments who continue to define and maintain what counts as an ‘authentic’ Aboriginal identity (Lawrence, 2004). For many years, understandings of Aboriginal identity have been steeped in notions of romantic primordiality and racial purity, where ‘Indians of fact’ embody certain ways of living, political philosophies, connectedness to the land, and abilities to speak one’s language (Battiste, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). While it is important for Canadian Settler society to legitimate and honour Aboriginal languages, cultures, values and traditions, equating cultural authenticity with these markers may risk overlooking colonial impacts upon identity politics. As St. Denis observes, it “encourages Aboriginal people to… accept cultural nationalism and cultural pride as solutions to systemic inequality” (St. Denis, 2004, p.36).

Many Indigenous scholars have astutely commented that there is economic prosperity to be gained from accentuating an ‘authentic’ cultural identity for many
Indigenous groups (Brayboy, 2000; Grande, 2000; St. Denis, 2007). Lumbee scholar Bryan Brayboy (2000) points to the intensification of identity politics when competing groups are fighting for their places amid diminishing resources. “In other words, these issues are more salient when there is something to be ‘gained’ or ‘lost’ based on the identity that one either claims or is given” (p.418). As such, essentialist arguments may, in fact, be strategically employed as useful “as the last line of defense against capitalistic encroachment and Western hegemony and the last available means for retaining cultural integrity and tribal sovereignty… (if you cannot ‘objectively’ define a people you cannot define their rights)” (Grande, 2000, p.351).

It is important to note at the outset that many scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, (Barcham, 2000; Brayboy, 2000; Menzies, 2001; Smith, 2005; St. Denis, 2007) are critical of essentialized conceptualizations of Indigeneity and the implications these have for insider/outsider belonging. Both Quechua/Peruvian educator Sandy Grande (2000) and St. Denis (2007) comment that centering the focus of one’s critique on admonishing essentialism serves to obfuscate sources of oppression such as the social, political and economic alienation experienced by Indigenous peoples. A more productive engagement is to focus our analyses on the reasons for strategic essentialism, which St. Denis (2004) and Grande (2008) and other scholars (for example, Mihesuah, 1998) argue are often ignored in discourse on identity politics. It is more productive to examine the motives underlying these discourses rather than contributing to the actual discourses themselves.

According to psychologist Cynthia Burack (2004), race matters because “internalized relationships and representations of self and other are brought into groups and affect transference relationships, the kinds of projections generated within the group, and the ways in which group members respond to leadership” (p.49). That is, the ways in which we view ourselves influence the ways in which we interact with one another and determine who is and who is not ‘one of us.’ These processes are sociohistorically shaped and influenced. For Aboriginal peoples in Canada, who counts as an ‘authentic’ Aboriginal person has been shaped by capitalist economic processes, racialization, Christianity, and imperial policies that continue to define “who belongs and how one belongs to Aboriginal communities” (St. Denis, 2007, p.1072). St. Denis (2007)
also discusses the impact of residential schools on Aboriginal identity and belonging. Through the alienation of family members from their communities, the “erasure and slaying of Aboriginal languages” (p.1073), and shame and punishment associated with cultural traditions, Aboriginal peoples’ sense of belonging continued to be impacted to this day.

In the following section, I examine the debate on Aboriginal ‘authenticity,’ focusing, in particular, on legal constructions of Aboriginality and the impact of cultural revitalization on Aboriginal belonging. This analysis is informed by two understandings of identity politics: (1) how ethnicity is used as a form of politics; and (2) “the processes by which racially marginalized peoples resist colonization and oppression” (Bernstein, 2005, p.1070). I examine both legalized constructions of Aboriginality as well as cultural revitalization and argue that an understanding of colonialism is important for a fuller understanding of Aboriginal identity politics. As I later explore in Chapter 5, the complexities of identity politics continue to manifest themselves in Aboriginal group situations in educational contexts.

2.3.2. Searching for ‘Real Indians’: Notes on Authenticity

Contemporary Indigenous identity is highly political and deeply entrenched in bodies of law devised by colonial powers who continue to define and maintain what counts as an ‘authentic’ Aboriginal identity (Lawrence, 2004). For many years, theoretical understandings of Aboriginal identity have been rooted in notions of romantic primordiality and racial purity, where ‘Indians of fact’ embody certain ways of living, political philosophies, connectedness to the land, and abilities to speak one’s language (Battiste, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). “Native people who are revealed as transgressing boundaries of so-called authenticity through their modernity can be dismissed as fakes, or severely restricted in their abilities to develop their communities in contemporary ways” (Lawrence, 2004, p.5).

In her essay entitled “On Authenticity,” Navajo philosopher Marilyn Verney (2004) ponders on what constitutes authentic American Indian philosophy. She argues that competing Indigenous and colonial metaphysical systems have created ‘cognitive
dissonance’ for American Indian people, giving rise to “a loss of identity as an American Indian” (p.139). Drawing upon Heidegger’s work related to ‘being,’ Verney proposes that Indigenous people have forgotten what it means to follow traditional American Indian teachings as they “get lost in the everydayness of Euro-American culture (Others) and its philosophical framework” (p.137). As she elaborates,

> It is through our acculturation to the controlling and influencing world of Euro-Americans that a majority of our people are losing their spiritual connection to the sacredness of our traditional teachings and beliefs that are taught to us by our tribal elders. Many of our young people are unknowingly influenced by what is outside of themselves, a culture foreign to our traditions. They are losing their identity as American Indians because they embrace the philosophical system of non-Natives, and become alienated from the philosophy of our people as American Indians… they are losing their identity as American Indians (p.136).

Verney’s convictions are problematic in a number of ways. First, Verney repeatedly uses the language of ‘loss’ to describe the acculturation (some might say assimilation) of Aboriginal people into the dominant Euro-American framework. Such a framing of Aboriginal identity omits the colonial legacy that has dictated and continues to dictate who belongs to Aboriginal communities. Second, Verney presumes that Aboriginal people, particularly youth, are unknowingly embracing a philosophical system alien to their traditional, and by implication, authentic identity as American Indians. Such a view has the potential to strip Aboriginal people of their agency by casting them as unwitting victims in their own demise. To suggest that Euro-American ontology has been wholeheartedly ‘embraced’ by Aboriginal people overlooks the resistance of many Aboriginal peoples and communities to colonial imposition. Moreover, a dangerous dichotomy is created between Aboriginal people ‘with’ or ‘without’ culture as those who are ‘without’ culture are seen as errant, not ‘real Indians.’ However, identity politics are much more nuanced than Verney’s framing of the issue might suggest. As Mi’kmaq lawyer Pamela Palmater (2012) notes “one’s identity as an Indigenous person – such as a Maliseet, Cree, Mohawk or Mi’kmaq – would also include a corresponding legal identity as an Indian, a communal identity as a band member or a citizen of an Indigenous nation as a self-government agreement” (p.175).
In addition to these categories, Cherokee/Greek writer, Thomas King (2012) provides additional categories in the biting satirical way for which he is renowned. For King, North American imagination has categorized Aboriginal people into three categories: “Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians” (p.53). Dead Indians, according to King, are those Indians conjured up out of the stereotypes, clichés, and fears of White North America. These Indians are what North America parades to display their antiquity and are made up of bits of “cultural debris” - “war bonnets, beaded shirts, fringed deer skin dresses” (p.54). Though these Indians have never existed except in the ‘North American imagination,’ they are the only ones that are accepted as ‘authentic’ Indians (ibid.). Live Indians are just that; Live Indians, Aboriginal people living in North America today. Live Indians are everything that Dead Indians are not: real. As King elaborates:

Dead Indians are the Garden of Eden-variety Indians. Pure, Noble, Innocent. Perfectly authentic. Jean-Jacques Rousseau Indians. Not a feather out of place. Live Indians are fallen Indians, modern contemporary copies, not authentic Indians at all, Indians by biological association only” (p.65).

Then there are the Legal Indians, who are officially recognized as ‘Indians’ by colonial governments. In Canada, Legal Indians are Status Indians, registered as Indians with the federal government via the Indian Act. King (2012) argues that, through processes of enfranchisement and residential schooling, the federal government has been trying to get rid of Legal Indians and, thus, abscond from their legal obligations to them, as set out in treaties. Overall, these different identity constructions interact with each other in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. The following sections explore identity politics in further depth, particularly as they relate to legalized categories and cultural revitalization.

2.3.3. **Identity Politics: The Construction of ‘Legal Indians’**

In *Real Indians and Others*, Bonita Lawrence (2004) offers a cogent analysis of Aboriginal identity politics. She explores the importance of legal regulation on the identity construction of Aboriginal peoples. In particular, she explores a range of issues affecting the identities of urban mixed-blood Aboriginal people and asserts that a so
called ‘authentic’ Indianness is a rare commodity, as distinctions between Aboriginal people have largely been created by colonial policies, such as the Indian Act. Her central argument is that the historical and contemporary processes of colonial regulation of Aboriginal identity have been deeply internalized by Aboriginal communities and have shaped Aboriginal self-definition and identification. She notes that,

It is important to be clear that while status is currently being used to promote Native heritage and defend treaty rights, status is not ‘heritage’ and it is not the same thing as treaty rights. The imposition of the category 'Indian,' as articulated through the Indian Act, in fact, was Canada's way to pre-empt the rights of Indigenous nations to govern themselves, a signifier that the colonizer, not Native people, controlled Native destinies (p.223, emphasis in original).

The real issue, she contests, is not that ‘Nativeness’ is a constructed identity, “but that Aboriginal identity flows from a complex history of colonization and strategies of resistance” (p.187). Rigid perspectives on what it means to be an Aboriginal person deny hybridity, the reality of multiple locations, and the impacts of colonial policies on Aboriginal communities. Indian Status, she continues, serves as a boundary marker to indicate who is Aboriginal and who is not, thus maintaining the government's power to exclude. She asserts that the divisiveness between Aboriginal communities – as seen in conflicts between Status Indians and non-Status Aboriginal people – and within communities have been “naturalized as inherent differences” between Aboriginal people as a whole (ibid.).

Like Lawrence, Palmater (2012) contends that the crux of the problem of identity politics is rooted in Canada's jurisdictional control over Aboriginal individuals and communities. Though she asserts that Aboriginal nations ought to be able to determine who can be citizens of their communities, she also acknowledges that ‘traditional’ and ‘colonial’ definitions of who is Aboriginal are inextricably linked. She states that “some Indigenous people have come to judge, discriminate, and exclude each other in the very same fashion that non-Indigenous people and governments have” (p.57). In her view, the right of Aboriginal nations to determine membership must be balanced against the right of the individual. To arbitrarily exclude non-status Indians from band membership on the basis of blood quantum is akin to the discriminatory policies imposed on Aboriginal people by the government of Canada. The process of figuring out equitable
means of inclusion into communities, however, is made difficult by the fact that Indigenous identity and rights discussions continue to be framed by colonially-based ideologies. For example, “the problem with the Indian Act, band membership codes, self-government citizenship codes, and even Aboriginal right jurisprudence, is that they continue to be based on out-dated ideologies that do not reflect modern realities” such as intermarriage and assimilation (p.176). In determining guidelines for communal belonging, Palmater asserts that Aboriginal communities must look seriously at the principles upon which they base their criteria in order to ensure that they do not perpetuate racist practices. “In the end, nation-building has far more to gain from over-inclusiveness, which will help protect the identity of Indigenous peoples, rather than over-exclusiveness, which can only serve to extinguish it” (p.224). The next sub-section explores the impact of cultural revitalization on Aboriginal identity and belonging.

2.3.4. Identity Politics and Cultural Revitalization

According to Verna St. Denis (2007), Aboriginal identity politics are rooted in a colonial history that has politically dictated who belongs and what it means to belong to an Aboriginal community. Together, capitalist economic structures, Christianity, processes of racialization, and Western forms of patriarchy have drastically changed Aboriginal community structures. For example, the residential school initiative has had devastating consequences on Aboriginal identity and belonging. St. Denis observes that “among the many devastating effects [of residential schooling] was the alienation of Aboriginal family members from one another, and the widespread, deliberate, and for the most part, successful erasure and slaying of Aboriginal languages” (p.1073). While cultural and linguistic genocide is often described through a language of ‘loss,’ St. Denis chooses explicitly to use the word ‘slaying,’ stating that “Aboriginal people did not lose their Indigenous language; it was shamed, beaten, and tortured out of them” (ibid.).

In response to the effects of colonization and racialization, Aboriginal communities across Canada have been engaging in concerted cultural revitalization efforts for well over 40 years. This is marked by the backlash on the part of many Aboriginal communities to the 1969 White Paper, through which the Government of Canada sought to eliminate the Indian Act and dismantle the legal relationship between
the state and Aboriginal peoples under the guise of equality. For example, the Indian Association of Alberta submitted the 1970 document entitled *Citizens Plus* (later, and more commonly, referred to as the *Red Paper*), to the federal government, which called on the government to continue to recognize their commitments to Aboriginal people as outlined in the Treaties. As a result of such strong opposition, the *White Paper* was repealed. However, as St. Denis (2007) observes, the revitalization movement that catalyzed as a result of the rejection of this proposal has had unanticipated effects on Aboriginal community belonging. “Some requirements for cultural authenticity include speaking one’s First Nations language, having knowledge of and participating in a myriad of spiritual practices and other cultural practices” (p.1076). While St. Denis does not argue against the importance of these practices to First Nations peoples, she contends that the movement does not “alleviate the social, political, and economic alienation experienced by too many Aboriginal peoples, both now and in the past” (ibid.). Part of her unease about cultural revitalization stems from how varying capacities, access, or desire on the part of Aboriginal people to participate in cultural revitalization can become a means of ‘blaming the victim’ (ibid.). Instead of locating the problem with the systemic inequality and discrimination of Aboriginal people, one’s level of cultural authenticity is seen as the issue.

St. Denis (2007) notes that, while the ability to speak one’s language has become an important marker of cultural authenticity, language acquisition poses a challenge for many Aboriginal people. “This lack of fluency in Aboriginal languages was set in motion by the requirements of residential schools and other colonial practices” (p.1077). To reiterate, Indigenous languages were “shamed, beaten, and tortured” out of Aboriginal children. As a survival mechanism, many parents and grandparents of Aboriginal children encouraged them to speak English, often at the expense of their First Nation languages. Within a climate of cultural revitalization, Aboriginal people, who did their best to make decisions that would help mediate cultural and racist conditions for their children, are told that they made the wrong choices, “and thereby held ac-countable for cultural and social change brought about by colonization” (p.1078, hyphenation in original).
In this way, cultural revitalization can be a double-edged sword for Aboriginal peoples. While it has the potential to foster a positive sense of identity and common community, it can also create exclusion for those Aboriginal people who are less grounded in traditional aboriginal cultures, often not by their own choice. “Although making efforts towards cultural revitalization is regarded as a positive approach to addressing the effects of colonization, it also helps minimize and discourage analysis of how historical and contemporary practices of racial inequality limit the aspirations of Aboriginal people” (St. Denis, 2007, p.1081). In the case of Aboriginal students, failure in schools was historically attributed to their cultural heritage whereas, more recently, failure has been attributed to Aboriginal people for having ‘lost one’s culture’ (St. Denis, 2004, p.43).

Aboriginal political scientist Joyce Green (2004) suggests that Indigenous liberatory struggles, such as cultural revitalization, can become fundamentalist in nature if they are “framed in dualistic and totalizing terms” (p.31). Green defines fundamentalism as an authoritarian socio-political prescription for ‘rightness’ that relies on incontestable authority. She further maintains that fundamentalism uses tradition as a prescription for national and cultural rejuvenation. Green also proposes that fundamentalism breeds absolutist thinking and leads to insularity and the exclusion of those who are not seen as acceptable to those in the inner circle. Further, for Green, cultural fundamentalism arises from the political use of essentialism. Such a process “constructs historically and nationally located identity as legitimate only when a precise set of cultural, ideological and, most worryingly, genetic markers or ‘blood quantum’ are met” (p.23). This, in turn, has the potential to lead to ethno-nationalism, which Green defines as a “political national discourse and program for the culturally bounded, if not always geographically or politically bounded, community” (p.25).

Green proposes that ethno-nationalism arises from a need of subaltern groups to defend themselves against colonial dominance. As such, it draws “communities of interest together under the umbrella of shared culture, history and language” to create one shared community in the face of racial oppression (Green, 2004, p.26). While the desire to belong in a community is a powerful human need, Green suggests that the community that ethno-nationalism creates and advocates for can be problematic. In her
view, Ethno-nationalist discourse often resembles fundamentalist rhetoric in that it associates national resurgence with a ‘glorious past’, a ‘degraded present’ and a ‘utopian future’ (Levinger & Lytle, 2001, p.178 in cited Green, 2004, p.26). For this reason, Green maintains that ethno-nationalism can create and accentuate rifts between communities, “constructing the ‘we’ community as fundamentally racially pure and distinct from others, who are political competitors” (Green, 2004, p.26).

Green (2004) critiques Mohawk political scientist Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred’s claims that “indigenous liberation is found in the practice of cultural traditions and the maintenance of Canada-indigenous relations via formal mechanisms such as treaty relationships” (p.28). Drawing from a vast range of Alfred’s work, Green notes that a strong nationalist character permeates his philosophy. In her view, “Alfred considers that indigenous resistance to colonialism ultimately takes on a nationalist character, which is itself grounded on authentic traditional cultural and institutional bases” (p.30). According to Green, this perspective requires a very precise definition of who Aboriginal people are and what tradition is. She suggests that such a model overlooks hybridity, the syncretic nature of culture, and the impact of colonialism on access, opportunity, and desire for traditional ways of knowing.

In contemporary Aboriginal political contexts, issues of identity and belonging play out in the multitude of organizations representing various groups of Aboriginal people; for example, the distinction between the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP). In 1961, the National Indian Council (NIC) formed to represent the interests of Treaty and Status Indians, non-Status Indians and Métis people (Inuit were excluded) (AFN, n.d.). According to the AFN, the mandate of the NIC was to “promote unity among all Indian people” (ibid.). However, the NIC found uniting the interests of all Aboriginal people to be “quite trying” (ibid.). As a result, the NIC disbanded in 1968 to form the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), which represented the interests of Status and Treaty Aboriginal groups, and the Native Council of Canada (NCC), which represented Non-Status Aboriginal people and Métis. When the NIB reconstituted itself in 1982, it continued to exclusively serve the needs of Status Indian, on-reserve peoples. The NCC also underwent a period of reorganization and, in 1994, changed its name to the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP): currently, their
mandate is to serve urban, off-reserve, and Non-Status Aboriginal people (Donovan, 2007). Like the AFN, CAP receives funding from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) because they amended their directive to include representation of Status off-reserve Aboriginal people (Sawchuk, 1998). This puts the organization in direct competition with the AFN, who also claim to represent Status off-reserve Aboriginal people (“Description of the AFN”, n.d.). According to Sawchuk (1998) CAP argues that, because the AFN is reserve based, it cannot provide services to off-reserve Aboriginal people. In contrast, the AFN does not perceive CAP to be a legitimate representative of urban interests. The tensions between these two organizations appear to be indicative of the ways in which Settler governments can pit Aboriginal groups against each other for funding and resources, while turning attention away from the colonial legacy that has legislated acceptable forms of identity while punishing others (King, 2003; St. Denis, 2004).

Most recently, the IdleNoMore movement, which grew to prominence at the end of 2012 and into 2013, has highlighted power divisions between Aboriginal elites and grassroots community initiatives, and has also provided a platform for ethno-nationalist concerns to be raised. In a blog post, Alfred (Jan 27, 2013) suggests that,

> When we as Indigenous people have a political agenda that’s consistent with our Original Teachings – to have a respectful relationship with the land and the natural environment and to have a respectful relationship among all of the nations that share this land – we have seen that this is a powerful draw for many people in our own nations and in the broader society (para. 1).

It appears that, in Alfred’s view, restoring an authentic Indigenous nationhood is the fundamental struggle highlighted by IdleNoMore. The above quote also seems to suggest that, for Alfred, Indigenous nationhood is regenerated through a focus on the land. Further, Alfred argues that Indigenous nationhood needs to be “led by traditional chiefs and clan mothers, medicine people, elders and youth, to start acting on our inherent rights on the land and to demand respect for our traditional governments” (para. 4). While not to detract from legitimacy and importance of Aboriginal languages,

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14 In 1983, the Métis separated from NCC to form the Métis National Council (Donovan, 2007).
cultures, values and traditions, equating the strength of Indigenous nationalism to cultural authenticity with these markers may risk overlooking colonial impacts upon identity politics, such as the intergenerational trauma that impedes some Aboriginal people from access to traditional ways of knowing (St. Denis, 2004). I return to this in Chapter 5 where I examine the potential impacts of colonialism on the intragroup dynamics of Aboriginal educators.

2.4. Coalition Politics

2.4.1. Introduction

What does it mean to work in coalition? In this section, I explore various scholars, feminists, and activists who have contributed to coalition politics theory, in general, before moving to coalition politics within Aboriginal/Settler contexts. I begin with Cynthia Burack’s (2004), notions of ‘coalitional frames’ and ‘reparative groups,’ which have shaped my own understanding of coalition politics. I then move to examine the scholarship of feminist women of colour who have been highly influential regarding what it means to work within difference. Lastly, I examine coalition politics in Indigenous contexts.

According to Burack (2004), “coalitions consist of the joint activity of autonomous groups, either for a single purpose or to pursue long-term social, economic, or political goals” (p.150-151). In order to enter into groups as partners of coalition, group members must be individually accountable, both to themselves and to others. Because of this intense self-scrutiny, coalitions are more than specifically timed interactions over particular issues that one chooses to engage in. In contrast to ‘hit-and-run’ social groupings, coalitions “require long-term attention to the feelings that are revealed or generated in the context of intergroup relations” (p.153).

Burack furthers her notion of coalition politics by breaking the concept down into three levels of analysis or types of conflict: conflict within the self, conflict within the group, and conflict between groups. These coalitional frames are mutually constitutive and can result in diverse interests, perspectives, and frictions. And although all three
frames have implications for the reparation of group life and group discourse, the third coalitional frame – coalitions across differences between groups – is usually given the most attention (Burack, 2004). Yet as Burack points out, “Even at the individual level, conflict within the self is a consequence of relations with others” (p.145). Thus, coalition politics explicitly acknowledges and embraces the complexities and unevenness of power relations at the level of the self and in intra and inter-group contexts in a reparative manner.

Paraphrasing psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, Burack (2004) defines ‘reparation,’ as “a morality of concern” (p.39). She elaborates by stating, “reparation refers to acts, and sometimes fantasies, that proceed from the realization of our capacities for destruction – our ability to damage ourselves and others with our hatred and aggression” (p.40). Burack adds that reparation has, at its core, a social dimension; that part of what reparation is about is to ‘make good’ for wrong or injury done. However, therein also lies the problematic of reparation, in that what measure of reparation is ultimately appropriate will always be interrelated with the value judgments of particular groups. Despite this possible point of contention, Burack maintains that groups should not be dissuaded from engaging in reparative acts. As she states, “reparation is not simply equivalent to care, empathy, love, benign action, or the application of ethical principles. Rather, it represents the struggle toward ambivalence and integration… and not a small measure of self-doubting anxiety, sadness, guilt, and loss” (p.59). That is, part of what characterizes reparative relations is precisely the inherent difficulty in making amends for damage done. Groups who are reparative are “those that collectively work through issues that routinely plague groups without giving in to the worst, most destructive, and unfortunately most common group possibilities” (ibid.). If reparation is not sincere, the humanity of those wronged as well as the harm that was done to them is denied. Ultimately, reparative groups “require openness about conflict and scepticism about solidarity” (p.88). Difference, she asserts, must be accepted and recognized as an opportunity for bridge-building. I return to this theme in Chapter 6, wherein I highlight respectful protocols, as identified by participants, that may enable the conditions for reparative inter-group coalitions to form.
2.4.2. The Stranger Within and Without: Coalition and the Politics of Difference

Coalition politics grew out of the critiques of (primarily) feminist women-of-colour in the 1970s and 1980s that problematized the notion of a ‘global sisterhood’ (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Feminist activists, such as Angela Davis (1991), Audre Lorde (1984/2007), Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981) and Chandra Talpade-Mohanty (1988), among others, challenged essentialist and ahistorical notions of what it meant to be a ‘woman,’ arguing that various economic, racial, cultural, and experiential means of differentiation come to bear upon one’s experiences (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). At the same, these critiques of Western feminist discourses were accompanied by an appeal to work in coalition across these various boundaries (Talpade-Mohanty, 1988).

Shirley Chisholm (1972), the first Black women to be elected to the US congress wrote that the struggle of African Americans was not isolated from those of other second-class groups. Religious, racial, and sexual discrimination were all forms of oppression that must be confronted. Consequently, oppressed groups needed to jointly come together “and challenge the forces which now hold the power in our country” (p.31). As such, Chisholm asserted that there was inherent value and wisdom in the ‘joint political action’ of coalition politics: “We face discrimination based on both racism and sexism. And it is important for us to be involved in both black and women’s liberation” (p.32). Nearly ten years later, African-American social-activist Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983) also pointed to the necessity of coalition work. However, she cautioned against the belief that coalition was a natural extension of kinship, a place that allowed one to feel secure. “You don’t go into coalition work because you just like it,” she states. “The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that’s the only way you figure you can stay alive” (pp.356-357). She notes that, because of the challenges that oppressed groups face in mainstream society, there is a desire to create an insular environment, a ‘barred room,’ where differences are ‘checked at the door’ so that group members can feel safe and nurtured (p.358). However, such a womb-like environment becomes infantilizing in that “you have no ability to handle what happens if you start to let folks in who are not like you” (p.359). Reagon asserts that individuals who are looking for comfort when entering in to coalition for others should look elsewhere. These individuals are “not looking for a
coalition,” she exclaims, “they’re looking for a home!” (ibid.). When you enter into coalition, she observes, you have to give. Coalition is a beast that needs to be fed; “It never gets enough. It always wants more” (p.361). Coalitions are not refuges; coalitions are places where discomfort and strain occurs, where differences are negotiated. As I suggest in Chapter 7, it is in daring to explicitly challenge Settler ideologies that coalitional possibilities may arise. These ideas are applied, in particular, to the experiences of one participant during a professional development day.

In her foreword to This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation, Chicana feminist, Gloria Anzaldúa (2002), reflects on the impact of This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (1981). Like Reagon (1983), Anzaldúa reminds her readers that there are no safe spaces. “Many women of color are possessive of This Bridge Called My Back and view it as a safe space, as ‘home.’ However, she cautions, “ ‘Home’ can be unsafe and dangerous because it bears the likelihood of intimacy and thus thinner boundaries” (p. 245). Moreover, staying ‘home’ and not venturing outside of one’s group stagnates collective growth. She explores what it means to ‘bridge,’ between differences, stating that,

To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant us safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded (p.246).

Instead of avoiding difference, Anzaldúa (2002) encourages the reader to respond to conflict head-on. We must have the courage to act consciously on our ideas, to ‘risk leaving home,’ and to delve deeply into discomfort and difference in order to see what understandings can emerge from conflict. She defends the transformational potential of multiple perspectives and spurs her readers to honour “people’s otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others for having a different view” (p.246). If we allow ourselves to see bridges where others see only an abyss, the “healing images and narratives” that we can only now glimpse through our mind’s eye will eventually come to fruition (p.247).
Indian feminist Uma Narayan (1988) reaffirms the notion that if we are to coalesce effectively, we have to work continuously within our differences. She contends that, “A collective self-examination of the problems of communicating across our differences” is essential for any group wanting to genuinely work across differences. If we do not learn to trust one another across our social differences and are unable to sustain our relationships in contexts of powerful disagreement, then coalitions will break down. So, “working together continuously across our differences’ seems to be a project we cannot avoid or get away from. We are condemned to either ignoring and annihilating differences, or to working tenuously across them to form always risky bonds of understanding” (p.34).

Black feminist, activist, and poet Audre Lorde (1984/2007) also acknowledges the necessity and urgency of recognizing and exploring differences. In her address to the Copeland Colloquium, Lorde advocates that women must traverse lines of age, race, class, and sex to redefine difference as “a springboard for creative change” (p.115). She contends that we have been conditioned to respond to difference with unease and revulsion and to see differences “in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior” (p.114). In the Western canon, difference has become pathologised: “We speak not of human difference, but of human deviance” (p.116). As a result, we do not have ways for relating across differences as equals. In and of themselves, differences are not the problem. The real problem, Lorde suggests, is our refusal to recognize and explore differences; instead, we pretend that they are insurmountable obstacles or that they are non-existent. Further, evading the differences between us “presents the most serious threat to the mobilization of women’s joint power” (p.117). In order to “move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change,” we must be willing to confront patterns of oppression that we have internalized and devise new ways to acknowledge and “use each others’ differences to enrich our visions and our joint struggles” (p.122).

For these aforementioned feminists, recognition of difference is not enough. Effective coalescing – at the various levels of self, inter, and intragroup – requires a commitment to explore the boundaries that seemingly divide us and to “use difference as a catalyst for personal and social transformation” (Keating, 2002, p.519). In recent
years, Indigenous scholars located in Canada have drawn upon coalition politics theory to explore possibilities for transformation in both inter and intragroup contexts. It is to their insights I now turn.

2.4.3. Coalition Politics in Indigenous Contexts

In her work with First Nations graduate cohorts, Haida/Coast Salish scholar, Dolores van der Wey (2007) maintains that coalition building should be a priority for First Nations cohorts, as paying attention to coalition politics will help prepare students to navigate both inter and intra-group contexts. Drawing on the works of feminist theorists such as Burack (2004), Narayan (1988), and Reagon (1983), among others, van der Wey (2007) explores the challenges of coalition work among First Nation groups. Based on the reflections her participants had regarding their cohort experiences, van der Wey stresses the importance of dealing with intra-group tensions and differences. She makes important linkages between these tensions and federal legislative policies that have been imposed on Aboriginal peoples. In her view, “Native peoples must name and address the origins and fallout of identity legislation so that we may counter termination legislation together” (p.1011). Identifying and exploring the sources of tension in order to contribute to a broader liberatory project is a perspective similarly advocated for by the feminist scholars and activists mentioned above.

Like Burack and Narayan, Okanagan author and activist Jeanette Armstrong (2005) also points to the need of soliciting differences of opinion when coalescing. From an Indigenous epistemological standpoint that identifies cooperation as the main principle for human interaction, Armstrong suggests that difference is absolutely necessary for survival. Armstrong elaborates that difference is often referred to negatively, as something to be avoided, overcome, or gotten around. Instead, she suggests that we view differences positively; as something that is valuable, that strengthens us, and is absolutely necessary: “Interaction has to be based on principles by which people not only respect each other in their difference but depend on those differences and understand that those differences are critical to their survival” (p.31). Drawing upon her Indigenous heritage, she cites the Okanagan principle of En’owkin to refer to the “process that is to be engaged in to look at difference, but also to engage
difference, to solicit difference, to incorporate difference, and to strengthen difference” (ibid.). Armstrong notes that this process is not immediate. Like “a drop that permeates through the top of the head and suffuses the rest of the body,” the process of working across difference and coming to consensus is achieved over time. People who gather on the basis of En’owkin come together with an understanding that not everybody has to come to an agreement, but that “everybody recognizes the common ground upon which our differences rest” (ibid.). For Armstrong, each member of a community engaged in the En’owkin process has a responsibility to honour the difference of another by recognizing where that perspective comes from and figuring out a way to incorporate that difference so that it can be built upon.

Edited by Settler scholar, Lynne Davis (2010), the collection Alliances: Re/environmenting Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationships brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, practitioners, and activists who reflect on the challenges and lessons learned from inter-group collaboration. In her introduction to the volume, Davis identifies three ways in which Indigenous-non-Indigenous alliances may be structured. One type of relationship is paternalism, based in a long and established history of colonization. In these types of arrangements, “non-Indigenous ‘partners’ may adopt a position of superiority by assuming they know what is best for Indigenous people” (p.5). Another type of relationship may be conceptualized as “partners walking side-by-side” (ibid.). In this relationship, Davis suggests that, like the Two Row Wampum, Settler and Indigenous society travel alongside each other on parallel paths, but are guided by differing laws, customs, and culture. Neither interferes with the business of the other until the need arises for the two groups to coalesce around a specific issue, or to accomplish a particular set of goals. The final type of relationship, implied by Davis as critical to Indigenous self-determination is “one where Indigenous partners provide the leadership, and non-Indigenous people take action in support of the direction that Indigenous people have determined” (ibid.). In distinguishing the different ways Indigenous-non-Indigenous alliances may be structured, Davis points out that, in practice, relationships may have elements of all three types of relationship models. As such, she cautions that it is important for alliance members to define the nature of the relationship as a means of negotiating the power dynamics that will inevitably ensue.
Davis (2010), in attempting to understand if and how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work together without reproducing the colonial relationships that characterize Aboriginal/Settler relations in Canada, asks what it would take to achieve relationships of mutual respect. She wonders if such arrangements are even possible and asks the reader to consider, “Is ‘respect’ enough? What are the ethical responsibilities of non-Indigenous people collectively and individually in supporting the self-determination of Indigenous peoples? Can relationships be re-envisioned[?]” (p.2). Many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars have thought critically about how relationships may be transformed, particularly as it relates to the necessity of questioning assumptions as we work to coalesce with each other.

Paulette Regan (2010) claims that Settlers must confront their own colonial mentality and historical ignorance as a means of rebuilding relationships with Aboriginal peoples of Canada. She bases her work, *Unsettling the Settler Within,* on the premise that “how people learn about historical injustices is as important as learning truths about what happened” (p.11, author’s emphasis). Regan further maintains that, in order to move from a position of a colonizer to an ally, Settlers must risk openness, self-abnegation, “and a willingness to stay in the decolonizing struggle of our own discomfort” (p.13). Moreover, she claims that working through uncomfortable emotions is necessary in order to engage fully in a process of decolonization and argues that socio-political change “entails a public truth telling in which settlers link critical reflection, enlightened vision, and positive action” to confront our own complicity in the project of colonialism (p.15).

Susan Dion (2005) similarly argues an approach to coalescing must include the conscious intent to recognize one’s implication in colonial history. She maintains that Aboriginal and Settler histories are not autonomous and that, by taking historical and current colonial relationships seriously, Aboriginal and Settler Canadians alike can join together to challenge the legacies of imperialism and racialization. According to her, in order for Settler Canadians to participate in accomplishing justice, relationships must be established that are based in “recognition of our shared history and its effects” (p.53). For Dion, this involves actively confronting one’s lack of knowledge about the history of Aboriginal/Canadian relations by challenging one’s identity as a ‘perfect stranger,’ which
she defines as a position that denies complicity by maintaining that one “knows nothing” about Aboriginal people (2009, p.179). Dion adds that, in troubling this position, many find that their ideas of and relationship to Aboriginal peoples is based upon stereotypical representations rooted strongly in colonialist ideology. She further maintains that reparative relationship building between Aboriginal and Settler peoples entails ‘knowing ourselves’ as products of historical processes to date and “hearing and learning from the stories of our shared relationship that bear witness to the testament of Aboriginal lives” (p.106). I continue the conversation on the importance of bearing witness as an important component of intergroup relationship building in Chapter 6.

To return to the questions posed by Davis’ (2010) earlier in this section, the arguments of the scholars cited above suggest that we must examine the cognitive dissonance caused by an investment in Settler nationalist myths and must take seriously the legacy of colonialism in our own lives and identities in order to achieve relationships of mutual respect between Aboriginal and Settler people. I take up these ideas again in Chapters 6 and 7 where I examine strategies for and challenges to intergroup coalescing as identified by participants.

2.5. Summary

In this chapter, I examined three concepts that provide the framework for subsequent chapters: apologies and reconciliation in a Canadian context; Aboriginal identity politics; and coalition politics. The first section examined the current Canadian climate of apologies and reconciliation with respect to Aboriginal peoples and began by asking how the desire for Settlers to avoid personal responsibility for perpetuating colonialism play out at a political level. Drawing upon Australian scholar, Sara Ahmed’s (2005) article “The Politics of Bad Feeling,” I analyzed both the 1998 “Statement of Reconciliation” and the 2008 Residential School Apology delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. I then problematized the racist undertones of these apologies and, following Regan (2010), asked what makes an apology genuine. I then explored issues of Aboriginal identity politics, proposing that, rather than critiquing essentialist discourses employed by Aboriginal communities and groups, we concentrate on the socio-historical and colonial influences upon Aboriginal identities. Finally, I explored the notion of
coalition politics, drawing upon both Settler and Indigenous scholars to examine what it might mean to work in coalition and the potential difficulties in doing so. In the subsequent chapters, I mobilize these concepts through an analysis of participant voices.
Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The research for this dissertation was conducted in four stages between February and July of 2012 and October 2013. The methods of data collection consisted of an online survey, semi-structured interviews, a group interview, and two follow up interviews. In this chapter, I introduce my theoretical framework, discuss how the participants and sites of study were chosen, and outline my methodological approach. I also describe each research phase separately and include who the participants are, how they were recruited, and the consent process. The chapter closes with a discussion of my methods of analysis, issues of validity and ethical considerations.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

This study of how a group of educators conceptualize respectful relationship building in Aboriginal education contexts is informed by various overlapping principles of post-structuralist theory, standpoint theory, coalition politics literature, and critical Indigenous scholarship.

Michael Peters and Nicholas Burbules (2004) define post-structuralism as “a specifically philosophical response to the alleged scientific status of structuralism” (p.8, emphasis in original). Influenced by Nietzschean philosophy, post-structural theorists, such as Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, among others, sought to decenter the scientific status of structuralism and to critique its underlying metaphysics while maintaining central elements of structuralism’s critique of the humanist subject. A number of post-structuralist precepts are useful for thinking through the complexities of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationship building in education contexts. For one thing, post-structuralism embraces the post-modern
scepticism of binaries and disbelief of metanarratives. Such a perspective is useful in problematizing Settler metanarratives of dominance – for example, the myth of the Canadian ‘peacekeeper’ (Regan, 2010) – that obscure the relationship of Settlers to the Canadian colonial legacy. Regan (2010) troubles the metanarrative of the Canadian peacekeeper. She observes that, while the genesis of this myth is typically attributed to the era of the 1950s, when then-Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson endorsed an international peacekeeping role for Canadians, its origins are derived from the Settler relationship with Aboriginal people during the 1800 and 1900s when many treaties were signed. Regan draws upon the 1995 Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) to demonstrate how the Canadian peacekeeper is made synonymous with the Canadian treaty-maker. To quote: “The Canada that takes a proud place among the family of nations was made possible by the treaties. Our defining national characteristics are tolerance, pluralism, and democracy. Had it not been for the treaties, these defining myths might not have taken hold here” (RCAP, 2006, vol.2 chap.2, as cited in Regan, 2010, p.107). Regan (2010) goes on to suggest that Settler investment in the myth of the Canadian peacekeeper impedes an examination of our colonizer legacy. She explains that such non-recognition is purposeful, in that it appeases an underlying Settler fear that we are not, in effect, peacemakers, but perpetrators of colonialism. To this end, although many Settler subjects may wish to preserve a presentist view of their relationship to Aboriginal peoples, post-structuralism views subjects as relational within structures and systems, and as historically and culturally located. This perspective has underpinned my interrogation of how the resilience and endurance of metanarratives may influence the behaviour of educators within schools and how the subjectivity of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators is politically and historically produced.

Post-structuralist concepts of genealogy and deconstruction have also helped me understand how social and cultural structures play a role in forming both Aboriginal and Settler self-consciousness, as well as affirming the importance of historicizing questions of being. For example, genealogy, as Foucault (1980) described it, is a particular investigation into those elements, which individuals feel are aistorical. Within education contexts, a belief that Aboriginal/Settler relations are not historically shaped can lead to a ‘blame the victim’ mentality, where Aboriginal peoples are viewed as intellectually and culturally deficient through fault of their own doing (St. Denis, 2004). To recognize a
The genealogy of Aboriginal/Settler relations is, at once, to recognize that we have been conditioned to view one another through a long legacy of governmental policies, bolstered by Western notions of superiority. The post-structuralist concept of deconstruction furthers this understanding by exposing the dependency of a dominant, superior Settler identity on an apparently inferior Aboriginal identity (Mackey, 2002). Further, deconstruction denies the possibility of intrinsic meaning and absolute truths. Such a perspective is important in challenging the supposed veracity of meta-narratives, such as the Canadian peacekeeper myth I described above.

A further challenge is to understand how institutional narratives structure educators’ responses, specifically, how they speak with and against these discourses since “value and institutional commitments infiltrate language and what is said” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p.138). Rather than looking for consensus in order to produce generalizations about the experiences of educators, post-structuralist theory offers ways to think critically about differences in responses. For these reasons, this study draws upon post-structuralism to help articulate the multiplicity of storied experiences.

Influenced by Marxist and Hegelian thought, and rooted in the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s, standpoint theory holds three principal assertions: (1) Knowledge is socially located; (2) Subaltern groups are socially positioned in a way that affords them ‘double vision,’ as being ‘outsiders within’ (Collins, 2004); (3) Research, in particular, that which focuses on power relations, should begin with marginalized peoples (Bowell, n.d.). Feminist scholars working in a variety of disciplines – for example Dorothy Smith (1987), Sandra Harding (1986), Nancy Hartsock (1983), Donna Haraway (1988), Patricia Hill Collins (1990; 1998), and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) – have advanced the tenets of standpoint theory by foregrounding the effects of power relations on the production of knowledge and by a shared commitment to acknowledging and analyzing power/knowledge relationships with the aim of bringing about just social change. Within feminist standpoint theories, the concept of ‘standpoint’ refers to “an achieved collective identity or consciousness” (Bowell, n.d., para. 10). As Collins (1997) advances, “the notion of a standpoint refers to historically shared, group-based experiences. Groups have a degree of permanence over time such that group realities transcend individual experiences” (p.375). Collins is careful to add that using the
group as the unit of analysis does not mean that all individuals within a group have had the same experiences, nor does it imply that they interpret their experiences similarly. However, she contends that group-based experiences continue to matter in sociological analyses as long-standing experiences of social struggle point to the prevalence of social structures in upholding and justifying oppression. Within the context of this dissertation, this aspect of standpoint theory has been very useful in analyzing the experience of Aboriginal educators, as a group, within K-12 contexts. Like Collins, I want to clarify that highlighting those narratives which point to ongoing social and racial oppression does not mean that all participants perceived their experiences similarly. Indeed, there were some participants who felt supported in their line of work and reported positive experiences with colleagues. However, as a group, Aboriginal peoples have been continuously oppressed within educational institutions. As van der Wey (2012) and others (Barman, 1995; Milloy, 1999; St. Denis, 2007) have observed, one of the primary aims of the Canadian state was to subjugate Aboriginal people via the establishment of residential schools, where children were removed from their communities, denied their languages and traditional practices, and educated for participation in the lower classes of Canadian society. The legacy of this colonial project plays out in schooling systems today and is highlighted by the experiences of Aboriginal educators of this study. I return to this conversation in Chapter 7, wherein I suggest that the ongoing invisibility of Aboriginal educators within schools is, in part, the result of the continued failure of institutions to seriously consider social and racial oppression.

Coalition politics theory, emerging out of Black feminist scholarship, is useful in theorizing participant responses and understanding how they conceptualize what it means to work together in both inter and intra-group contexts. As I explicated in Chapter 2, “coalitions consist of the joint activity of autonomous groups, either for a single purpose or to pursue long-term social, economic, or political goals” (Burack, 2004 p.150-151). To review, I cited the work of political scientist, Cynthia Burack, to suggest that order to enter into groups as partners of coalition, group members must be individually accountable, both to themselves and to others. Because of this intense self-scrutiny, coalitions are more than specifically timed interactions over particular issues that one chooses to engage in. In contrast to ‘hit-and-run’ social groupings, coalitions “require
long-term attention to the feelings that are revealed or generated in the context of intergroup relations” (p.153).

Further, I drew upon Burack’s (2004) notion of coalitional frames, wherein she furthers her notion of coalition politics by identifying how the concept pertains to three levels of analysis or types of conflict: conflict within the self, conflict within the group, and conflict between groups. These coalitional frames are mutually constitutive and can result in diverse interests, perspectives, and frictions. And although all three frames have implications for the reparation of group life and group discourse, the third coalitional frame – coalitions across differences between groups – is usually given the most attention (Burack, 2004). Yet as Burack points out, “Even at the individual level, conflict within the self is a consequence of relations with others” (p.145). Thus, coalition politics explicitly acknowledges and embraces the complexities and unevenness of power relations at the level of the self and in intra and inter-group contexts in a reparative manner.

Finally, an engagement with critical Indigenous scholarship is central within the context of my research (for example, Cook-Lynn, 2008; Dion, 2005, 2007, 2009; Schick & St. Denis, 2003, 2005; St. Denis, 2007). Indigenous scholars have demonstrated that much theory used in research has failed to consider the implications of colonialism, racialization, and imperialism on Indigenous peoples (Barnhardt, 1998; Battiste, 2008; Grande, 2000; Smith, 1999, 2005). An immersion in critical Indigenous scholarship has provided an awareness and understanding of the relationship between Indigenous and Western epistemologies, for example, how frames of Western theory serve to redefine and transform the voices, subjectivities, and experiences of Indigenous peoples (Grande, 2000). My interest in understanding the relationship of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants in Aboriginal education contexts demands a deep knowledge of Aboriginal epistemologies and of the legacy of colonialism and the particular historical and contemporary conditions that shape Aboriginal and other Canadian relations. Even though I cannot know the lived realities of oppression, the knowledge of such a legacy is crucial for this research. How to engage respectfully leads into a discussion of ethics, which I examine in further detail later on in this chapter.
3.3. Overview of Research Methods

For my research, I have focussed on two different areas of inquiry to gather data about how educators conceive of and build relationships in Aboriginal education contexts in urban public schools. These are: 1) participant investments and motivations in Aboriginal education; and 2) the intricacies of relationship building – both inter and intragroup - in Aboriginal education contexts. I began an exploration of these themes through an online survey. The rationale for beginning with a survey was to allow participants to engage in reflexive practice regarding their experiences in Aboriginal education and to determine who might be a potential interview candidate based on the thoughtfulness and criticality of one’s initial responses (St. Denis, 2010). As I elaborate in my “Data Collection Methods” section, the online survey was unsuccessful due to a job action that was ongoing in both districts at the time of my research\textsuperscript{15}. Therefore, the areas of inquiry were explored through semi-structured interviews.

According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), the interview is an adaptable means of data collection, “enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard” (p.349). Semi-structured interviews, in particular, were useful for the purposes of my research as they allowed the order of questions to be controlled by the interviewer while still allowing for a degree of spontaneity (see Appendix I). To elaborate, the advantages of a semi-structured interview process are two-fold: On the one hand, having a set of pre-determined questions and themes can potentially increase the extensiveness of the data in that it allows data collection to be comparable across respondents. Given that I wanted to be able to correlate responses among participants, having specific possible questions to be put forward for each topic was useful. On the other hand, I wanted to acquire information about how participants viewed and offered insights about their respective their work contexts, and to be responsive to their frames.

\textsuperscript{15} While qualitative researchers, typically, do not discuss failures of their original research design, Alison Tom (1996) maintains that being transparent about how research develops affords students, colleagues, and others interested in the work, the opportunity to learn more about doing qualitative research and the emergent nature of research design. Further, “research must discuss the ways their research designs may change during a project in order to increase the likelihood of achieving research intentions rather than simply fulfilling research plans” (p.347). For these reasons, I have chosen to describe the survey process, even though it was an unsuccessful method of data collection.
of reference. The open-ended nature of the interview sessions allowed me to go into depth on a particular subject. For example, there were times when participants spoke passionately about particular issues, which, at times, made it challenging to move on to other questions. Although I would attempt to return participants back to the question at hand by rephrasing my query at a later time during the interview, 47% of the individuals interviewed made repeated efforts to return to a previous topic that was evidently of much importance to them. Further, being flexible and adaptable to change built rapport and offered informants the space to express their views in their own terms (Bernard, 2002).

While semi-structured interviews formed the basis of my data collection, there are notable drawbacks to this method of inquiry. Critical education scholars (Lather, 1986; Rosiek, 2006) have suggested that there are limits of self-reflexivity due to the possibility for false consciousness, whereby people subscribe to hegemonic ideals that do not serve their best interests. To counter this, Jerry Rosiek (2006) suggests that educators dialogue in conjunction with other educators in order to critically feedback on each other's analyses. For my purposes, I used a group interview to triangulate individuals' responses from the semi-structured interviews and to flush out, in greater detail, unanticipated insights that were brought up in those contexts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). An advantage of conducting a group interview is that it can produce data and insights about topics that might not be exposed at the level of a one-on-one interview (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Additionally, group interviews can allow people to generate knowledge and insights collaboratively and open up related but unanticipated topics that might arise over the course of group discussion (Berg, 2007). Further, group interviews are useful to triangulate other forms of data collection, like interviews and participant observation (see Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Within many Indigenous contexts, collective knowledge sharing, in a format such as a talking circle, is a key feature of relationship building (Graveline, 2000). When individuals are invited to share in community, participants may be compelled to listen to others and hear alternate viewpoints in ways that offer “another lens to view our own Reality” (p.364). For this reason, I incorporated a group interview into my research in
order to encourage the participants to be self-reflective and to provide a forum wherein they could share their thoughts on relationship building within Aboriginal education contexts with individuals in similar work situations. As Métis scholar, Frye Jean Graveline (2000) observes, circle, as methodology, has the potential to build community by providing an environment where people can feel listened to and respected. Although I did not explicitly employ a ‘circle as methodology’ approach, the group interview achieved a similar aim in that it helped to establish rapport between the participants. For example, at the end of the group interview, one participant remarked that it was nice to have such a forum to talk to other educators, stating that, “because we work in isolation so much, it’s nice to know that with these sorts of struggles, we’re not alone” (June 14, 2012).

The themes that exhibited a high level of frequency and import during the analysis of the one-on-one interviews formed the basis of the topics explored within the semi-structured group interview session. These were: 1) intragroup relationship dynamics within Aboriginal education teams; 2) the importance of voice - that is, being able to share one’s experiences within Aboriginal education contexts; and 3) the impact of administrative leadership in bridging inter and intragroup relationships. The first and third group interview topics link to my second research question, which pertains to the perceived importance of forming relationships within Aboriginal education contexts. The second group interview topic ties back to my first research question regarding the motivations that underpin Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators’ involvement in Aboriginal education initiatives. The interrelationship between these topics and my overall dissertation questions is further addressed in the “Data Collection” section below.

### 3.4. Participants

Participants for this study were recruited primarily through snowball sampling (Bernard 2002). After permission to conduct research was obtained from two respective school districts and the SFU Research Ethics Board, I made contact with the

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16 Participant recruitment for each stage of research is described in more detail in the section ‘Data Collection Methods’.
District Vice Principals of Aboriginal Education in each of these school districts to request access to the contact information of educators who participated in the EA Process at each respective district. As an EA, ideally, symbolizes a commitment by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders to work towards the improvement of Aboriginal education, I felt it an opportune document around which to analyze Aboriginal and settler Canadian relationships. In theory, the educators who participated in the creation of the document represent those in the district with an expressed commitment to Aboriginal education, and it was principally for that reason that I was interested in working with these specific participants.

Following the survey portion of the study, I contacted individuals with whom I had a prior relationship to see if they might be interested in participating in a semi-structured interview\(^{17}\). Participants then suggested individuals who might be interested in my research that I could talk to, which shifted my recruitment approach from purposeful sampling to include snowball sampling.

In order to protect participant anonymity, pseudonyms are used and information that could link individuals to the school districts in which they work has been minimized.

**Table 1: Participant demographics by position\(^{18}\), school district, years of experience, gender, and ethnic identity.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Position</th>
<th>Identified as Aboriginal</th>
<th>Identified as non-Aboriginal</th>
<th>Number of Participants (Out of 15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Support Workers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Resource Teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School District 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School District 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{17}\) To clarify, I had previously acted as Site Assistant to four of the participants in a graduate program cohort

\(^{18}\) As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, ‘Aboriginal Support Workers’ is a blanket term that I am using to describe a position that has been given a different job title in each study site.
Table 1 provides a general overview of the individuals who participated in this study. Overall, 15 individuals participated in the research with 9 participants coming from one school district and 6 participants from the other. There was also a representative range of experience within school systems, with 60% of individuals having 15+ years of experience and 40% individuals with less than 15 years of experience. Overwhelmingly, women participated in this research, with only one man represented in the study population. This may be attributed to the fact that women are represented in higher numbers in the education sector than men. For instance, according to 2006 Census Data, 73% of employees in teaching and counsellor positions in public schools are women (StatsCan, 2006). Further, the majority of participants were of Aboriginal descent, with 73% claiming Aboriginal ancestry and 26% percent of non-Aboriginal descent. Because of the job action that was occurring at the time of my research (see below), I chose not to interview administrators. This choice was also influenced by ethical considerations as I felt it would be more difficult to protect their anonymity, given their position(s) within the districts.

3.4.1. Participant Motivations for Participating in the Study

At the beginning of each individual interview, after a bit of informal preamble, I asked educators what prompted them to participate in this study. Their answers ranged from being intrigued by the questions I was asking, to being passionate about Aboriginal education and wanting to share their experiences, to wanting to raise awareness about the difficulties and complexities inherent in relationship building.

Both Krista, a high school teacher of Settler ancestry, and Darlene, an elementary school teacher of Aboriginal ancestry, said that they felt compelled to sit down and talk with me because of the questions I was asking. As Krista noted, “this is an area that I’m very passionate about […] so when you were describing it, I found it
exciting” (Interview, May 6, 2012). Darlene, in addition to being interested in the research topic, also wanted to use the research as a forum to share best practices. As she observed, “I always have to reflect; ‘what is it that’s working for me and how can I share that with others?’ So that’s why, when I saw your question, it’s so simple. I love the fact that you made it really simple and easy to understand, and it’s very intriguing. So that’s why I said ‘yeah, sure! Include me’” (Interview, Feb 24, 2012).

Other reasons for participating included the need to critically engage in healing the fissures between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that have occurred as a result of destructive government policies. Shonna, an elementary school teacher of Settler heritage, remarked,

I think it's really critical that we engage so much more. [...] I think it's terrible what happened in the residential schools. I think that's just appalling, and so the more that we can do to start the healing, the better. And so your work will inform the work we do, right? So it's important to me to be involved (Interview, Mar 16, 2012).

Others echoed Shonna’s sentiments. Robin, an Aboriginal resource teacher, hoped that other teachers might see the results of this research and be inspired to change their practices. In her words:

I encourage people who are asking real questions about relationship and how we can be more effective. If that helps other teachers, then that's why I'm doing this. If somebody sees this research and changes their practice, then that's why I'm doing this. Or it makes them think about something else (Interview, June 26, 2012).

For Andrea, an Aboriginal Support Worker, it was important to speak on behalf of the students and families whom she served and to be informed of the research being done in the field. As she stated, “I always think it’s important to have a voice and to be a representative voice for families in this area of Aboriginal education, and I'm always

19 The specific wording I used in my e-mail invitation to participate was: “My research focuses on relationships, and how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can work more effectively together in education contexts. Given your work in this area, I was wondering if you might be able to find the time to sit down with me to talk about your experiences” (Feb 8, 2012, personal communication).
interested in the research and what's coming of it, and keeping a finger on the pulse of things, so yeah. That's what interested me” (Interview, June 5, 2012).

The decision to participate in the research came more easily for some than for others. Given the history of exploitation of Aboriginal peoples on the part of Settler researchers, it was understandable for individuals to be wary about participating (Smith, 1999). Gwen, an Aboriginal Support Worker, shared that she was exasperated at being constantly asked to participate in research studies and seeing little change for Aboriginal communities:

For the longest time, I was like, ‘I don’t want people researching me. I’m tired. I’ve had enough,’ ’cause things weren’t changing for my people. But at the same time, I’ve started to realize that by you learning more about that and by me learning more about what you’re doing, it does make the changes, we can make the changes this way, and that’s what’s important, (June 12, 2012).

For Gwen, her eventual decision to participate rested in her realization that it was ultimately important for her to share what she knew in order to bring about change. Beth, an Aboriginal resource teacher, came to similar conclusions as Gwen, and had been reluctant to participate due to the institutional inertia that she saw permeating her organization with respect to Aboriginal education initiatives. As she informed me,

It wasn’t a simple decision. [...] I have such a hard time with the whole focus that Aboriginal education takes. And sometimes, it just kind of frustrates me, right? Then once I thought about it a bit more too, I thought, ‘well if I don’t speak my mind, or if I don’t say how I feel about the situation, then it will never go anywhere either.’ So it’ll be just my perspective. But if I participate, then maybe there are people of like mind that it would cause some kind of reaction – not that I’m going to change the world, but I think at times it’s necessary to voice concerns and perspectives (Interview, Apr 5, 2012).

Analogous to Gwen, Beth’s eventual choice to participate in the research came down to her conclusion that speaking out with the hope of potentially reaching others of like mind was better than remaining silent.

As is evident in the response of many aforementioned participants, the ability to share one’s perspective in order to be a potential influencer of change was a motivating
factor to participate. Denise, an Aboriginal Support Worker, spoke to how important it was for the inclusion of participant perspectives to be genuine. Her insights on this matter are worth quoting at length:

I think that consultation is a 'cute' word. I hear it used a lot lately, ‘in consultation, in consultation.’ It's such a cute word. It doesn't really mean anything. It's defined by whoever is taking the data or taking the comments or stuff like that. It's always put through a different lens and, because I know you personally on a different level, I feel that there's more likelihood that there's going to be a voice heard. [...] When you told me you were looking at collaboration, I love that idea. For me, that's really exciting; it's empowering. There's a whole bunch of different things that I'm going to get out of it because I'll be a part of this study. [...] My experience is only my experience, but sometimes it can reflect in other people's experiences as well (Interview, Mar 2, 2012).

Denise’s insights speak to the need for researchers to meaningfully engage with participants’ voices in a way that ensures the equitable representation of their opinions. Like the other participants featured in this section, Denise felt excited and empowered by the opportunity to share her experience and the possibility of it resonating with someone else. Further, because I knew Denise from a graduate program cohort, she knew me personally and trusted me to represent her perspectives in a way that it would be heard. As an individual connected to the participants who gave of their time, I interpret it to be my responsibility, as a witness to their stories, to pass on and critically engage with what they have shared (Dion, 2009). As is evident, many participated with the hope that, by sharing their experiences, they might influence others and provoke change. In Chapter 8, I explore some ways in which the insights that they shared may be disseminated and expanded upon.

3.5. Sites of Study

I chose two sites of study to engage in data collection. In addition to the potential replicability of research findings that an additional site of study allows, a second location enabled my research findings to be more robust and well developed (Santos & Eisenhart, 2004). Further, the two study sites strengthen the anonymity of participants involved in the research (Bernard, 2002). The first site of study was chosen because of
the high number of individuals who worked there whom I knew from other academic contexts. I anticipated that individuals I knew would be more likely to speak to me about their experiences in Aboriginal education, or at least point me in the direction of someone who might be interested to sit down and talk with me. Initial interviews were held with people whom I already knew. As expected, they directed me to other potential participants within the district. The second research site was chosen according to geographical proximity to the first, as I wanted to concentrate on urban public school districts in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Given its geographical closeness, I anticipated that individuals whom I had already interviewed in the first site of study might know of some colleagues in the neighbouring districts with whom they could put me in contact. This, indeed, turned out to be the case. Through the initial connections suggested by individuals in the first study site, I was able to speak to a number of people in the second study site, thus enriching the interviews I had already conducted and strengthening the anonymity of all individuals involved. Although I had two different samples, I did not notice any tangible differences in participant responses between the districts. Although I knew four individuals previously from one study site, those informants had referred the others from the second study site and, as a result, there was a thread of connection with the individuals to whom I had not been previously acquainted. Differences in responses centered primarily on experiences in their respective districts in terms of their interactions with Aboriginal education policies and procedures. The differences regarding how these experiences played out will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

In order to respect the confidentiality of the study participants, the details of the sites of study will not be disclosed. For this reason, the study sites will remain unnamed and individuals will not be identified as being from one particular district or another.
3.6. Data Collection Methods

3.6.1. Online Survey

Limitations

In June of 2011, 90% of teachers across BC voted for a province-wide strike to protest provincial legislation that restricted teachers’ rights to negotiate class sizes and composition and to negotiate for wage increases on par with other provinces. That September, teachers began a ‘limited Job Action,’ which entailed, among other things, the suspension of administrative duties, attending staff meetings, and writing report cards (Talmazan, 2012). The job action continued into 2012 and was ongoing over the course of my research. I attempted to conduct a survey during the job action because I could not anticipate how educators would interpret their expectations - for example, if responding to a survey would constitute a transgression. Additionally, I did not put this phase of work on hold as I was uncertain as to how long the job action would continue and was mindful that, based on past disputes, tensions and divisiveness between administrators and teachers has the potential to carry on beyond contract settlement. That is, teachers may well have been reluctant to respond to the survey invitation in the aftermath of the settlement, as the invitation would have been issued from the office of the respective District Vice Principals of Aboriginal education. For these reasons, the online survey was likely not accessed as widely as it might have been, had a job action not been occurring at the time.

At the first site of study, the District VP of Aboriginal education had been a liaison between potential survey participants and myself. As noted above, due to the ongoing job action, educators were not obliged to open e-mails from this person, which may well have inhibited the survey’s dissemination. In total, 5 out of 85 potential participants

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20 A survey was not issued to the second study site, given that when asked for participants, the District VP’s secretary forwarded me the e-mail distribution list of all the signatories to the Enhancement Agreement, which totalled 22 individuals in mainly administrative capacities. I thanked the secretary for the signatory list and asked if it was possible to get an expanded list of other individuals who participated in the process (e-mail communication, Apr 25, 2012). Unfortunately, I received no response to my request. As a result of not receiving contacts in non-administrative capacities, I did not conduct a survey at this site.
responded to the survey\textsuperscript{21}. Later, during the semi-structured interview phase, three participants informed me that a survey on the Enhancement Agreement had already been conducted the year before and that participants’ anonymity had been compromised when the researchers in that earlier research shared insights from the findings with the Aboriginal administrator. As a consequence, these participants informed me that they knew of individuals who had opened the District VP’s e-mail and, therefore, were reluctant to participate for fear of a similar situation occurring. The ethical breach shared with me by three of the participants during the semi-structured interviews is only one facet of an underlying tension between Aboriginal education workers and administrators, which I explore in further depth in Chapter 5.

**Recruitment and Procedure:**

Recruitment for the online survey began by first securing ethics approval from the two sites of study, in addition to formal review and approval by the SFU Research Ethics Board. Pending permission and subsequent receipt of the e-mail addresses, the link to the survey was e-mailed, along with an invitation to participate (Appendix C).

The survey was initially sent out at the end of January 2012 and was available for two weeks from the initial release. I selected this response timeframe based on research conducted in online data collection, which reports that the typical response time for a web-based survey is 2-3 days. As Granello and Wheaton (2004) observe, “the majority of recipients of an e-mail survey either [respond] within 1 to 2 days of receiving the initial solicitation or not at all” (p. 388). Given the low number of participant responses – four in total – the link to the survey was reissued, this time, with a disclaimer that the research was independent and not affiliated with the ongoing job action. The re-issued survey was available for two weeks after its release and received only one response. After the two-week availability of the survey, the online survey link was de-activated.

\textsuperscript{21} Due to the lack of success from this method of data collection, the answers of the 5 respondents were not used. Instead, I re-contacted these individuals to see if they would like to participate in a semi-structured interview to share their experiences. Of the 5, 3 individuals agreed to participate. For further detail, please refer to Section 3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews.
Consent Process:

Participants were asked to complete the survey online using any computer device capable of running a current web browser and operating system. There was no request for names on the survey. Participants were reminded that completing the survey was completely voluntary and that they could skip any questions they did not wish to answer and that they could also quit the survey at any time.

The introductory description for participating in the online survey was included in the initial e-mail sent out and found on the top of the first page of the online survey. By pressing the “NEXT” button on this introductory page, the participant had access to the consent form (Appendix E). It was stated on the consent form that by filling out the survey, the participants were agreeing to participate having read and understood and agreed to the consent information. Should participants have chosen not to participate in this study they could close their current browser window to exit the study at that time. The survey was anonymous and confidential, posing no risk to the participants, and contained questions that the participants might encounter talking about their experiences and involvement in the education of Aboriginal youth with their peers, friends, or family (please see Appendix H for the survey itself).

3.6.2. Semi-structured Interviews

Participants:

I recruited participants via e-mail invitation (see Appendix D), beginning with those who participated in the online survey, as well as individuals that I knew from prior academic contexts. Through snowball sampling (Bernard, 2002), these individuals then put me in contact with colleagues whom they anticipated might be interested in participating in the research. In total, I interviewed 15 participants. Like other studies using critical ethnographic methods, I relied on the use of participant narratives as a means of data collection (Dion, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994).
**Consent Process:**

At the beginning of the interview, participants were presented with two copies of a consent form (see Appendix F), which they needed to read and sign, indicating that they agreed to participate in this phase of the study. One copy was for myself, and the other was given to the participants to keep for their records.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, their participation was completely voluntary, and that they could refuse to answer any questions and to stop the interview at any time. They were given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had at the beginning and the end of the interview.

**Procedure, Interview Protocol and Measures:**

Initial interviews were conducted with educators at their place of employment or some other agreed-upon locale. Interviews were semi-structured according to guiding questions that I had pre-established to generate discussion (Bernard, 2002; see also Appendix I). While the questions were worded to prompt responses that would align with my overarching interview goals, the semi-structured nature of the interviews left the questions open-ended enough to allow individuals to interpret and respond in their own way. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Further, this preliminary series of interviews was submitted to the participants for review after transcription had been completed. No changes were requested, save for one participant, who requested that their transcript be cleaned up of ‘ums,’ ‘ahs,’ and the like.

### 3.6.3. Group Interview

**Participants:**

After the semi-structured interview stage, participants were invited to participate in a group interview session. The rationale for doing this was to offer individuals the chance to follow up on themes discussed in the initial interviews and to share knowledge and insights about their experiences with individuals from both sites of study. I sent an
email to participants, asking them if they would be interested in participating in a group interview session pertaining to themes that emerged from the individual interviews and proposed a series of dates that might be convenient. Of those, four individuals attended the group interview; two from each study site.

**Consent Process:**

At the beginning of the group interview, participants were presented with a consent form (see Appendix G), which indicated that they agreed to participate in this phase of the study. Further, participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. They were also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time, their participation was completely voluntary, and that they may refuse to answer any questions and to leave the group interview at any time. They were also given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have had at the beginning and the end of the interview.

**Procedure, Interview Protocol and Measures:**

The group interview was conducted at my home to offer a sense of intimacy and informality to the process. As a facilitator and moderator to the group interaction, I provided some guiding questions and topics for discussion based on initial themes that were identified from the individual interviews as a result of data analysis (see Appendix J). The group interview also served, in a limited way, as a professional development opportunity for the teachers as they were able to discuss and share varying education strategies within their districts. As with the semi-structured interviews, the group interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcription was submitted to the participants for review after completion, and no changes were requested.

3.6.4. **Follow-up interviews**

**Participants:**

I was especially interested in briefly re-interviewing two teachers with respect to their pedagogy, particularly in relation to how they might work through difficult learning with students, who, to borrow Dion’s (2009) phrase, embody a “refusal to know” about
the colonial underpinnings of Aboriginal-Settler relationships and the implications that they perceived this process as having within broader workplace contexts, or for Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationships in general. Krista and Darlene were selected based on the high frequency of codes that occurred in their interviews with respect to relationship building in their respective milieus. I sent an email to each, asking them if they would be interested in participating in a brief follow-up interview session and proposed a series of dates that might be convenient. Both agreed to participate, and together, we decided on a mutually agreed-upon date, time, and location.

**Procedure, Interview Protocol and Measures:**

Separate follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with Darlene and Krista within their respective classrooms. During these interviews, I provided them the opportunity to link their practice to larger intra and inter-group issues, but found that they did not provide a lot of specificity in this regard. An excerpt from Darlene’s follow up interview serves as one exception, and I return to it in Chapter 7 when I discuss the coalitional possibilities that may arise from speaking to uncomfortable issues. Both interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were submitted to both women for review after transcription had been completed. No changes were requested.

### 3.7. Methods of Analysis

The initial step in my analysis of the qualitative data was to read the interview transcripts and the notes that I had taken during the data collection process. To elaborate, immediately following interview sessions, I took notes regarding my observations of participants - for example, how they reacted to particular questions, and comments about the information that they have shared with me. The notes that I jotted down provided me with an initial list of themes, which then became expanded as I worked through the coding process. I then reviewed these, in conjunction with the interview transcripts in order to develop some initial ideas about categories and potential relationships between the participants’ responses (Maxwell, 2005).
3.7.1. **HyperRESEARCH**

I chose to use qualitative data analysis software (QDA) due to its potential to be a quicker and more accurate method of analysis (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006; St. John & Johnson, 2000). In total, I had 17 individual interviews and 1 focus group interview. Employing QDA allowed me to analyze my data conveniently and thoroughly, as I was able modify my coding system, add notes to blocks of text that I had highlighted, and define concepts as the research progressed. Further, QDA allowed me to apply multiple codes to particular sections of text, in the event that an excerpt was particularly rich in meaning. In addition, QDA afforded me the ability to develop or merge codes as I worked through data analysis.

When developing codes, I used a combination of both deductive and open coding processes (Bernard, 2002). According to Bernard (2002), deductive codes are codes created based on already existing hypotheses about one’s research. For this reason, I began by developing deductive codes around the original themes of my research proposal: investments, relationships, and Aboriginal education. While I applied deductive codes to my data, I also kept myself open to themes that frequently recurred within the data. These codes constitute what Glaser (1978) calls ‘open coding.’ I also wrote memos, that is, “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (Glaser, 1978, p. 83 in Punch, 2009, p. 180). These included short notes and post-coding reflections after I had finished coding each interview, wherein I would write about the overall themes that stood out to me for that particular interview. In order to determine the most prominent themes within the research, I ran a frequency report in hyperRESEARCH. I then examined the themes identified in the report alongside the themes that I had identified as being important from my post-coding reflections. I looked to see where the parallels were and then created a concept map to help link the most salient themes together.

3.7.2. **Critical Discourse Analysis**

While QDA is useful in managing large amounts of data, St. John & Johnson (2000) caution that relying on “code and retrieval methods” can result in data becoming decontextualized, wherein “the essence of meanings in data” may be missed (p.396).
For this reason, I also employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) to make sense of the data. At its basic level, discourse analysis is the analysis of language in use and includes both spoken and written texts (Paltridge, 2006). In order to understand the relationship between what is said and what is meant, discourse analysis examines how language is used within particular situations. In this respect, discourse analysis is concerned with how the interpretation of language depends on knowing the social context in which the discourse occurs, or the pragmatics of language. For this reason, it was important for me to be mindful of the nature of the relationship I had with the participant, the setting in which the interview was conducted, and the location of the participant (for example: teacher or support worker, senior or junior) within the school as I analyze participant responses.

While discourse analysis may be seen as the study of language in use, critical discourse analysis can be viewed as the study of language not in use. CDA is concerned with a critical theory of the social world. Its aim is to help “reveal some of these hidden and often ‘out of sight’ values, positions and perspectives” (Paltridge, 2006, p.178). Critical discourse begins with the conviction that language is social and both reflects and constructs the social world. Its purpose is to deconstruct and expose social inequality as expressed and legitimated through language. Critical discourse analysts believe that, through repeated use, discourse becomes normative and appears neutral (Paltridge, 2006). As such, critical discourse analyses deconstruct texts to uncover the underlying ideologies and assumptions embedded within them.

According to Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000), CDA unites three levels of analysis: (1) the actual text, (2) the processes involved in its creation, and (3) the larger social context. Paltridge (2006) elaborates by identifying four principles of critical discourse analysis. These are that: (1) Social and political issues are constructed and reflected in discourse; (2) power relations are negotiated and performed through discourse; (3) discourse both reflects and reproduces social relations; and (4) ideologies are produced and reflected in the use of discourse. As a result, CDA has helped to reveal hidden or taken-for-granted values, positions, and perspectives that educators hold with regards to their ideas about relationships. In addition, CDA assists in uncovering the social and power relations that may be reflected in how educators speak.
about relationships. This has been achieved through a number of factors, including: repeatedly listening to and reading through the data; comparing responses with an eye to examining similarities and differences in how participants structure their response, for example, how they choose and manage a topic when responding to a question; and lexical analysis, that is, being mindful of word frequency and the kinds of words and expressions participants use when responding to a question (Partridge, 2006). The aforementioned levels of analysis and theoretical principles have also been useful in uncovering the ideologies and values that are embedded in textual documentation, such as Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s 2008 apology to residential school survivors (see Chapter 2).

3.8. Validity

1. Issues of Investigation Validity: How will my relationship with the participants affect the telling of their stories?

According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), investigation validity refers to “the ethical rigor, expertise, quality control, and, indeed, personality of the researcher” (p.187). As Gubrium and Holstein (2008) articulate, “stories are assembled and told to someone, somewhere, at some time, with a variety of consequences for those concerned. All of this has a discernible impact on what is communicated and how that unfolds” (p.247). Thus, the various contexts of storytelling affect the shape of the narrative. In an interview setting, what gets told is directly effected by the context in

22 Regarding Data storage and participant confidentiality, with respect to the online survey, the online digital data was securely transmitted from the participant’s computer to the on-site server at Simon Fraser University. The data was securely stored and password protected. Only I had access to the password and data. Moreover, since the survey was filled out online, there was no way to track or identify participants. No names, e-mails or IP addresses were recorded. All data collected by the online survey was securely stored in Simon Fraser University’s on-site servers and completely controlled by the University’s privacy policies regarding personal data. For both individual interviews and the group interview, all audio media was transcribed using identifier letters. Pseudonyms were also used in data analyses and reports. No one other than myself had access to the raw digital audio, notes, and survey digital archives. These were stored in a locked cabinet and on a password protected, secure, encrypted server, for a minimum of two years as required. After this time, hard copy files will be shredded and digital data will be deleted.
which it is told – an educator’s office vs. a coffee shop – and the fact that I am the receiver of the story. The kind of rapport that I have with the participants, that is, the extent to which they have felt comfortable sharing their perspectives and values with me has played an important part in what they have shared. It has also been important to pay attention to the power relations that may be present in these dialogic encounters. As Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) argues, the demand for the ‘full expression’ of marginalized voices becomes voyeuristic when the voice of the dominant, in eliciting the oppressed to speak, goes unexamined. Further, as Michelle Fine (1994) articulates, members of the dominant group are twice protected by the absence of social surveillance – e.g. public agencies, social researchers – and scholarly discourse on their disfunctionality. Being mindful of how important it is to pay attention to one’s social location, I encouraged participants to ask me any questions they may have throughout the course of the interview. Oftentimes, participants asked about my interest in the subject, how I came to be involved in Aboriginal education, and what my motivations were around pursuing this line of inquiry. By creating an environment where asking questions was reciprocal, a greater sense of rapport was established and I perceived participants to feel more comfortable sharing information with me because I had allowed myself to be vulnerable to them.

For this reason, as interviewer, I have also had to consider the ways in which I have cooperated and aided in the development of the narrative. As Gubrium and Holstein (2008) argue, narratives are jointly formulated out of the interaction between interviewer and interviewed. Mindful of the contexts of relationship, I have returned the transcripts and thesis excerpts to participants for review in order to offer them the opportunity to clarify or provide further information, commonly defined in qualitative research as ‘member checking’ (Cohen et al., 2007) or ‘face validity’ (Lather, 1986).

2. Issues of Respondent Bias: How will I guard against the limits of self-reflexivity in participant responses?

Gubrium & Holstein (2008) suggests that researchers exercise caution when evaluating individual accounts simply on the basis of memory (2008). This caution is also acknowledged by Patti Lather (1986) who notes that ‘false consciousness,’ that is,
when people identify/accept ideologies that do not serve their best interests, could be problematic. For this reason, Lather (1986) urges qualitative researchers to apply methods of validation to the process of self-reflexivity. This includes processes of triangulation, construct validation, and the development of a “self-critical attitude toward how one’s own preconceptions affect the research.” This self-critical attitude can be achieved by being mindful of external validity concerns; that is, situating one’s research within a wide literature search, taking into account studies that both support and challenge one’s results (Cohen et al., 2007). Within the context of my own research, I used respondent validation through sharing transcripts with the participants in order to provide them with the opportunity to offer feedback and by situating the research within other critical education studies that examine the experiences of educators in Aboriginal education contexts (e.g. Dion, 2009; St. Denis, 2010).

3. Issues of Researcher Bias: As author of this dissertation, how do I ensure accurate representation of the narratives that are shared with me?

Donna Deyhle (2009) notes that, as a white anthropologist engaging in descriptions of Native American people, she risks reinscribing those representations in yet another form of surveillance (p.xxi). Susan Dion (2009) further observes that tellings will always be re-tellings, reinterpretations of the words and experiences of our respondents from our particular locations. The product that emerges from the writing reflects the meaning we as authors take away from the data and what we deem important. “It represents a partial retelling bound by my own perspective” (Dion, 2009, p.84). Because there is no way of representing the words of others as separate from our cultural locations, Rosiek (2006) advocates for an acknowledgement of our interests and insight into the potential effects this would have on the interpretations presented. Thus, in addition to member checking, I have explicated my own biases and assumptions throughout the dissertation in order to be transparent and to provide insight into the bases underlying my representations.
3.9. Ethics

In standard dissertations, ethics sections typically involve the researcher addressing how they have accounted for ethical concerns, such as obtaining consent, protection of subject anonymity, strategies for safeguarding confidentiality, securing the data, etc. (Berg, 2007). While I have addressed this in preceding sections of this chapter and agree that the protection of research subjects is important, I take issue with the standardized usage of ethics typically promoted by universities: Ethics, so defined by research ethics boards, focuses on issues of liability and legality rather than on a relational model of ethics, which is centered on an ethic of care that values and respects the connection between the researcher and the participant. Because of the history of exploitation and unequal power relations that have characterized research with Indigenous peoples, it is important to explicitly address ethics in a more holistic manner that goes beyond Western models of individual accountability.

Within Western institutions, the concept of ‘ethics’ is founded in the externalization of law and social behavior (Cordova, 2004). According to Native American scholar, V.F. Cordova, externalization of law manifests as constraints placed upon an individual’s behavior, which are then enforced through threats of punishment. This places the onus of ‘right action’ on the individual. To act ethically is thus a choice an individual makes to abide by externally imposed rules – e.g. those drafted and enforced by ethics boards. In this model of ethics, reward is derived through approval of one’s research. The punishment for not acting ethically is the potential discrediting and revoking of one’s work.

What Western models of ethics often fail to consider is the inherently social nature of human beings. Cordova (2004) explains that ethics founded in the internalization of law “is based on the fact that human beings do not exist as isolated, or solitary, beings… Ethics is based on the fact that human beings exist in social environments; it deals, primarily, with the sense of the ‘We’ rather than the sense of the ‘I’” (p.173). Linda Smith (2005), a Maori scholar, adds to the conversation, stating that research ethics “is a study of how humans fail and succeed at treating each other with respect” (p.101). Smith further maintains that while the principle of respect is embedded
in all major ethical protocols dealing with human subjects, researchers must question what is meant by respect, as the basic premise of the value rests on Euro-American epistemology. She writes: “what is respect, and how do we know when researchers are behaving respectfully? What does respect entail at a day-to-day level of interaction? To be respectful, what else does a researcher need to understand?” (Smith, 2005, pp.97-98, emphasis author’s). These questions are important to researchers cognizant of the ‘We-factor’ of research. As Cordova (2004) observes, human action is not inconsequential. We cannot engage each other without there being consequences of our encounters. How, then, do we come together in a spirit of respectful interaction, where the purposes and motives for interacting vary from researcher to participant (Dion, 2009)?

An ‘ethical space’ is needed that highlights and accounts for these differences. According to Roger Poole (1972), an ethical space is “an abstract space that frames an area of encounter and interaction of two entities with different intentions” (in Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffery, 2007, p.21). Willy Ermine (2000), a Cree scholar, elaborates on Poole’s definition by asserting that, in cross-cultural collaborations involving Indigenous peoples, a recognition that each party claims their own autonomous view of the world and an acknowledgement that each come with different interpretations and imperatives is critical to ethical engagement. Through the recognition of difference, a space of possibility is created.

As Anna Tsing (2004) reminds us, collaboration does not entail a simple sharing of information. We should not assume that collaborators will share common goals or that everyone will equally benefit. In addition to negotiations across class, race, gender, nationality, and culture, social justice goals are constructed in the capitalist and economic contexts that they are always already embedded in. A certain amount of ‘friction,’ “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” must thus be accepted in encounters where those engaging are not starting ‘on the same page’ (Tsing, 2004, p.4). The twentieth-century model of solidarity naively asks allies to line up as parallel equivalents. This is an idealistic goal, as those immersed in social justice work are bound to be differentially located along lines of race,
class, gender, and socio-economic status. However, it is possible for heterogeneous and unequal encounters to lead to new, productive arrangements (Tsing, 2004).

As a researcher, navigating the complexities outlined above in an ethical way meant recognizing how the different motivations individuals had for being involved in the study impacted what they talked about. At times, the different motivations for engaging with me resulted in conversations where individuals spoke about others in critical ways. As a researcher, I felt it important to recognize that might have been interpreted as “ranting” about colleagues, on the part of some participants, possibly related to ongoing experiences of feeling marginalized within schools in terms of space, voice, and of feeling relevant. That some participants appeared to use the interview session as an opportunity to express their frustrations about some of their colleagues required me to ask why this was the case; what structural barriers or sets of conditions that these educators work in might explain these expressions of frustration? As Ermine (2000) and Tsing (2004) note above, through a recognition of difference, a space of possibility is created. I would elaborate on this to make the claim that through a recognition of different responses, space is created for opening up a conversation about why those differences might exist and what the implications of these responses might be in a larger context of both inter and intra group relations. This question links back to my overarching research interest in relationship building within Aboriginal education contexts and will be explored in further depth in subsequent chapters.

3.10. Summary

In this chapter, I discussed how the participants and sites of study were chosen, and outlined my methodological approach. I also described the different phases of my research study – an online survey, semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview, and two follow-up interviews – outlining who the participants are, how they were recruited, and the processes of consent and research protocol. The final sections of this chapter provided insight into my methods of analysis, issues of validity and ethical considerations. The following chapters deal with the two major research themes that have emerged from this study. To review, these are: (1) Investments and motivations in
Aboriginal education; and (2) the intricacies of relationship building in both intra and intergroup contexts.
Chapter 4. The Experiences of Aboriginal Educators Within Schools

4.1. Introduction

As the literature reviewed indicates, the challenges Aboriginal educators face within education systems have been under-examined. This chapter considers how and why Aboriginal educators might be discriminated against within schools, as evidenced by the placement of Aboriginal individuals in tokenistic positions, the increased monitoring of Aboriginal staff, and the burden of doubt that Aboriginal employees bear to prove to Settler administration that they can competently perform at their jobs. I begin by suggesting that Aboriginal staff members are “space invaders” (Puwar, 2004, p. 7), in that they occupy positions for which they are not the somatic norm. As a consequence of ‘boldly going where few Aboriginal people have gone before’ Aboriginal individuals are subjects of Settler surveillance, assuming both the “burden of doubt” and the “burden of representation” for occupying roles not typically held by them in the past (p.11). For this reason, Aboriginal staff are often assigned to roles based on racialized Settler conceptualizations of the work for which they are deemed fit. From here, I move to examine the ways in which Aboriginal workers are ostracized. I demonstrate that the majority of participants with whom I worked face both psychic and physical barriers in finding a ‘place’ within schools. I then explore what may happen when Aboriginal people are admitted into inner circles of power and the social pressure that Aboriginal administrators may feel to be complicit in narratives that deny inequity and difference.

The next section investigates the ways in which administrators working within institutions may convince themselves they have ‘done their part’ by exploring how Enhancement Agreement (EA) initiatives get heralded as a measure of ‘good performance.’ Here, I demonstrate how EAs can be viewed as non-performative documents as they do not produce the effects that they name. Moreover, as a
statement of commitment, the EA comes to stand in for institutional follow through. This is not to say that institutions are necessarily opposed to change. However, as will be made clear, acceptable change and support is typically that which does not challenge the underlying structures or fundamental premise of the institution, which is the maintenance of the colonial status quo. Once ‘business as usual’ is questioned, however, power-holders within institutions may react, through tactics of backlash, such as reducing discrimination to a matter of perception, or through isolation and vilification of those who dare to speak out (Bishop, 2005). The final section explores what happens when calls for change are perceived by upper level administrative personnel as having ‘gone too far.’

4.2. The Somatic Norm of Institutions: Reserved Occupational Spaces

In her book *Space Invaders: Race, Gender, and Bodies Out of Place*, British sociologist, Nirmal Puwar (2004), explores what happens when individuals who are not expected to occupy certain positions do so. More specifically, she is concerned with the question of what happens when women and visible minorities “take up ‘privileged’ positions which have not been ‘reserved’ for them, for which, they are not, in short, the somatic norm. What are the terms of coexistence?” (p.1). Through an examination of woman and persons of color in senior civil service positions, particularly British Parliament, Purwar cogently demonstrates how these ‘different’ bodies are ‘space invaders’; they ‘invade’ territories that are seen to belong to particular bodies – read: white, upper-class men – and, in the process, create disturbance and disorientation because their presence demonstrates that positions of authority are embodied.

Puwar (2004) argues that although the removal of formal barriers has ensured that all bodies can legally occupy positions of leadership and authority, “subtle means of inclusion/exclusion continue to formally operate through the designation of the somatic norm” (p.33). Within schools, the somatic norm salient to Aboriginal peoples is that of offering educational assistance, for example, the role of a Support Worker, or teaching within alternative school settings. Darlene, an Aboriginal elementary school teacher who has her own mainstream class, shared with me her rationale for choosing her current
district of employment. She commented that she received offers of work from two
different school districts; one position was as a resource teacher working in Aboriginal
education contexts, and the other was as a mainstream elementary classroom teacher.
Darlene chose the latter option. As she elaborated, “I had a taste of alternative
education, and I thought ‘Why is it that we always have to get the hard jobs?’ Why is it
that we’re put in these places where people are supposed to feel better because ‘Oh,
there’s an Aboriginal person helping another Aboriginal person?’ ” (Interview, Feb 24,
2012). Darlene added that working as a mainstream classroom teacher helped her to
realize that Aboriginal educators needed opportunities working in mainstream education
contexts in order to “learn the system. We had to learn how the system works, how
schools were run, how we work with children and our colleagues in that setting, rather
than being on the outside of the topic. ‘Cause that’s what support programs are: They’re
add-ons. Everyone calls them ‘enrichment,’ … they still are to the side” (Interview, Feb
24, 2012).

As evidenced by Darlene’s response, Aboriginal peoples often have to fight
against being marginalized into alternative or support roles, where Aboriginal programs
are viewed as ‘enrichment,’ set apart from the core curriculum. Rather than being a part
of mainstream education, Aboriginal educators are often relegated to ‘the outside of the
topic.’ When Aboriginal peoples do move into mainstream positions, it has the potential
to cause disorientation and amplification to Settler colleagues unfamiliar with seeing
Aboriginal peoples in positions of authority, as I outline below.

For Purwar, the processes of disorientation and amplification are inherent in the
way space invaders are encountered. With respect to disorientation, Purwar suggests
that the presence of minoritized bodies is disorienting to white individuals, who are not
used to such close proximity of the ‘Other’ in positions of equal stature. Such a
presence represents a dissonance, “a jarring of framings that confuses and
disorientates. It is a menacing presence that disturbs and interrupts a certain white,
usually male, sense of public institutional space” (p.42). In short, unease is generated
when racialized individuals occupy traditionally white spaces as figures of authority. The
confrontation with those previously on the outside, who are now on the inside, disturbs
the boundaries that have contributed to a privileged sense of whiteness. Thus, “the
entry of ‘the native’… unsettles taken-for-granted positionalities and provokes [individuals] to open up for questioning their own place in the world” (p.46).

The feeling that ‘other’ bodies have invaded the physical space of the institution results in the amplification of numbers, whereby non-white individuals are seen to take up more space than they actually do. “This means that a sprinkling of two or three Black and Asian bodies rapidly become exaggerated to four or seven” (Purwar, 2004, p.48). As one woman civil servant recounted to Purwar in an interview, “they’re counting … and this comes up quite often: ‘Well we’ve already got two women’ or something. ‘And it’ll look a bit odd if we appoint a third woman’ ” (anonymous participant, cited in Purwar, p. 49). For Puwar, the idea that ‘we already have enough numbers,’ is indicative of a fear of being overrun, of being displaced from the centralized positions that white bodies have historically occupied. The fear of displacement also leads to the hyper-vigilant surveillance of minoritized individuals, whose capacities to do their jobs are viewed in doubt.

4.2.1. The Numbers Game: Advocating for Aboriginal Staff

Evidence of disorientation and amplification were palpable in the responses of the participants whom I interviewed. For instance, 73% of participants spoke to the institutional resistance to hire more Aboriginal people for roles needed within the system. Henrietta articulated the underlying need for more staff to serve as role models to Aboriginal youth: “we’ve voiced enough times that we need more role models. And it’s not to be racist or discriminatory, it’s just that we want those role models, you know? We want more teachers, [Support workers] and so on that are Aboriginal people to show our children that you can aspire, you can become, you can dream” (Interview, Mar 9, 2012, brackets are author’s insertions). However, as many of the participants who discussed institutional resistance reported, the requests for greater numbers of Aboriginal staff have been repeatedly denied. For instance, Darlene spoke to the frustrations of interacting with the Board regarding the hiring of more Aboriginal staff. She realized, “that they’re not willing to cooperate and give me information when I ask them ‘Why do you not hire more Aboriginal teachers?’ And they’ll give you excuse after excuse, and then finally I started to find other resources to help me get that information. So I turned
to the Union” (Interview, Feb 24, 2012). However, as Daniella, an Aboriginal Support Worker, noted, the Union has not been any more effective in securing positions for new staff: “They [the Union] are constantly approaching the Board, saying, ‘we need somebody at the elementary level. Come on. We need more people here.’ ... And the Board doesn't seem to - they're not prepared to make some changes yet,” (Interview, Feb 14, 2012). Further, Beth articulated that, “Since 2008, to my knowledge, there have been no Aboriginal teachers hired outside of our team other than the ones that already existed in the system” (Interview, April 5, 2012).

Although participants did not articulate the specific rationale the Board gave for not hiring more Aboriginal staff, the increasing surveillance of current staff and the tokenistic positions and roles in which they were placed appear to indicate that the amplification of numbers is, in part, responsible for the lack of new hires. These processes are further outlined in the subsections that follow.

4.2.2. Surveillance and the Burden of Doubt

My conversations with participants revealed that slightly less than half (47%) felt an increase in surveillance on the part of the institution. As Darlene informed me: “We’ve had to account for things that we’ve already done in the past, and it was never questioned before ... We built up these programs, and now they’re questioning it: They're questioning how the money is spent” (Interview, Feb 24, 2012). Speaking about her flexible work schedule as an Aboriginal Support Worker, Henrietta talked about the frustrations of using time cards to track her hours.

Like I can only speak for myself, but like I work overtime, and sometimes I don't claim that time. I just work and work and work, right? But then they started getting picky about our time cards and about overtime and all this kind of stuff. And I'm like, 'where is this coming from?"” (Interview, Mar 9, 2012).

Brenda, an Aboriginal Resource Teacher, informed me that the District in which she worked had recently developed a tracking system for employees involving iPads:

Our current boss now, [they have] a pretty neat system in place where [they] gave everybody an iPad, where there's a tracking system in
iPad. [This person] can find out where everybody is at any moment of
the day, if the person with the iPad doesn't know enough to turn the
tracking system off. However, [our boss] says if you turn the tracking
system off, and if it should get stolen, we won't be able to find it. So
there is kind of a catch there. I think if everybody's doing what they
say they're supposed to be doing, the tracking thing shouldn't bother
them one iota (Interview, July 3, 2012).

Although the increased surveillance of staff did not bother Brenda, other
participants, like Henrietta, found it disconcerting. In *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of
the Prison*, French philosopher Michel Foucault (1977) speaks about the ‘hierarchical
gaze’ that permits “an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those
who are inside it” (p.172). This intense scrutiny acts upon those subjects by providing a
hold on their conduct, thus altering them. The introduction of time cards and iPad
trackers can be seen as forms of surveillance that impinge upon Aboriginal education
workers through intense processes of monitoring and control, calling them to account for
their whereabouts.

Due to the heightened visibility of Aboriginal workers, any mistakes run the risk of
being seen as evidence that one is incompetent at their job. Purwar (2004) argues that
because women and non-whites exist as anomalies in places where they are not the
normative figures of authority, they are not automatically assumed to have the requisite
skills to competently do their jobs. As such, the onus rests upon marginalized workers to
prove their worth; to demonstrate that they can ‘cut it.’ In the group interview, Beth spoke
directly to the burden of doubt faced by Aboriginal people within education contexts:

all the levels of education have that lack of valuing and the questioning
of whether you really know what you’re doing or not. Whether you’re
an effective person, basically. I know people that refuse to miss a
Monday morning for most of their careers because of that whole
stereotype that ‘oh, you must have partied all weekend, so you didn’t
come to work on Monday.’ They don’t want to be thought of in that
way, so if they’re sick, they’ll go to work on Monday and take Tuesday
off because they don’t want to fall into that stereotype. And that’s
horrible (Group interview, June 14, 2012).

Beth’s comment speaks to the need for Aboriginal employees to work harder in
order to assuage the burden of doubt. Her admission, that even after numerous years at
a job, many Aboriginal employees will refuse to take a Monday off for fear of being
stereotyped as a hard partier speaks to the ways in which stereotypes have been used by the Canadian government as justification for historic and ongoing oppressive actions against Aboriginal people (Dion, 2005). In this way, Aboriginal individuals are constantly under a spotlight due to ongoing racialized Settler perceptions, as any mistake may be taken as affirmation that one does not belong.

For Purwar (2004), the burden of doubt and surveillance are processes that are inextricably linked. The smallest error can be picked up and used as a rationale for increased surveillance, which, in turn, finds further inaccuracies and justifies racialization. In order to fight against being racialized, minoritized employees must bear also bear a ‘burden of representation,’ in that they are seen to represent the capacities of the groups for which they are identified. She elaborates, “there is a consequent burden attached to being one of a minority, as people feel the pressure to do the job well, in order to show that non-white people can also do the work” (pp. 62-63). Oftentimes, this burden is dealt with by performing an occupational script that is expected of Aboriginal workers by dominant administration.

### 4.2.3. Occupational Scripts and the Burden of Representation

While Judith Butler’s theory of performativity is commonly applied to gender analyses, it is rarely associated with studies of work. Puwar (2004) speculates that this has to do with a misreading of Butler’s work that overemphasizes notions of play while underestimating how entrenched ideals and conventions mediate performed identities. As Butler (1993) articulates, an ‘act’ is a repetition of the past; it “is itself a recitation, the citing of a prior chain of events which are implied in a present acts and which perpetually drain any ‘present’ of its presentness” (p. 244). To use a theatrical analogy, identity ‘scripts’ preexist the actor, with the ‘act’ having been going on before the actor has arrived on the scene. It is within these sets of directive norms that individuals must assert themselves. In their analysis of learning disabilities, Ray McDermott and Herve Varenne (1995) illustrate how the power of culture is used to disable. For example, they suggest that the difficulties paraplegic people face with curbs and stairs “tell us little about the physical conditions requiring wheelchairs or carts, but a great deal about the rigid institutionalization of particular ways of handling gravity and boundaries between
street and sidewalk as different zones of social interaction” (p.327). The institutionalization of such boundaries results in social isolation and exclusion and begs the question of how ‘disability’ is constructed in broader culture.

Within institutional contexts, minoritized individuals are subjected to similar institutionalized practices of exclusion. According to Puwar (2004) women and non-whites often find themselves “strait-jacketed” in positions that are reflective of stereotypical representations of their gender or race. She cites the example of female civil servants who are given portfolios associated with familial spheres, but who are seen as ill-suited to positions involved in defense or agriculture (p.146). Additionally, racialized employees experience further discrimination since they must constantly fight against being representatives and spokespersons of their race. Occupational scripts, based on expectations of the type of work for which a minoritized individual is perceived to be suited, are thus difficult to combat. In educational contexts, Aboriginal employees often find themselves placed in “ethnic slots,” doing jobs that “lock them into their race” (ibid.).

Of the educators I interviewed, 53% spoke to the role entrapment they experienced by virtue of their racial background. As Andrea, an Aboriginal Support Worker, observed, “it’s a struggle to be validated as an Aboriginal person, but sometimes when an issue happens, and it happens to be an Aboriginal kid, all of a sudden, I’m the token Indian that has to deal with it. So that is a big struggle for me too. It’s like that legitimacy piece.” (Group interview, June 14, 2012). Thomas, a fellow Aboriginal Support Worker, commented on the hand off that many teachers and administrators make to Support Workers because anything related to Aboriginal youth is perceived as ‘their job.’ “There are some people who say, ‘oh, Aboriginal student? Here! Here you go,’” he stated. “And yet, they are issues that they themselves can resolve. It has nothing to do with Aboriginality, zilch. It’s an issue that they, the administrator or the teacher, can resolve” (Group interview, June 14, 2012). Gwen, also an Aboriginal Support Worker, talked about administrators not seeing the relevance of Aboriginal education initiatives to their own work contexts:

They’ll say, ‘well it’s the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, so it’s your job, Gwen.’ And it’s like, ‘no it’s not. The whole idea is that you
guys take this on, not me. No it’s not. That’s your job. That’s what it was all about. Don’t you remember? Nice try. You’re supposed to do that stuff’ (Interview, June 12, 2012).

Darlene stressed how important it was for incoming Aboriginal employees to fight against being ‘slotted in’ to Aboriginal education positions if that was not what they wanted:

I’ve always been advocating for people when they come in and they want to teach [in regular classrooms] just to keep going at it, tell them what you want, don’t let them put you here if that’s not what you want. Right? And that’s what I had to do, because they wanted me to stay in Aboriginal education (Interview, Feb 24, 2012).

On two counts, then, Aboriginal people are prone to being ‘strait-jacketed’ in education contexts: First, Aboriginal individuals are expected to deal with all things Aboriginal by virtue of their race. As seen in the responses of Thomas and Gwen, the excuse that it was ‘the job,’ of support workers to deal with all things Aboriginal in order to abdicate responsibility was frequently used. As Andrea’s comments suggest, Aboriginal employees must struggle to be validated by performing an occupational script that dictates what their roles and responsibilities ought to be. Second, it is assumed that Aboriginal people will not be suited to mainstream classrooms because they do not have the requisite skill sets. Darlene makes a point of telling newcomers to fight for the positions they want as a result of her own resistance to being delegated to a role that she did not want to assume.

Thus far, I have focused on the ramifications that occur when Aboriginal workers ‘invade spaces’ by occupying positions for which they are not the somatic norm. As I have illustrated, Aboriginal employees bear the burdens of doubt and representation for assuming roles that they have not typically held in the past. To assuage these burdens, Aboriginal people are often ‘strait-jacketed’ into performing occupational scripts based on racialized Settler ideas of what their roles ought to be. The next section focuses on the notion of space as both cultural and architectural exclusion, and the challenges that Aboriginal individuals face as a result of spatial ostracization.
4.3. The Architecture of Exclusion: Struggling Against Physical and Psychic Boundaries to Belonging

Educational philosopher Jane McGregor (2004) argues that space in schools makes a difference. Though space is commonly thought of as a physical container for social life to play out in, McGregor argues that space ought to be thought of as an interaction between the physical and the social; what she defines as spatiality. “If we look more closely we can see that the way space is organized in schools produces particular social relations. Rather than being an arena within which relations take place, space is made through the social – it is enacted and so continually created and recreated” (p.2). Power relations are also made through the spatiality of schools. McGregor observes that modern day schools are reproductions of 19th century industrial school models, which were organized to produce hierarchical arrangements based on the socio-economic relations at large. While McGregor limits her analysis to the ways in which power is used to determine uses of space by students, her insights can also be applied to the ways in which Aboriginal employees are included and excluded within schools.

Of the educators with whom I spoke, 73% relayed to me instances indicative of both social and physical spatial exclusion within schools. Previous to her work at one of the study sites, Denise worked at an organization with predominantly Aboriginal staff. Speaking of her transition, she informed me that, “It was an Aboriginal environment, Aboriginal bosses, Aboriginal coworkers, Aboriginal everything, almost, right? Going into the mainstream, it was like, ... feeling very insignificant within a process where I felt previously I had a voice, [here] I had no voice” (Interview, Mar 2, 2012). Andrea noted that, while half of the schools she worked at felt welcoming, in the other half, it’s very uncomfortable. And I’m not the first one to say it, working at those schools. There’s a definite culture. You feel it when you walk into a school, and you are trying to walk in and deliver, or share, another culture within a school that already has its own culture. It can be really difficult. So some days I just leave with the feeling of ‘don’t let the door hit me on the way out’, sort of thing (Interview, June 5, 2012).
Both Denise and Andrea’s responses are reflective of the process of alienation that happens when outsiders ‘invade’ spaces not reserved for them (Puwar, 2004). Puwar (2004) suggests that psychic and physical boundaries are implicit to the sense of Europeanness that permeates certain places and professions. Within Settler education contexts, schools have not been constructed as a ‘natural’ domain of Aboriginal professionals (or Aboriginal people in general). As Dion (2005) notes, Aboriginal people have been historically positioned within Canadian society as victims of process in contrast to the European bearers of civilization. Educational sociologist, Sherene Razack (2002), observes that Settler origin stories, which produce Europeans as the bearers of civilization, simultaneously confine Aboriginal peoples to an anachronistic space and time. As such, Aboriginal people were (and are) thought not to have the capacities necessary for civic engagement in Canadian society. Within systems of education, Aboriginal peoples experience continued subjugation by being rendered as beneficiaries of Canadian society and backward in relation to Settler society; Settlers have ‘education,’ while Aboriginal peoples have ‘culture’ (Battiste, 2005). This leads Aboriginal people to be viewed as alien in the ‘consecrated space’ of white professionals (Puwar, 2004, p.34) – a ‘racial shadow’ on the landscape of the Settler workplace (Razack, 2002, p.3). Denise and Andrea’s feelings of insignificance, of trying to find a space within an institution that ‘already has its own culture,’ are thus well founded.

In addition to coming up against the psychic boundaries within Settler workplaces, 64% of Aboriginal employees grappled with spatial exclusion in a physical sense. Commenting on the classroom in which we conducted our interview, Daniella remarked:

This is a great school because we have a big space. I have things set up so that I can spend one-to-one with kids, Beth can teach, we can do fantastic things. But that’s not the norm. You know, in my place at [another school], I love my office, but it’s this big [indicating 1/4 of class size] and I usually have fifteen kids in there. It’s very difficult. (Interview, Feb 14, 2012).

Henrietta also spoke to the struggles to secure appropriate space for the youth with whom she worked:
This is the other thing that we've always had difficulty with, is space. Space. And we've had to share space at [this school]. And it was always kind of an issue, because if somebody else was there when you were supposed to be there, then it was hard to ask them to move, you know, 'cause you didn't want to be rude. So people were always fighting for space. [...] Now at that school with the new Principal, she doesn't care how many kids we have to cram in that small office, you know? Sometimes there were 10 kids who were trying to be in that small room and, 'sorry, there's no other space in the school for you,' right? [She's] not an advocate; doesn't care (Interview, Mar 9, 2012).

A powerful example of systemic discrimination through spatial exclusion was told to me by Andrea, who had the space she used taken away from her in a very undermining way. In her words:

At one school, I was told that the office space I have was mine for when I was there. And that school's a socially very needy school, so I need a place to meet with social workers, parents, caregivers, whatever. Every week, there's something in there. So the first time it really happened [...] I went to go into my office, and it's on the premise that if something happens and they need a confidential space, they use it, which is fine. I went in, my name was off the door, my schedule was off the door, my request for service forms were taken down, the envelope was ripped. And they said, "Oh, there's some fundraising going on, and they're going to need to store chocolate in here for the next few months." And so I said, "Well, if I can just get to the desk. Really, for now, all I need is the desk. I need a computer, need a printer, need a phone." No word of exaggeration. From the desk to a little bit of headspace, I'd say a few inches, boxes, cases of chocolate [filled the room]. So I couldn't sit at the desk. I was surrounded, like literally. The chair was still in there. I sat in the chair, and I looked around, and I cried. It was like I felt totally devalued, totally undermined (Interview, June 5, 2012).

McGregor (2004) contends that spaces tell a great deal about power structures. Razack (2002) adds that having a mastery of spaces allows the colonizer to feel in control; “the mapping subject achieves his sense of self through keeping at bay and in place any who would threaten his sense of mastery” (p.12). Within Settler schools, the construction and maintenance of a racial order is evident in the control exercised over Aboriginal employees with regards to the spaces they can and cannot use. Both Daniella and Henrietta indicate that the struggle for appropriate space is, simultaneously, a struggle against exclusion and a testament to the Settler power structures in place. Andrea’s violent eviction from her office is further evidence of the way in which racialized
employees are produced as illegitimate users of space\textsuperscript{23}. The removal of her name, schedule, and the ripped envelope of her service forms are imperious reminders of the Settler control of school spaces. This act of authority announces to Andrea that the space she uses does not belong to her, and that the Settler administration is the ultimate exerciser of power.

In this section, I highlighted examples of the psychic and physical barriers that Aboriginal workers must face in finding a ‘place’ within schooling systems. Displacement, both psychic and physical, from the inner circle of belonging within schools was a common theme among 73\% of the participants interviewed. The next section examines what happens when racialized employees are hired into positions of power and the ways in which efforts to effect real change are curtailed.

4.4. Being Part of the Club: The Difficulties Faced by Aboriginal Administrators in Effecting Institutional Change

Within both sites of study, recent shifts in administration had happened. New Vice Principals of Aboriginal Education had been hired, both of whom were of Aboriginal descent. While, on the surface, such a move might indicate both Districts’ willingness to include an Aboriginal voice within the ‘inner circle’ of power, my interviews with the participants revealed that they viewed the positions with scepticism, questioning whether real change could be effected or whether this was a tokenistic move on the part of administration to quell their repeated requests for greater employment equity.

\textsuperscript{23} While the word ‘violent’ might be perceived as an extreme descriptor for characterizing Andrea’s experience, sociologist Yasmin Jiwani (2006) maintains that the ways in which violence is commonly understood obfuscate how violence is structured in dominance and abuses of power. To quote: “how violence is understood, experienced, and responded to is indicative of a discursive formation that defines and regulates its meaning... It is the normalization of violence that renders it invisible, or visible only under certain conditions and within prescribed definitions. Hence, the violence of colonialism, of nation building are made invisible” (p.8).
Darlene noted how her initial enthusiasm for having an Aboriginal person in a position of power was subsequently diminished when no meaningful change seemed to come from the hiring. In her words:

[Having a new VP of Aboriginal Education] is all fine and dandy and now you’re thinking, ‘okay great. Now we have someone to advocate for us at this level.’ That’s what we all assumed and were happy about. But that’s not what’s happening [...] So again, going back to that word, ‘tokenism,’ is this all this job is, is just to say, ‘Oh, look at us, we have an Aboriginal educator in charge.’ Well are you allowing that person to make meaningful decisions on behalf of the team? [...] The thing is if you’re going to put an Aboriginal person in one of those positions, then give them the power they need to make those decisions. ‘Cause right now, that person is just a liaison, is just a go-between: “Oh, I’ve got to go ask them. No, you can’t have it.” That’s what’s happening (Interview, Feb 24, 2012).

For Darlene, tokenism amounts to being in a position of seniority, albeit without the power to effect meaningful change. In her view, the current District VP of Aboriginal Education is occupying a token position; there in body, but unable to ‘make meaningful decisions’ that will benefit the Aboriginal education team as a whole.

Brenda connected the lack of Aboriginal administrators to the larger, colonial structure of education itself: “What people fail to acknowledge a lot is that the system that we work in now, public education system, is an old British system. It’s colonization, and it’s the old boys’ club no matter where you go, and so these systems that exist need to be revamped in a large way” (Interview, July 3, 2012). She surmised that the transition to a new Aboriginal VP was, in part, a move to find someone who knew how to be ‘part of the club’ 24:

When [the former Aboriginal administrator] was District Vice Principal for Aboriginal Education, [they were] excluded from the beginnings of [a District initiative] and what not, and that’s why [they] left. That’s one of the key reasons why [they] left [the District] and went to work [elsewhere]. You know? [They were] not consulted, and it’s like ‘wow, now why is that?’ You know. And so now we have [another person] who has helped with policy creation in various school districts.

24 Gender-neutral language has been inserted, and any other identifiers have been removed from this excerpt to protect both the interviewee and the individuals being spoken about.
[Interior District], I think, the most recent one, helped them develop their Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement. So here you have a [person] now in that position who fits into the old boys' club very well. [...] Now, [this person] is getting things to happen, right? (Interview, July 3, 2012).

In Brenda's view, having someone who 'fit into the club,' resulted in 'things happening' within Aboriginal education. As Darlene suggested in her above comment, such a move may be seen as tokenistic in that it assists individuals, but does not affect the underlying structure of the institution (Bishop, 2005). Speaking of herself, Darlene believes that she would not fit 'into the club' very well:

Darlene: people ask me, 'how come you're not in that position?' And I say, 'Even if I wanted to today, they wouldn't hire me.'

Sadie: Why?

Darlene: Because I'm too political and I know what's been going on in the District, and I'll ask questions that other people don't get to until later on in their career – if they've been in that position for a while... But if you're not sure and you've just started and you're not really connected to that community, you kind of go along with it; along with the flow (Interview, Feb 24, 2012).

From Darlene’s perspective, her familiarity with the internal politics of her District disqualifies her from being a power-holder at an administrative level. As her earlier comments suggest, Aboriginal administrators are at risk of becoming tokens – symbols and representatives of the group without being able to effect meaningful change. Darlene’s longstanding position within her school district enabled her to feel comfortable and secure enough to pose tough questions to the higher-ups. Both of the recent Aboriginal District VPs, however, were hired from outside of the Districts, meaning that they were newer to the inner-workings of the system and, hence, potentially more susceptible to the ‘flow’ of administrative influence.

The latter part of Darlene’s statement is, I think, important to focus on because it speaks to the pressures that Aboriginal administrators face to conform to institutional norms. As with Aboriginal workers, Aboriginal administrators are also 'space invaders,' assuming positions of seniority previously unreserved for them. For this reason, Aboriginal administrators also bear the burden of doubt and of representation when it
comes to their ability to credibly do their jobs. Because of their senior positions, so too do Aboriginal administrators fall under a gaze of colonial surveillance, perhaps even more pronounced due to their increased visibility and perceived status as a spokesperson for their race (Bishop, 2005). The position that an Aboriginal administrator finds her/himself in is, thus, a difficult one. On the one hand, having an Aboriginal administrator offers a source of optimism for Aboriginal workers whose voices have been previously excluded and who may see the administrator as an agent of social change; an instrument through which barriers to privilege and resources may be removed. On the other hand, in order to cement their acquired higher status and admission into ‘the club,’ administrators may feel pressure to ‘go with the flow’ of administrative culture.

Educators Jill Blackmore and Judyth Sachs (2007) maintain that leaders work within a myriad of constraints and possibilities, which include promotional hierarchies, performance management, and assumptions of ability based on gender, class, and race. Puwar (2004) adds that, in order to rise through the ranks of institutions, one must be an ‘insider’ who is ontologically complicit, to some extent, in the denial of race, class, and gender that are intrinsic to institutional narratives. She goes on to suggest that, in the civil service, seniors look for themselves in their prodigies. Those who have ‘a feel for the game,’ who “engage in the ‘legitimate’ idioms of various disciplines” are more likely to be accepted into the upper echelons of the institution (p.124). For minoritized professionals, the pressure to conform to institutional narratives is even greater. Those who dare to name race, for example, risk being viewed as unprofessional troublemakers (Bishop, 2005; Puwar, 2004; Wright, 2002). As Puwar (2004) elaborates, “within institutions, the aversion to seeing racism is coupled with the aversion to confronting colleagues and especially superiors. There is an overriding preference for consensus, which manifests itself as etiquette” (p.139). Shonna, an elementary school teacher of Settler descent, who participated in the Enhancement Agreement process of her District, recalled a situation in which the District Vice Principal of Aboriginal education had explicitly named race in the introductory paragraphs of the policy document, but was forced to rewrite the segments at the behest of their superior.

So [we agreed we needed] a history [in the introduction to our Agreement] to explain to people why we have an Enhancement Agreement. [The District VP of Aboriginal education] drafted a history,
and it was really well done [...] [This person] drafted it in a way that was respectful, but also really clearly said, "This is what happened, and this is how it is understood by people who talk about sociopolitical relations." There was a dominant culture that actively worked to discriminate against a non-dominant culture. And the District Principal [...] responded against that. What he articulated was he felt that that would turn teachers and administrators away from the document, because it was too strongly worded. It placed judgment. [However,] I thought this was a good way of framing it, and that people needed to have it in their face, and see it for what it was, not have it softened. My Aboriginal colleagues worked with it for a long time, and changed it so that it is less in your face, and more accessible, probably [...] I still don't think that was right. I think it should have stayed as the statement that [the District VP] had originally made, because it was well made and it really articulated the situation (Interview, Mar 16, 2012).

The scenario that Shonna recounted epitomizes the difficulties faced by Aboriginal administration in attempting to effect change. By refusing to acknowledge a narrative that names racism and places the colonial relationship of Aboriginal and Settler peoples 'in your face,' the District Principal's actions affirm the continued illegitimacy of talking about race in Settler workplaces. Thus, being ‘professional’ in administrative settings necessitates conformity to a liberal ideology of colour-blindness, meritocracy, and desire for sameness. Aboriginal administrators, like the individual Shonna mentions, can thus find themselves between a proverbial rock and a hard place. The expectation to represent the concerns of the Aboriginal educators they serve are, in fact, mediated by the risks entailed in naming unpopular topics, like racism and inequity. "It is much easier to hush things up, to seek compromise and to turn the other cheek for fear of the whole artifice upon which careers are built coming apart" (Puwar, 2004, p.139).

In her comments to “The Personal and the Political Panel” at the Second Sex Conference, held in New York in September of 1979, Audre Lorde (1984/2007) infamously and provocatively declared that “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” (p.112). This statement has become something of a catchphrase in progressive eduspeak, an implicit declaration that one is acting in solidarity with, and knows the conditions of, the oppressed. To quote Lorde is to announce oneself as an ally, an indication that “you know more about the experiences of a group of marginalized people than those people do themselves” (McKenzie, 2013, para. 10). The phrase, “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,” has been decontextualized, and,
at times, criticized apart from the rest of her speech (see Benjamin, 2000; Olson, 2000). In context, the statement reads,

It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.* They may temporarily allow us to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change (Lorde 1984/2007, p.112, emphasis in original).

In her address to the Second Sex panel, Lorde (1984/2007) defends an appreciation of differences among women as necessary for survival. The ‘tool’ the oppressor uses to keep women subjugated is the notion that differences are weak, that Cartesian binaries are valid, that ‘divide and conquer’ is the natural world order. “When the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy… only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable” (p.111). In my reading, what Lorde refers to when she uses the word ‘tool’ is an ideological paradigm, a colonial mindset that has become internalized.

With respect to Aboriginal education, Aboriginal administrators can also be ‘master’s tools,’ in that some may operate as instruments to further the Settler educational regime. As such, the ‘master’s tools’ cannot destroy the Settler educational structure by relying on the principles that built and supported the institution in the first place. To begin to dismantle the master’s house, the master must be confronted with a new paradigm, shaken out of complacency, denial and self-preservation to acknowledge that this ‘house’ has been build on a foundation of exclusionary, elitist, and racialized principles.

That being said, to acknowledge that a new epistemology and ontology is needed to dismantle the Settler system is one thing. To actually stand up against the system and speak back to oppressive gestures and policies is quite another (Puwar, 2004). As I have highlighted in this section, Aboriginal administrators may feel decisive pressure to be complicit in institutional narratives and practices that deny inequity and difference. While institutions look for individuals who have ‘a feel for the game,’ and can, thus, be ‘part of the old-boy’s club,’ there is a certain satisfaction in welcoming minoritized individuals to the inner circle of power. As educational psychologist, Stephen
Wright (2002), notes, acceptance of disadvantaged individuals into the privileged group may allow advantaged persons to feel as though they have ‘done their part’ to reduce inequality: “The presence of tokens may ‘prove’ to them that discriminatory barriers are gone and that existing practices are fair” (p.246). The following section investigates the ways in which institutions convince themselves they have ‘done their part’ by exploring how Enhancement Agreement initiatives get touted as a measure of ‘good performance.’

4.5. Performing Equality and Documenting Diversity: Barriers to Enhancement Agreement Implementation

Influenced by French philosopher and sociologist, Jean Francois Lyotard, Sara Ahmed (2012) uses the term ‘performance culture’ to refer to the way in which an institution seeks to legitimize itself. ‘Good’ institutional policy “becomes that which in advancing the performance of an institution also increases its contribution to the social system” (p.84). Ahmed observes that institutional culture is a manifestation of performance culture: “Institutional performance involves an increasing self-consciousness about how to perform well in these systems by generating the right kinds of procedures, methods, and materials” (p.85). Good institutional performance also includes performativity in the theatrical sense; that for an institution to perform well, it must be seen to be generating the “right kinds of appearance” (ibid.). ‘Equality,’ then, becomes a part of institutional performance, constituting a ‘right’ kind of performance and contributing to the image of the institution as a progressive entity. Ahmed employs the phrase, ‘the new equality regime,’ to describe interrelated processes, actions, and meanings that appear to redress structural inequality, when in actuality, inequalities are maintained. The new equality regime is rooted in the assumption that equality is achieved “in the act,” and that having a policy, which is designed to address inequality, is a sufficient substitute for action. In these moments, Ahmed contends, power is reaffirmed “at the moment it is imagined as undone” (p.13).

Ahmed (2012) explores how documents come to provide measurements for institutional performance. While documents are forms of writing, they also serve as a function of measurement “when the task or aim of the document is ‘to document’ an organization in some way” (p.86). Part of the institutional performativity becomes the
creation of the document itself as a benchmark for good behaviour. Ahmed (2012) argues that, “when diversity work becomes a matter of writing documents, it can participate in the separation of diversity work from institutional work” (p.87). The very act of writing the document can mean not having time to participate in the very things the document is advocating for. Further, the document, in becoming a form of compliance, also works to conceal inequitable institutional habits: it is “a way of presenting the [institution] as being ‘good at this’ despite not being ‘good at this’ in ways that are apparent if you look around” (p.102). As such, documents become forms of ‘image management’ in that they allow the organization to be viewed as doing ‘a good job’ at achieving equality (ibid.).

Ahmed (2012) puts forth the thesis that statements of commitment, such as diversity and equality policies, are ‘non-performatives,’ becoming paper trails when they do not bring about the effects they name. Butler (1993) defines performativity as “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (p.2). Ahmed (2012) then inverts the concept to suggest that institutional documents have the potential to be read as non-performatives when, through reiterative and citational practice, the discourse does not produce the effects that it names. In her words:

In my model of the non-performative, the failure of a speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but is actually what the speech act is doing. Such speech acts are taken up as if they were performatives (as if they have brought about the effects that they name), such that the names come to stand in for the effects. As a result, naming can be a way of not bringing something into effect (Ahmed, 2012, p.117).

Ahmed’s (2012) thesis of non-performatives is useful in terms of thinking about how institutional documents, as statements of commitment, stand in for the effects that they name. Butler (1993) cautions that discourse does not, in and of itself, ‘perform’ since it is not clear if language can be constituted as a set of ‘acts.’ While the binding power of the act appears to be derived from the intention or will of the speaker, Butler draws upon Derrida to suggest that the binding power of discourse, or speech act, is in its citational, or iterative, force. “In this sense, every ‘act’ is an echo or citational chain, and it is its citationality that constitutes its performative force” (p.282). I would extend
this claim to suggest that the power of institutional statements of commitment is in their iterative force as a non-performative. Sociologist Dorothy Smith (2006) defines text, in an institutional context, as that which is replicable: “The capacity to coordinate people’s doings translocally depends on the ability of the text, as a material thing, to turn up in identical form wherever the reader, hearer, or watcher may be” (p.166). For Smith, the power of the text to coordinate subjects or prompt people to act in certain ways is dependent upon its replicability. I would argue that the same holds true for non-performative documents in that their power is derived from the iterative practice of standing in for effects named.

Ahmed describes, what she terms, the ‘tick-box’ approach to diversity: “when institutions can ‘show’ that they are following procedures but are not really ‘behind them” (p.114). For 80% of the participants of this study, the Enhancement Agreements (hereafter abbreviated to EAs) were perceived as constituting a ‘tick box’ approach to Aboriginal education. Beth, for example, described the EAs as being ‘just there’:

[Our District] has said, ‘I’ve done it. It’s done. I’ve got it.’ We signed ours in 2008, and I don’t think we’ve moved since then. I think we’re now pushing to move, but I don’t think we’ve done anything since that mandate was signed, since that paper was signed. I’m not a huge fan of Ab ed policy, because I think that’s exactly what it turns out to be (Interview, Apr 5, 2012).

Likewise, Thomas characterized the EAs as meaning little in the grand scheme of things:

I think of more concern to me about the Enhancement Agreement is that it's just, again, a lot of words and a lot of beautiful talk. But you know, whenever you implement any kind of policy or rules or a guideline, in this world, a guideline can mean nothing. Because that's the type of society we are living in, and it's an Agreement, and there's goals there. We try to do things around it, but in the end, it's business as usual sometimes (Interview, Feb 23, 2012).

Brenda also referred to the EA of her District as being little more than a bunch of ‘nice words’:

It's no real concrete commitment, but it says stuff like 'we want to facilitate active engagement in learning from K to 12.' Anyone can say
that. ‘We want to educate everybody about racism. We want to cultivate traditional cultural knowledge. We want to get rid of stereotypes.’ [...] It’s very wide-reaching. And it’s great. It all looks good in theory, but when it comes right down to it, there are so few people who are really committed to it (Interview, July 3, 2012).

Ahmed (2012) refers to this lack of commitment or willingness to change as ‘institutional inertia’ (p.26). She notes that the official or expressed desire of an organization to institutionalize diversity does not mean that the organization has opened itself up to meaningful change. Writing, instead, becomes an end in itself. Having a policy on Aboriginal education thus becomes equated with being good at Aboriginal education. As a form of image management, the presence of an EA creates an image of a school district as being open to and accepting of Aboriginal education25. In the process, the inequities that the documents were meant to unveil are further concealed. For this reason, the EA can be viewed as a non-performative document in that the identification of targets and goals for Aboriginal education come to stand in for the effects that the document has, in principle, committed school districts to bring about. In this respect, the more that a district presents itself as being open, the larger the barriers to change can seem.

Denise talked about her fear of having educational administrators restrict the potential and possibility of what Aboriginal education could be because it had been defined within an EA. In her words, “that's what I'm scared of, is that the education system will say ‘this is what it is.’ You said this is was it is, I asked you to define it and that's what you said it was. This is the EA. We asked you to define it, and this is what it is. This is what Aboriginal education is” (Interview, Mar 2, 2012). For Denise, her fear stems from the worry that the institution, in laying out what Aboriginal education ‘is,’ in the EAs, will only commit to a specific type of education, for example, programs that

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25 The notion of ‘image management’ is intimately connected with sociologist, Erving Goffman’s (1959) concept of ‘impression management,’ whereby individuals regulate and control information in social interactions in order to influence the perceptions held by them of others. Within institutional contexts, this can apply to the ways in which a company orchestrates its public image. In the case of school districts that have EAs, the document can be used as a perception-influencer, as I elucidate in the main body of this chapter.
increase Aboriginal students’ cultural awareness, at the expense of assistance with mainstream coursework. Beth spoke to this directly, stating that,

Institutional support, it depends, I guess. It’s hard to define it. It’s very elusive. Because you have support, but again... You have support in terms of if it fits into their idea of what Aboriginal education should look like institutionally – the institutional rules and guidelines for Aboriginal education. So if it can fit into that box somewhere, then you have the support to go ahead with it (Interview, Apr 5, 2012).

Commitment, in this instance, can be seen as closely linked with compliance in that the District will ‘commit’ only to the extent that it is required to do so. Ahmed (2012) observes that institutional commitment can be articulated without actually committing the institution to anything in particular. As I have argued above, EAs, as expressions of a district’s commitment to Aboriginal education, can become a stand in for actually doing the work needed. Having a document like the EA can function as a source of district pride in that it acts as a sign of the district’s commitment to Aboriginal education. As Ahmed puts it, “the point of the document can be to have a document you can point to” (p.90). The EA also functions as a checkmark in the tickbox of ‘Aboriginal education requirement.’ As the above participants have suggested, having the EA can serve as an illusion of backing something. However, as Ahmed observes, “commitment is not given by the document but depends on the work generated around the document” (p.118). It is the actual doing, of generating the institutional will to follow through, that is the most challenging.

In this section, I have demonstrated how EAs can be viewed as non-performative documents as they do not produce the effects that they name. Moreover, as a statement of commitment, the EA comes to stand in for institutional follow through. This is not to say that institutions are completely inactive. However, as Beth suggested, acceptable change and support is that which does not challenge the underlying colonial structures or fundamental ideology of the institution. Once ‘business as usual’ is questioned, however, the institution may react. I describe this reaction in some detail in the next section, where I explore what happens when calls for change are perceived as having ‘gone too far.’
Bishop (2005) defines ‘backlash’ as what happens when an institution “makes a sudden, energetic effort to reduce change. It has always put up resistance but has also accepted change to a certain point. It then balks because it somehow perceives the change as having ‘gone too far’” (p.119). For Bishop, ‘going too far’ from the vantage point of the institution entails change that threatens the internal structure and ideology of the institution itself. She likens ‘backlash’ of this threat to the spring-back action of stretched elastic. New policies that have been adopted and the inclusion of previously excluded groups amount to, what Bishop terms as, ‘token change,’ that is, change meant to quell opposition and deflect scrutiny away from the inner workings of the institution. However, when expectations of equality arise and minority employees become “less willing to behave as tokens,” the institution reaches its limit of acceptable change and “snaps back” (p.119).

Bishop (2005) identifies a number of institutional tactics associated with backlash. These include: reducing discrimination to a matter of perception, and placing the onus on victims to prove that discrimination has indeed occurred (p.129). According to her, these reactions are rooted in two misconceptions about oppression: that oppression within an organization is either present, or it is not; and that intention counts more than impact (p.120). With respect to the first misconception, Bishop suggests that this stems from Western dualistic assumptions of all or nothing, without recognizing that achieving equity is a “slow, complex, difficult and uneven process” (p.121). The second misconception stems from an over-personalized response to accusations of oppression, which assumes that “If I didn’t intend what I said to be racist/sexist, then it isn’t.” Together, these two misconceptions about oppression pose a threat to calls for change because it makes those who levied the accusations prone to blame.

Beth talked extensively about institutional reactions to calls for change from the Aboriginal team:

Well I’ve also heard the words recently that ‘no person is indispensible.’ And it’s like, ‘oh, interesting.’ I mean, there’s huge shake-ups in the Districts when it comes to Aboriginal staffing these
days. They’re trying new things and there’s a lot of shaking, and you’re almost sitting there thinking, ‘so what are they waiting for? Who’s going to fall out and then we can move on?’ Because policy and practice is ‘we change in disruption and people sort of filter out and then we can start implementing change with the new people that are coming in.’ Is that a change? Is that the way? And do you push hard enough so that people are going to fall out? It’s a fear. I know a lot of people who are afraid to voice things when it goes against the bigger voices in the system (Interview, Apr 5, 2012).

Beth’s statement encapsulates the danger of speaking out. In effect, the institution, instead of earnestly considering the concerns raised by Aboriginal educators, deflects the attention back onto subordinates by leveraging threats of punishment for critiquing the institution. The fear of losing one’s position altogether silences those who would dare to go against institutional ‘business as usual’. Beth continued, talking about the difficulties of promoting a broader awareness and acceptance of Aboriginal education initiatives within schools: “it’s difficult to do. And it’s honestly like trying to break down a door, you know, and once you get it open to try to keep it open” (Interview, Apr 5, 2012). As space invaders, Aboriginal workers have to be constantly vigilant in ensuring that space is created for them. Ahmed (2012) observes, “the struggle for diversity to become an institutional thought requires certain people to ‘fight their way.’ Not only this – the persistence required exists in necessary relation to the resistance encountered” (p.26). Thus, the harder Aboriginal workers push for both psychic and physical space within institutions, the greater the resistance to such disruption, as ‘jagged worldviews collide’ (Littlebear, 2000). Due to belief on the part of many Settlers that Aboriginal knowledge is “in binary opposition to ‘scientific,’ ‘western,’ ‘Eurocentric,’ or ‘modern’ knowledge” (Battiste, 2002, p.5) Aboriginal employees and the associations of ‘other’ that they might be affiliated with generate unease. Seen as jarring to the epistemological foundations upon which Settler education rests, Districts move to defend themselves against such intrusion by relegating such knowledge to ‘enrichment’ or ‘alternative’ programs, as Darlene expressed earlier in the chapter. The ‘fear of voicing things,’ that Beth mentions above speaks to the fear of coming up against something that does not move, of being ostracized even more than one already is, of losing ground when there is not much ground to begin with. Ahmed (2012) adds that speaking up can be interpreted, “as a sign of ingratitude, of failing to be grateful for the hospitality we received by virtue of our arrival. This very structural position of being the guest, or the
stranger, the one who receives hospitality, allows an act of inclusion to maintain the form of exclusion” (p.43). With speaking comes risk, and only the individual can know for her/himself whether such risk is worth it. However, as Lorde (1984/2007) powerfully articulates: “the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak... we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottle, and we will still be no less afraid” (p.42). Silence, she further observes, will not protect us. For this reason, she encourages her audience to speak, to voice ‘what must be spoken’ so that we do not choke on “the weight of that silence” (p.46). Better to take the risk of having what was shared “bruised or misunderstood” than never be heard at all (p.40). I return to and expand upon this conversation in Chapter 7 when I discuss the coalitional possibilities that may arise from daring to speak to uncomfortable issues.

4.7. Summary

In this chapter, I have investigated some of the ways in which Aboriginal workers are discriminated against within schools. I began by suggesting that Aboriginal staff may be characterised as ‘space invaders’ (Puwar, 2004), in that they occupy positions for which they are not the somatic norm. The fixed Western gaze on the ‘Other,’ has endowed white individuals “with a superior sense of their ‘natural’ right to occupy privileged spaces of institutional representation” (p.40). This gaze has simultaneously racialized personhood so that non-white individuals are perceived as subhuman (St. Denis, 2007). As I have argued, essentialist Settler ideas of Aboriginal people as trapped within a primordial and romantic past are at odds with the ‘rationalist,’ ‘modern,’ and ‘progressive’ aims of Western education models. Puwar (2004) adds, “It is, after all, women and non-whites who represent the negative side of the binaries of nature/culture, body/mind, affectivity/rationality, subjectivity/objectivity and particularity/universality” (p.142).

For Aboriginal peoples to reinvent the spaces in which they were once oppressed can be disruptive for many Settlers who base their colonial positionalities upon an ‘inferior’ Aboriginal ‘other’. As a consequence, Aboriginal individuals are often subjects of Settler surveillance, assuming both the burdens of doubt and of representation for occupying roles not typically held by them in the past. As such, Aboriginal staff
members are often ‘strait-jacketed’ into roles based on occupational scripts written by Settlers. These ‘scripts’ are grounded in stereotypical and misplaced notions and conceptualizations of the work for which they are fit. As I contended, Aboriginal people were (and are) thought by many not to have the capacities necessary for civic engagement in Canadian society.

From here, I shifted to examine several of the ways in which Aboriginal workers can be excluded. I established that Aboriginal employees face both psychic and physical barriers in finding a ‘place’ within schools. I then considered what happens when Aboriginal people are allowed into the inner circle of power and the pressure that Aboriginal administrators may feel to be complicit in narratives that deny inequity and difference. To revisit the passage I cited from Lorde (1984/2007), “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p.112).

The next section explored the ways in which many of those working within institutions convince themselves they have ‘done their part’ by considering how Enhancement Agreement initiatives get heralded as a measure of ‘good performance.’ Here, I demonstrated how EAs can be viewed as non-performative documents as they do not produce the effects that they name. Moreover, as a statement of commitment, the EA comes to stand in for institutional follow through. This is not to say that institutions completely stonewall change. However, as I argued, acceptable change and support is that which does not challenge the underlying structures or fundamental premise of the institution. Once ‘business as usual’ is questioned, however, the institution is likely to react through tactics of backlash, such as reducing discrimination to a matter of perception, or through isolation and vilification of those who dare to speak out (Bishop, 2005). The final section explored what happens when calls for change are perceived by those in positions of power as having ‘gone too far.’

In the chapters that follow, I underscore the different strategies or ‘tools,’ Aboriginal educators are using to counter a colonial approach to difference and relationship building. The following chapter explores the challenges of internalized oppression, in addition to strategies of decolonization, while Chapter 6 considers potential approaches for embracing difference and intergroup reparative relationships.
Chapter 7 returns to the legacy of institutional and structural oppression, and considers further possibilities for coalition building.
Chapter 5.   The Impacts of Colonialism on Aboriginal Intragroup Dynamics

5.1. Introduction

Contemporary Aboriginal identities and intragroup relationships are highly political and deeply influenced by colonial laws and policies that continue to define and maintain what counts as an ‘authentic’ Aboriginal identity and who belongs in an Aboriginal community (Lawrence, 2004; St. Denis, 2007). For many of the participants of this study, the ramifications of colonialism on identity construction and intragroup dynamics are a lived reality. One of the questions I asked during the individual interview sessions was whether individuals felt as though they had institutional and peer support for their involvement in Aboriginal education contexts. Their answers revealed a complex picture that demonstrated the inextricable relationships between colonialism, intragroup violence, and intergenerational trauma.

In this chapter, I analyze participants’ responses in order to investigate the underlying thread of colonial influences. I begin with a discussion of the complexity of relationships within an Aboriginal education team in a Lower Mainland school district. To varying extents, many participants spoke of how relationships among team members had become strained and what factors might have contributed to such tensions.

In the next section, I consider how colonial influences on Aboriginal identity politics affect intragroup cohesion by focusing on Andrea, a mixed-blood Aboriginal woman who felt frustrated with having to perform a recognizable and acceptable Aboriginal identity for her peers. I contend that these requests are based in a colonial legacy that has greatly influenced group belonging criteria within Aboriginal communities and further argue that recognition of this legacy is necessary if the complexities of intragroup identity politics are to be understood.
Next, I draw upon critical women-of-colour feminists and activists, like Audre Lorde (1984/2007), Gloria Anzaldúa (2009), and Jo-Ann Episkewew (2009) who propose that healing from colonial trauma entails breaking the silence around the shame of oppression. To this end, I highlight the story of Gwen, an Aboriginal Support Worker who worked to communicate better in order to repair relationships amongst her family and, through the process, practiced *survivance*, which I define later in the chapter. First, however, I turn to an Aboriginal education team and explore the various factors, as identified by them, that affect group cohesion.

5.2. Working Through Intragroup Tension: Factors Affecting Group Cohesion

As noted above, one of the questions I asked during the individual interview sessions was whether individuals felt as though they had institutional and peer support for their involvement in Aboriginal education contexts (see Appendix I). To varying extents, many participants spoke of the intragroup dynamics between Aboriginal education team members and how relationships between team members had become strained. Henrietta offered her insights into how tensions might have arisen:

I think how it first started was that... there was some power struggles between the new staff and the old staff. [...] Things started getting shaky. And I think, to be honest, us Support Workers felt quite offended a number of times because we’re older staff and we’re a big part in advocating for staff expansion, and yet sometimes, we were referred to sometimes as ‘just the Support Worker.’ Sometimes they would be mistaken for us, and they would respond by, ‘we’re not just the Support Workers’ you know? So it was clear that there was a status being established between the two groups. And I think some of them got kind of offended by it and it really started to damage some relationships (Interview, Mar 9, 2012).

For Henrietta, creating distinctions between newer staff and ‘just’ the Support Workers led to feelings of resentment on the part of those individuals who had been there longer and had advocated for the hiring of new staff. To distinguish themselves from the Support workers was, from Henrietta’s perspective, a slight in which the importance of their roles was trivialized. Shirley, a fellow Support Worker and a member of the ‘older staff,’ offered a different perspective than Henrietta:
I have to be frank with you, sometimes the old crew... are pretty set in our ways. Right? I think it's been kind of tough on the new crew to kind of feel like they're belonging. I think ideas are different. [...] You know, I think there's a little bit of dissension amongst people and groups. Personally, I think it's all a matter of people understanding each other enough. I don't think they do. I think it's more reactive, and I think some of that comes down from the top. You know, if you're feeling like you're kind of [mimics being strangled] like this, that you tend to be on your guard all the time about everybody and everything (Interview, Mar 9, 2012).

In this interpretation, Shirley acknowledged how being ‘set in our ways,’ might affect newer staff members' sense of belonging. However, instead of locating tensions with the actions of newer staff, she attributed the setting of one’s ways to being ‘in a stranglehold’ by administration. The tightening of the administrative grip around the figurative necks of Aboriginal education workers caused individuals to be on edge and on guard, even amongst each other. Thomas echoed Shirley’s sentiments from the perspective of someone newer to the Aboriginal education team:

I think what had happened initially was that the people who were hired, they basically did what they wanted, when they wanted, how they wanted... [My colleagues have] this concept of ‘we've done this this way for how long. We think it's successful, and so we're going to sort of impose on the rest of them what they need to do’ (Interview, Feb 23, 2012).

From Thomas’s vantage point, more entrenched staff were ‘imposing’ their approaches onto newer staff because they had been used to doing things a certain way for so long. However, Thomas did not appear to consider why staff who had been there longer might be more entrenched in their position, as Shirley had reported.

During the group interview session I conducted, Beth critically reflected on what may underpin the division and tension between Aboriginal workers within the Aboriginal education team of which she is a member. Like Thomas, Beth saw the intragroup tensions among team members as, in part, a result of newer members coming in and shaking up an established way of doing things. “First of all,” she stated,

there is a differentiation between established workers and incoming workers and there’s always discussion of how things have happened before... [It’s] a power struggle, and it becomes ‘well we were here
and we began this program and we know,’ as opposed to ‘well maybe we need to try some new things, because in spite of everything that we’re doing still, our graduation rates are not changing,’ (Group interview, June 14, 2012).

However, Beth pushed her observations further to consider why older, more established members might feel threatened by newer staff coming in:

The education that they’re coming in with is incredible. So I think it is fear in that ‘you may have a degree in here and a degree in there, but I have all this knowledge because I’ve been in here and I’ve worked with these kids right from the beginning.’ So it becomes a fear of whose knowledge is more valuable, so whose knowledge should carry more weight and whose voice should be heard ... There’s such a struggle within our teams, and it comes from the larger picture (Group Interview, June 14, 2012).

Here, Beth builds on Thomas’s sentiments in her thinking through how external sources of power and validation - ‘the larger picture’ - might cause older staff members to be wary of newcomers. New hires are coming into the system with a greater amount of administrative-approved education, which can be seen as threatening to the knowledge and experience of older staff. As Beth points out, underlying the wariness of newer staff on the part of more established individuals is a fear that their knowledge will be seen as more valuable, their knowledge will carry more weight, and their voices will be heard louder than those voices shaped by experience within the system: “There’s always the discrepancy between who has the paperwork and who doesn’t and who has the more power so who has the more voice” (Beth, Group Interview, June 14, 2012). When paperwork becomes associated with power and voice, those without paperwork may find their power to voice and to effect change reduced. Mindful of this potential scenario, older staff may work to intimidate and silence newer group members, though it is their own loss of power that they may fear the most. As Beth admitted, “As a new worker, I’m constantly wondering about what should I say, what shouldn’t I say ... those positions that are in place have been there for a while. And coming in as a new person, it’s hard. It’s hard to insert your voice into established contexts because you do end up hitting walls” (Group interview, June 14, 2012). Thomas echoed Beth’s concerns, stating that,
Sometimes I feel that the tensions that we have amongst us are what silences us because that brings us down ... I’m more afraid of, amongst my own team members, to say something that’s going on, because that’s going to stress me out more, and that’s going to make me not want to do much at all (Group interview, June 14, 2012).

In Thomas’s view, fear of speaking up within one’s own team serves to silence and de-motivate. The tension that silence and fear causes functions like a weight ‘bringing us down,’ into a quagmire of inaction. Beth likens the intragroup struggles faced by the Aboriginal education team as akin to bands determining band membership:

when you look at things like blood quantum and who’s Indian enough, I know that my band is struggling with that as well: who should and who shouldn’t be. It’s about, ‘well, your parents are from here and here and here, so how much of our band blood do you actually have?’ But why would you do that when if you’re limiting your numbers as to who fits on to your reserve. Eventually, those are going to go down to nothing because everybody marries off-reserve, so you’re not going to have a membership. Yet we tend to do that. And it’s the same with this. It’s the constant fear of opening yourself up and losing whatever you have. So I see band memberships and band members who live on-reserve struggle so much to open those doors because they don’t want to share what little they have. And yes, that’s a problem for Aboriginal people as a whole because we’re struggling to hold on to what little we have. And I wonder, is that what we’re doing as educators as well? Are we struggling to hold on to what little we have because we don’t want to lose it? (Group interview, June 14, 2012).

The fear of loss is a salient point that Beth makes in relation to intragroup tensions. The fear of ‘opening yourself up and losing whatever you have’ plays out in Aboriginal education contexts, yet is part of a larger colonial infrastructure that pits Aboriginal people against one another. As Thomas King (2003) argues, identity legislation “has also had the unforgivable consequence of setting Native against Native [...] the true tragedy [is that] the creation of legal categories has made us our own enemy” (p.149). He cites the example of band councils who sought to deny membership to previously enfranchised members with the passing of Bill C-31 in 1985 “out of fear that the influx of C-31 Indians would drain the tribe’s limited resources” (p.150). I continue this analysis in the following section.
5.2.1. Analysis

The tensions residing within the Aboriginal education team can be seen as a form of “verbal and emotional violence…[doubling] back on itself” (Anzaldúa, 2009, p.285). Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) names the underlying causes of infighting as systemic and internalized racism: “Instead of joining forces to fight imperialism we’re derailed into fighting with each other, into manoeuvring for power positions. Each struggles to be heard” (p.285). In struggling to be heard, members of the Aboriginal education team enact violence upon each other. From the perspective of some of the more established employees, like Henrietta, such violence takes form as the illegitimating and trivialization of their positions and experience. For newer employees like Thomas and Beth, the violence manifests through tactics of intimidation and silencing. Underlying the actions of both groups may well be fear. On the one hand, older employees fear that the paperwork and credentials of newer personnel entering the group will outweigh their experience. On the other hand, more recent employees are afraid to speak out and potentially disrupt or displease already established team members. The actions (and inactions) of both groups are likely connected to a fear of loss, as Beth observed above. Anzaldúa (2009) writes that instances of contention are rooted in issues related to power in decision making: Because marginalized groups share a long history of “theft of entitlement,” (p.285) borders between become tightened and reinforced in order to protect against encroachment: the fewer the individuals within the inner circle, the fewer persons to vie for power to make decisions. As such, intragroup tensions may be seen as part of a larger struggle to “hold on to what little we have” (Beth, Group interview, June 14, 2012).

At the same time, participants acknowledged that intragroup tensions were orchestrated by overarching factors. Shirley posited intragroup tension as being the result of increasing administrative surveillance, which caused anxiety and kept people ‘on their guard.’ Beth also recognized that the struggles faced by the Aboriginal education team were part of ‘the larger picture.’ Within the group interview session, Beth and Thomas talked through how intragroup tensions could be beneficial to colonial administration. Thomas saw the discord among their group as advantageous to administrative higher-ups: “The fact that we can’t agree amongst ourselves serves a
purpose. Some people are happy when certain people can't organize themselves and get it together... It's like when we're not that organized, we're not that much of a presence (Group interview, June 14, 2012). Beth followed on the heels of Thomas’s comment with the insight that developing strategies to create intragroup conflict has been that way “since colonial contact. I mean, it’s for money, it’s for power, it’s for everything. And education is just one little... cog in the wheel,” (Group interview, June 14, 2012).

Throughout the history of Aboriginal/Settler contact, the colonial government has worked to divide Aboriginal peoples and communities through policies aimed at enfranchisement, Status differentiation, and geographic displacement (Bhandar, Fumia, & Newman 2008, Lawrence, 2004; Weaver, 2001). Less often examined is what happens when power is perceived to have returned to disenfranchised Aboriginal communities. Métis playwright, Ian Ross’s (1998) play, “fareWel,” is illustrative of the way in which the colonial regime has worked to divide Aboriginal peoples in communities through the perceived restoration of power. “fareWel” is set on a fictional reserve called Partridge Crop, located in an area of southern Manitoba. At the beginning of the play, the audience learns that the federal government has transferred all control and responsibility for delivering services like health, education and social welfare to the band and has also abdicated responsibility for managing the band’s finances; depending on population size, that would translate into millions of dollars. Though the situation Ross presents is fictional, Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009) contends that similar scenarios are happening on reserves across Canada. She calls these colonial “claims for altruism highly questionable,” adding that “Turning over control of multi-million dollar budgets to people who lack education and training and who have lived their lives in poverty is tantamount to setting the stage for administrative failure” (p.176). This is precisely what happens to the political leadership of Partridge Crop who, as a result of a lack of education and training, mismanage the band’s funds. As a reaction to the mismanagement, the government takes back partial control of the band’s finances and puts them into receivership.

The play goes on to explore the struggles of six band members as they attempt to unite their community and restore it back to health. One scene explores the internal
conflict between Teddy, a potential leadership candidate, and Rachel, a prostitute who questions his ability to govern. Unable to answer her challenges, Teddy assaults Rachel by pulling her hair. For Episkenew (2009), this instance in the play illustrates the cathartic power of intragroup violence: In attacking another, the perpetrator of violence achieves momentary alleviation by hurting that part of oneself that is reminiscent of helplessness and a lack of hope. I focus on this instance to highlight how the intragroup tensions may also be demonstrative of cathartic violence – a deflection from one’s own position of relative powerlessness. Due, in part, to the increasing administrative surveillance and accountability of the Aboriginal education team, intragroup tensions are heightened. That feeling of powerlessness, of a lack of control in areas that were once theirs to control, may have caused group members to lash out, to 'hold onto what little they had,' for fear of losing it all. Like the Partridge Crop band, wrestling with intragroup conflict legitimizes greater administrative control of the Aboriginal education team. As Beth pointed out, education is just one other ‘cog-in-the-wheel’ of colonial power maintenance, another strategy to rationalize control and subjugation. As Audre Lorde (1984/2007) writes, distortions about each other have arisen from a history created about our differences, “it is those distortions which separate us. And we must ask ourselves: Who profits from all this?” (p.129).

While intragroup relations are strained by competing claims for decision-making power, they are also influenced by identity politics. In the next section, I consider how the colonial influence on Aboriginal identity politics may affect intragroup cohesion.

5.3. “If I Can Teach You How to Can Salmon, Do I Have Membership?”: Performing Identities in Intragroup Contexts

Much like gender performances, Bryant Alexander (2004) suggests that cultural performances use performative elements to mark association. Such delineations depend on “notions of territoriality and geographical claims,” (p.379), among other categories, which serve to signal to other members of the group whether or not one is ‘in’. Alexander maintains that, while categories of membership are social constructions, their pervasiveness is the result of their apparent verity and the deep investments that
both individuals and communities have in distinguishing themselves from others. Membership is thus maintained through “recognizable performative practices” that are seen as valid by others in the group (p.380).

Within systems of education, cultural performances are typically perceived as necessary for Aboriginal educators as a measure of credibility. As I discussed in the previous chapter, occupational scripts metaphorically dictate that Aboriginal individuals perform an expected idea of what Aboriginal educators ought to do as a way of proving that they are capable of doing the job and assuaging the ‘burden of doubt’ (Purwar, 2004, p.59) laid on them by Settler administrators and colleagues. To clarify, the ‘burden of doubt’ is inflicted upon Aboriginal educators because they are expected to take on all things ‘Aboriginal’; they bear a ‘burden of doubt’ in that they must prove they are able to take on a different role outside of that which is traditionally in the purview of ‘Aboriginal education,’ such as culturally focussed instruction. Further, this credibility extends beyond intergroup dynamics to intragroup contexts where Aboriginal individuals may find that they have to prove to each other their worthiness to work in Aboriginal education contexts.

As a person of mixed Aboriginal and Settler ancestry, Andrea relayed to me that she felt as though she had ‘something to prove’ to those who doubted her credentials:

I feel like as long as I’m not full blooded, I will always have something to prove to somebody. And in some areas, some circumstances, it doesn’t matter, but in some it does. Like I feel like I have to wear my eagle feather if I’m going to be taken seriously at times...The people I work with, a lot of them are urban Natives, so it’s like, ‘can you teach us how to make jam? How do you do this?’ That kind of thing. And it’s like, ‘okay, if I can teach you how to can salmon, am I in? Do I have membership?’ Like just to be frank about it, it’s a struggle (Group interview, June 14, 2012).

The dynamic that Andrea relates seems to be symptomatic of a cultural revivalist, or tradition-centric, perspective whereby traditional knowledge and behaviour is seen as central to Aboriginal identity (Lawrence, 2004). In order to be seen as an authentic Aboriginal person, Andrea feels that she must perform for her peers in ways that demonstrate she is knowledgeable in traditional practices. In making this argument, I am not attacking ‘Aboriginality’ outright, nor do I intend to go down a path of
deconstruction that de-historicizes and relativizes categories of membership. As Anita Pilgrim (2001) observes, even if categories – in this case, ‘Aboriginal’ – are socially constructed, it does not mean that they can be easily deconstructed and reconstructed. Alexander (2004) adds, “although performance can manifest the subject of its focus, it does not modify the materiality of embodied presence and the social investment in race” (p.380). Sandy Grande (2000) argues that essentialising Aboriginal identity is seen, by some, “as the last line of defense against capitalistic encroachment and Western hegemony and the last available means for retaining cultural integrity and tribal sovereignty … if you cannot ‘objectively’ define a people you cannot define their rights” (p.351). Thus, while Grande is not advocating for a return to essentialist logic, she cautions that it is important to recognize that essentialism is seen as a viable defense against colonial imposition. Plains Cree Métis poet and scholar, Emma LaRocque (2002) further contends that post-colonial and post-structural emphases on “hybridity,” “liminality” and “boundary-crossing” can eclipse Aboriginal cultural knowledge and the colonial experience; “we are all deeply colonized, white and Native alike, and no amount of disassembling ‘the Native experience’ to accommodate globalized post-colonial theories can undo this homegrown colonial burden” (p.222). It is this ‘homegrown colonial burden’ that I wish to emphasize in asking the reader to consider what underpins Andrea’s need to perform an Aboriginal identity that other Aboriginal people will recognize and validate. As I discussed in Chapter 2, traditional Aboriginal and colonial markers of who may or may not be considered Aboriginal are inextricably linked. Lawrence (2004) contends “Aboriginal identity flows from a complex history of colonization and strategies of resistance” (p.187). Denying the impacts of colonial policies on Aboriginal peoples and communities only serves to inculcate further divisiveness. In my view, this is the central issue that Andrea’s statement alerts us to.

Because she is not “full blooded”, Andrea perceives her colleagues to question the extent of her cultural background. As Lawrence (2004) notes, how ‘Indian’ one looks is a central marker for group participation. She continues: “the violence of racism that darker Native people must negotiate on a daily basis must be seen as integral to the lateral hostility that their denials of lighter Native people’s Indianness represents”

26 See also Gayatri Spivak’s (1985) discussion of “strategic essentialism.”
This latter point needs emphasizing because it is central to understanding the situation that Andrea finds herself in. This is illustrated best through Joanne Episkenew’s (2009) analysis of Vera Manuel’s (1998) play “Strength of Indian Women.”

In “Strength of Indian Women,” Manuel (1998) explores the intergenerational effects of residential schools through three principal characters – Agnes, Lucy, and Mariah. Each of the women experienced residential schools in different ways, mediated, in part, by skin colour. For example, Lucy harbours resentment for Mariah because she was treated better than Lucy and Agnes. “Because they equate Mariah’s light-coloured skin with virtue, she becomes the favourite of the nuns and priest” (Episkenew, 2009, p.167). Although Mariah had no control over her favouritism, Lucy blames her for this inequity. As Episkenew (2009) observes,

Painful memories of residential school are always with her, and it is easier – and safer – to blame another ‘Indian’ than it would be to blame ‘God’s helpers.’ And so the residential school policy succeeds in dividing Indigenous people by creating a hierarchy within their ranks based on the colour of their skin (p.168).

For the women of Manuel’s play, the residential school experience taught them that survival depends on being silent. Mariah is haunted by the memories of witnessing her friend being murdered at the hands of a nun – pushed down a flight of stairs for refusing to stop speaking her tribal language (Episkenew, 2009). As she grows older, Mariah finds herself unable to repress her memories from childhood. It is not until she tells the other women her story that she is able to find relief from her trauma.

Verna St. Denis (2007) discusses the ways that Aboriginal intragroup identity politics are entrenched in a colonial history. Aboriginal people “are, in part, living out a long-established politically charged script of who belongs and what it means to belong to an Aboriginal community” (p.1069). She further maintains that analyses of conflicts arising from identity politics need to consider the varying capacities of Aboriginal people to reconnect with their cultural heritage. Seeing one’s level of cultural authenticity as a problem rather than a product of systemic inequality and discrimination can result in another form of ‘blaming the victim,’ whereby Aboriginal people are seen as aberrant for not having ‘enough’ culture. She effectively illustrates how parents, living under colonial
and racist conditions, made decisions that they thought were best for securing the future of their children. In her words:

In a strategy of cultural revitalization, these effects would come back to haunt Aboriginal people who no longer speak their Aboriginal languages and who are no longer familiar with their historical cultural practices and customs. These Aboriginal ancestors and their descendants are produced deviant once again, continually making the wrong decisions, and thereby held accountable [sic] for cultural and social change brought about by colonization (p.1079).

Andrea’s is one of the multitudes of families whose lives have been affected in such a way. Though she has reconnected with her cultural heritage, she remained unaware of the Cherokee traditions of her father’s people for many years because of intergenerational effects of oppression.

It’s only been since I’ve been a mother that my dad has really come into his own healing with his culture, and different teachings and his own identity as an Aboriginal man ... He was raised with the ‘don’t tell anyone you’re Indian, and no one will ever know.’ Cause he looks like he could be Spanish. And it’s become important as he's getting older to let me know where he comes from. And there’s no one around any more to shame him (Interview, June 5, 2012).

As Andrea’s comments show, the legacy of intergenerational shame caused her father to turn away from his culture. It was only later in life that he had healed enough to accept and own his identity as an Aboriginal man. Thus, to blame Andrea and her family for their lack of (or later arrival to) Aboriginal cultural heritage overlooks the problem of systemic social inequality. As St. Denis (2007) argues, First Nations people can broaden their solutions to inequality by encouraging analyses of how historical and contemporary practices of inequality serve to restrict the aspirations of Aboriginal people.

In sum, the requests for Andrea to perform a recognizable Aboriginal identity are based in a colonial legacy that has greatly influenced who belongs and what it means to belong to an Aboriginal community (St. Denis, 2007). As such, it is important to recognize the legacy of colonialism if the complexities of intragroup identity politics are to be understood. As Episkenew (2009) suggests, healing from colonial trauma, in part, entails breaking the silence around the shame of oppression. The next section
highlights the story of Gwen, who learned to communicate better in order to repair relationships amongst her family and, through the process, practiced survivance.

5.4. Speaking to Heal: Good Communication as a Practice of Survivance

Gwen spoke about her journey of healing that allowed her to get to a place where she could communicate in a “healthful” way with others. For her, the impetus to become a better communicator began with a desire to repair familial relationships:

[The desire to communicate] had nothing to do with education; it had to do with my family. How do I get what I feel back across to my family? And that we break some of these cycles that are not of our doing, but were created because of what was happening to us because of mainstream stuff and the rules and laws that were put onto us?

“Colonialism,” writes Mohawk/Métis scholar Laura Hall (in House, Hall, & Pine, 2008), “is a system meant to confuse, to mix up our minds, and to control us” (p.126). The efficacy of colonial strategies lies in their ability to obfuscate the sources of oppression, to turn the source of blame back onto the oppressed so that they believe that they are deserving of their socio-historical circumstance (Freire, 1970/2007). Like Mariah in Manuel’s (1998) play “The Strength of Indian Women,” many Aboriginal peoples have learned that survival in Settler society depends on being silent, and that the stories and memories of colonial trauma stay buried deep within one’s psyche. However, while one may be able to repress stories of trauma, it is harder to bury accompanying emotions, like shame and anger (Episkenew, 2009). It is this unresolved trauma, Episkenew (2009) argues, that continues to wound Aboriginal communities generation after generation. She offers a powerful account of how silence perpetuates unhealthy relationships via an analysis of the experiences of two of Manuel’s characters: Sousette and her daughter Eva. Her insights are worth quoting at length:

The traumatic memories of LeBlanc’s sexual abuse remain inside Sousette and fester there, and so she lashes out at her daughter who reminds her of herself. Unaware of her mother’s story, Eva accepts her mother’s treatment of her as evidence that her mother does not love her and as proof that she is inherently unlovable. In some ways this is even
more damaging than the residential school abuse. None of the Indigenous children who attended residential schools had any cause to expect love from the school staff. The schools were the creation of the colonial regime, and their mandate was to kill the Indian in the child. Eva, on the other hand, certainly had cause to expect love from her mother, the woman who gave her life. Not surprisingly, her mother’s betrayal fills her with hurt, and that hurt is expressed in anger, the only form of emotional expression she has witnessed and learned (pp.169-170).

In this excerpt, Episkenew demonstrates how trauma continues to be passed down through generations of Aboriginal families. Violence, not love, was learned at residential schools, and the violence experienced there bred shame and subsequently more violence (Episkenew, 2009). Speaking of her own childhood experiences, Lorde (1984/2007) writes that her mother’s silence around color disarmed her and taught her “isolation, fury, mistrust, self-rejection, and sadness,” (p.149). She adds, “Children know only themselves as reason for the happenings in their lives. So of course as a child I decided that there must be something terribly wrong with me that inspired such contempt” (p.146). Without the language and tools to assess the hatred put upon you from the outside world, anger manifests as a quagmire that encircles you and “spill[s] out against whomever [is] closest that share[s] those hated selves” (p. 150). As she further observes, it is easier to manage external manifestations of oppression than it is to deal with the distortions we have internalized about each other and ourselves.

The intergenerational effects of colonial policies were also noted by 47% of the study participants. Tina, an Aboriginal Resource Teacher, and Thomas, an Aboriginal Support worker, both spoke about the internalized oppression and shame that they observed in some of the Aboriginal youth with whom they worked. Tina remarked, “some of our students are really embarrassed of their identity, and they don’t want to be involved in anything [to do with Aboriginal programs] at all,” (Interview, March 29, 2012). Likewise, Thomas observed, “the kids refuse to talk about their Aboriginal ancestry or where they’re from. […] So kids are ashamed; they’re really ashamed,” (Interview, February 23, 2012). He recounted an interaction that he had with one particular student who refused to identify or participate in Aboriginal education programs. “I sat her down and I had a conversation and asked her, ‘why have you taken this stance?’ She said, ‘well because all my family members are alcoholics and they’re failures and I don’t want to be like that,’ ” (Focus Group Interview, June 14, 2012). Thomas explained that he tried
to convey to her that “being successful and being Aboriginal” were not incongruous (ibid.). During the group interview, where Thomas shared this exchange, he attributed the “black and white” thinking of many Aboriginal students to a lack of understanding regarding the ramifications of colonialism (ibid.). As he contended, Aboriginal programming teaches youth “beading or some craftwork, but they’re not learning the actual history [of colonialism]. [As a result] they’re not understanding why their families are the way they are” (ibid.). As Tina and Thomas indicate, the rejection of heritage on the part of Aboriginal youth speaks to an underlying need to examine and speak to the underlying historical causes of shame and internalized oppression and echoes Hall’s (2008) earlier assertion that the potency of colonialism lies in its ability to turn sources of blame back onto the oppressed.

Krista, a high school teacher of Settler descent, shared with me a classroom session she facilitated wherein Aboriginal children and their parents discussed residential schools and the intergenerational impacts of these schools on Aboriginal families. As she observed: “It was really, really intense, because a lot of the students [and] their families had never talked about it” (Interview May 6, 2012). During a debrief session with the students afterward, Krista noted that many began to make linkages between colonialism and the intergenerational effects on their families. For example, two students spoke of their grandmother and mother respectively, commenting, “‘I’m starting to get why my grandmother was zealously Christian,’ or ‘I’m getting why my mother is very permissive,’ ” (ibid.). Krista also commented that at the end of the semester, a student, who had identified privately as Aboriginal but had not disclosed his identity to his friends, openly discussed his heritage: “At the very end of the semester, he brought in his drum that his sister had made him, and he talked about his drum; that was a huge moment” (ibid.). In this instance, discussing the intergenerational impacts of colonialism with family members provided a forum to explore the root causes of oppression and ongoing impacts of colonial policies on Aboriginal communities and families. For one student, having the space to explore the legacy of colonialism potentially contributed to a sense of confidence to embrace, and subsequently announce to others, his Aboriginal heritage.
Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) states that dialogue is imperative in the struggle against internalized oppression. In order for communities to move forward, cumulative loss and trauma need to be addressed, and ways of healing damaged psyches must be found. Likewise, Episkenew (2009) believes that relief from trauma will come from breaking the silence of shame and fear. To return to Gwen, part of rehabilitating relationships with her family came from her recognition that the destructive relationships were ‘not of our doing,’ but were created by federal policy. Lorde (1984/2007) suggests that fear of one’s anger teaches nothing. However, by scrutinizing anger, by ‘following the threads of rage’ to a place of vulnerability and pain, anger can be a source of liberation. In her words, “anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification” (p.127).

In the service and vision of a future of repaired familial relationships, Gwen ‘followed the threads’ of her rage to the underlying sources of oppression that intersected in her life:

I had to learn all about ‘isms.’ Racism, homophobia, sexism, and all that. As an Aboriginal woman, there’s a lot of sexism put on us. So that I learned before I learned the communication styles. That was one of the most important things for me to recognize: what is racism? What is all of that? ... ‘Cause I’ve been on the receiving end of racism, sexism, and all of these sorts of things that you can think of. [...] To me, that’s so important to raise the awareness for self in that and how do I see myself looking at these ‘isms’ and stuff. Where do I place myself in that? And how can I undo the hurt that may have been caused because of these ‘isms’? As an Aboriginal woman in this world, we’re always looked at as a piece of meat and all this kind of stuff, so how do I get myself to say, ‘that’s your perception of me. That’s not who I am,’ and working on that for me. That was one of the things I realized also helped me to be a good communicator. I had to look at those parts of me as well (Interview, June 12, 2012).

For Gwen, learning about the ways racism, sexism and other forms of oppression intersected in her life was an integral component of learning how to become a better communicator. Anzaldúa (2009) calls the work of healing the coyolxauqui imperative, the search for inner completeness that draws upon suffering as a motivating force of creativity. “All of life’s adventures go into the cauldron, la hoya, where all fragments, inconsistencies, contradictions are stirred and cooked to a new integration. They undergo transformation” (p.292). For Anzaldúa, these ‘fragments, inconsistencies,
contradictions’ inhabit the body, the vessel within which all of our responses to the world take place. For healing to happen, we must “stay focused on the point of intersection (nepantla) between inner and outer worlds” (ibid.). She identifies individuals who are able to creatively focus on nepantla as nepantleras. Such persons, she states, are “supreme border crossers” (p.293). They are able to move between inner and outer worlds, they do not get locked into one perception; they possess a gift of vision, and are able to recognize one’s cultural conditioning. Further, “they serve as agents of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater conocimiento; they serve as reminders of each other’s search for wholeness of being” (ibid.).

Based on the above interview excerpts, Gwen could be said to embody qualities of a nepantlera, as defined by Anzaldúa (2009). In this excerpt, she demonstrates how she was able to recognize her cultural conditioning by looking at the ‘fragments, inconsistencies, and contradictions’ within her that have been affected by ‘isms.’ Gwen also illustrates how working to undo hurt begins with recognizing and locating one’s place within colonial discourse and examining one’s relationship to colonialism. This process entailed recognizing ‘isms’ as external to her personhood and acknowledging that she is more than the sum of colonial definitions and societal assumptions of who Aboriginal people are or ought to be. Gwen also embodies a nepantlera because her journey of healing the rifts between her family and within herself has to potential to inspire and challenge others to a deeper awareness, a greater conscientization, and a reminder that healing, be it intra or intergroup, is ultimately a search for wholeness of being, a coalition of the self via a recognition of and a reconciliation with embedded colonial attitudes and beliefs.

Further, Gwen’s journey of healing through positive and proactive communication may be seen as an important strategy for survivance. Revived by Anishinaabe theorist Gerald Vizenor, survivance was an English word, roughly synonymous with survival, which fell out of use in the nineteenth century (Kroeber, 2008). Vizenor (2008) has reclaimed the word to signify survival through resistance. “The suffix ance,” he writes, “is a quality of action ... Survivance, then, is the action, condition, and quality, and sentiments of the verb survive, ‘to remain alive or in existence,’ to outlive, persevere with a suffix of survivancy” (p.19). Vizenor elaborates that survivance is not a theory or an
ideology: it is a practice that creates an active presence, which dynamically resists nihilism and victimhood and renounces Settler narratives of dominance. While Aboriginal people have experienced horrific loss, it is through speaking to heal, speaking against mourning, that Aboriginal peoples resist a state of passive victimhood and practice survivance. Gwen stated, “I think one of the most powerful things about being able to learn how to talk to each other in a good way is it brought up the strength and the love in our family” (Interview, June 12, 2012). As Gwen’s comment reveals, family ties are strengthened when individuals ‘learn how to talk to each other in a good way.’ Such a mode of communicating can be seen as a practice of survivance, in that Gwen and her family speak to heal the wounds created by colonial policies and practices, wounds that ‘are not of our doing,’ but that they are nonetheless affected by. Through learning to communicate ‘in a good way,’ Gwen and her family are actively working through trauma and finding strength through healing. At the same time, Gwen, acknowledged that this process has not been easy, that forging bonds between family members emerged from a furnace of disruption and dissent.

My family, before we hated our drama, now, it’s like, ‘we love our drama.’ We’re able to come back and say, ‘okay, this is what’s been taught. How do we undo that part?’ We’re able to do that amongst ourselves now, whereas before, it was like ‘I hate your guts! I’m not talking to you for the next ten years!’ [laughs]. That kind of thing. And I thought, ‘no, we need each other. We’re too precious. We’ve got to figure out this thing’ (Interview, June 12, 2012).

For Gwen, the imperative to ‘figure things out,’ came from recognizing how vital her family was, even though communication could be painful and difficult. Further, ‘figuring things out,’ meant understanding that the sources of familial dissent stemmed from unhealthy ways of communicating that had been taught and had to be undone. To return to Episkenew’s (2009) earlier arguments about the intergenerational effects of the residential school legacy, violence breeds shame, which breeds more violence. When shame and anger are the only emotional responses that one as been taught, it stands to reason that those learned responses are the ones that will be expressed and passed down through generations unless the silence is broken. To practice survivance is to break the silence by embracing drama, difficulty, discomfort, and the myriad of painful emotions that can accompany healing. Lorde (1984/2007) contends that believing such
processes are not lengthy and difficult is ludicrous. However, she observes that to believe it impossible is suicidal:

As we arm ourselves with ourselves and each other, we can stand toe to toe inside that rigorous loving and begin to speak the impossible – or what has always seemed like the impossible – to one another. The first step towards genuine change. Eventually, if we speak the truth to each other, it will become unavoidable to ourselves (p.175).

‘Inside that rigorous loving,’ that Gwen and her family members feel for each other, they have spoken the once seemingly impossible to one other. Though the process has been difficult, they have ‘come back’ to a place where they can articulate the pain and suffering caused by colonization and move forward in a proactive way. Ultimately, the lessons of *survivance* that Gwen’s story points to are important for Aboriginal individuals, communities, and, more specifically, Aboriginal education teams working through tensions caused by colonial oppression. Further, the shame and internalized oppression observed by Tina and Thomas in the Aboriginal students with whom they work, and the experience, recounted by Krista, of Aboriginal students and their families discussing the legacy of residential schools with positive results further affirms the importance of learning to communicate in ways that challenge Settler-colonial metanarratives. Further, the insights shared by the aforementioned participants lend credence to the development of pedagogical tools that allow students to engage with difficult learning and that open up spaces where coalitions may be formed.

5.5. Summary

In this chapter, I have highlighted participants’ responses in order to reveal the underlying and interwoven threads of colonialism, intragroup dissent, and intergenerational trauma. An analysis of the tensions existing within the Aboriginal

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27 I use Gwen’s articulation of ‘come back’ deliberately in this sentence, because what may seem like a journey to is, in reality, a return. As Lorde (1984/2007) articulates: “We have to consciously study how to be tender with each other until it becomes a habit because what was native has been stolen from us” (p.175). In her analysis of “Strength of Indian Women,” Episkenew (2009) demonstrates how residential school policies taught dysfunction. As such, to ‘come back,’ is to return to healthy ways of relating to each other that would have been in place prior to residential schools.
education team made apparent how systemic and internalized racism contributed to intragroup dynamics by manifesting as verbal and emotional violence (Anzaldúa, 2009). Underlying the alienating tactics of both older and newer group members was arguably a fear of loss, rooted in a long history of colonial theft and appropriation. As Beth pointed out, education was just one other ‘cog-in-the-wheel’ of colonial power maintenance, another strategy to rationalize control and subjugation.

From here, I asked the reader to consider how the colonial influence on Aboriginal identity politics affect intragroup cohesion by focusing on Andrea, a mixed-blood Aboriginal woman who felt frustrated with having to perform a recognizable and acceptable Aboriginal identity for her peers. I argued that these requests are based in a colonial legacy that has greatly influenced group belonging criterion within Aboriginal communities and further proposed that recognition of this legacy is necessary if the complexities of intragroup identity politics are to be understood. Drawing upon St. Denis (2007) I reiterated the importance of broadening solutions to inequality by noting that analyses of how historical and contemporary practices of inequality serve to restrict the aspirations of Aboriginal people must be encouraged.

Finally, I drew upon critical women-of-color feminists and activists, like Audre Lorde (1984/2007), Gloria Anzaldúa, and Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009) to support the claim that healing from colonial trauma, in part, entails breaking the silence around the shame of oppression. To this end, I highlighted the story of Gwen who learned to communicate better in order to repair relationships amongst her family and, through the process, practiced survivance. Elaborating on Gerald Vizenor’s (2008) reclamation of the word, I argued that Gwen’s work with her family could be characterized as survivance in that Gwen and her family spoke to heal the wounds created by colonial policies and practices, wounds that were not of their doing, but that they were nonetheless affected by. Through learning to communicate ‘in a good way,’ Gwen and her family were actively working through trauma and finding strength through healing. I ended the chapter with her story because I believe that the lessons of survivance that Gwen’s story teaches us are necessary for Aboriginal individuals, communities, and, for the purposes of this dissertation, Aboriginal education teams working through tensions caused by colonial oppression. In the next chapter, I examine the politics of intergroup relationships.
focusing, in particular, on the importance of intergroup coalescing and the desired qualities of individuals who seek to ally with Aboriginal peoples and causes.
Chapter 6. Confronting Obstacles to Intergroup Relationship Building

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter 2, I argued that, with respect to Aboriginal peoples, Canada had entered an ‘age of forgiveness,’ beginning with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples in the early 1990s and culminating with the 2008 Official Apology delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper to former students and families of residential schools. Following this, I proposed that a failure on the part of many Settlers to make linkages between current attitudes and policies and historical practices stood in the way of genuine restitution and respectful engagement. In this chapter, I return to the issues I presented in that earlier discussion by exploring, in further detail, the difference between knowing and acknowledging the colonial legacy and understanding its relationship to the present. I then move to explore how Settler/colonial myths, like colour-blindness, meritocracy, and individual blamelessness serve to obstruct a willingness to explore critical discourse that challenges naturalized frameworks. From here, I highlight the work of cultural theorist Roger Simon (2004) to suggest that practices of critical remembrance and responsible listening are important for open intergroup engagements. I then draw upon participants and a variety of critical theorists to highlight respectful protocols that may enable the conditions for reparative intergroup coalitions to foster. I turn now to the distinction between knowledge and acknowledgment as a first step in recognizing the colonial legacy and its impacts on Aboriginal-Settler relations.
6.2. **Beyond Knowledge: Acknowledging the Colonial Legacy**

When asked how aware she perceived her colleagues to be about Aboriginal history and the legacy of colonization, Shirley, a Support Worker of Settler descent, surmised,

> I'm pretty sure they don't. I think they know surface sort of things. They know there were residential schools. They know that there's reserves. They know how this all happened from textbooks. But I don't believe they understand it. [...] I think non-Aboriginal people should have a clear knowledge and understanding of what Aboriginal families or people have gone through, as in the history, right? I think they really need to have a clear understanding of residential school and the loss of culture and all of that [...] You know, we talk about different traumas that affect people in war-torn countries, and we're acknowledging those, but what about the families in our own communities, in Canada, here, in BC? (Interview, Mar 9, 2012).

Andrea added that, “a lot of people don't get it. [...] They may know the history, but I don't think they really understand the link to the present and how it’s affecting people now, and how it’s all of our responsibility to take care of this” (Interview, June 5, 2012). For Beth, the lack of knowledge regarding the legacy of colonialism permeated many levels of Aboriginal education:

> When I look at Aboriginal education, there is a tier. And unfortunately, the majority, as usual, are at the bottom of that pyramid. [...] And I look at people like us who would fit, you know, maybe in the second tier and some of us in the third, who have that knowledge and are trying to share it, but we’re trying to share it with people who just don’t care [...] It’s an awareness versus acknowledgement situation. And that just doesn't necessarily [apply to] non-Aboriginal educators, right? That’s Aboriginal people too. They know that we’ve been treated badly, they know that there’s racism everywhere, but to acknowledge the bigger picture and what they need to do to participate in that, the majority of people at the bottom of that pyramid are not quite there yet (Group Interview, June 14, 2012).

The statements of Shirley, Andrea, and Beth, importantly demonstrate that to *know* is not enough; there needs to be an acknowledgement of colonialism and an understanding of how one is implicated in the overarching picture. Shirley puts her finger on the pulse of what Eva Mackey (2002) and Paulette Regan (2010) refer to as
the ‘benevolent Canadian peace-maker myth.’ In the excerpt above, Shirley makes an important distinction between knowing the history of Aboriginal exploitation from texts and understanding it. As Philip Deloria (1998) comments, “Simply knowing about Indians, African-Americas, Asian-Americans, and Latino/as has become a satisfactory form of social and political engagement” (p.189, cited in Thompson, 2003, p.13). This ‘knowing about’ does not prompt individuals to question the traumas that have and continue to play out in Canada. By ‘focusing on the traumas that affect people in war-torn countries,’ Settlers are able to divert attention away from their own resistance to unpacking their investments in Settler narratives. As such, the Canadian ‘peacemaker myth’ is left unquestioned. Similarly, Andrea’s comment speaks to a lack of understanding regarding how the past and the present are inextricably linked as well as the collective responsibility to trouble the colonial status quo.

Beth expands upon the distinction between knowledge and acknowledgement in her assessment of the various levels of awareness among Aboriginal education workers. For her, knowing about racism and the inhumane treatment of Aboriginal peoples is not enough to stimulate a response that leads to action. There are individuals who may know about the history but simply “don’t care” enough to do anything more; their level of apathy serves as an excuse for not exploring how they might participate in “the bigger picture.” Regan (2010) maintains that not wanting to know more is a response to not wanting to be disrupted or to question the core principles of Canadian identity. Roger Simon (2004) furthers this sentiment, contending “ignorance is not simply a rationally organized state of affairs, but is, as well, a dynamic, unconscious structure that fosters resistance to knowledge” (p.196). Thus, ignorance is not an innocent subject positioning; it is a state of being that serves as an impediment to the reception of further knowledge and self-examination. Philosopher Trudy Govier (2003) maintains that ignorance is an avoidance of responsibility, as one cannot ignore something without having some awareness of what is being ignored. She uses the example of cobwebs around a dining room light, stating that she may notice them while cleaning, but choose to ignore them because they are too high for her to reach. Govier elaborates, stating that she can continue to ignore them until they grow so large that acknowledging them is unavoidable. She draws parallels between this process and that used to ignore the resentment, anger, and alienation that can result from past wrongs. Govier explains,
“When there is no acknowledgement of wrongdoing, the initial wound develops into ‘the second wound of silence,’ because the lack of acknowledgement indicates that people condone the wrongs and do not care about the baneful results” (p.85). The difference between knowledge and acknowledgement, Govier argues, is the recognition of what we know: “Acknowledgement is not the same things as knowledge, because we may know things that we do not acknowledge... Acknowledgement is knowledge and, further than knowledge, a kind of avowal that amounts to spelling out or marking of what we know” (p.71, author’s emphasis). For this reason, Govier contends that acknowledgment is a necessary part of one’s willingness to commit to restitution and positive change. However before one acknowledges to others, they must first acknowledge to themselves. Govier proposes that the opposite of acknowledgment is self-deception, which she claims is a matter of motivated selective attention. She goes on to say “when we deceive ourselves, we turn our attention away from unwelcome information and fail to attend to it. We can nevertheless take some account of that information, which, of course, is one of the things that enables us to turn our attention away from it” (p.73).

With respect to the historical injustices experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada, Govier maintains that Settlers have denied their humanity by choosing not to know. She contends that,

We knew enough to know we did not want to know more. We did not know because we did not want to know. We did not want to know because the truths we would face would be unpleasant and incompatible with our favoured picture of ourselves, and they imply a need for restitution and redress, threatening our rather comfortable way of life (p.78).

Govier’s (2003) denunciation of Settler denial is a powerful commentary on the way in which ignorance is strategically deployed to deflect blame. Building on Govier’s (2003) argument, Regan (2010) defines Settler denial as the refusal to recognize that we are beneficiaries to the injustices experienced by Aboriginal people, as such acknowledgement would threaten the privilege and power Settlers experience in Canada and disrupt “the colonial status quo” (p.35). To claim that one does not know is, at once, a claim that one did or does not want to know in order to avoid the potential of being disrupted. The word ‘disrupt,’ as defined by the Oxford English dictionary, means to “break apart, burst, shatter, separate forcibly” or “to interrupt normal continuity.” When
critical theorists, such as Dion (2007) or Regan (2010) speak of Settler disruption, they are referring the breaking apart or forced separation of one’s investments in dominant discourses with the discourses themselves. Dion (2007), in particular, ‘disrupts’ the teachers she works with by asking them to juxtapose their own ideas and images of Aboriginal-Settler relationships with Aboriginal counter-narratives. Through this process, “teachers begin to recognise not only their investments and commitments, but how they came to be so inscribed by dominant discourses” (p.350). With respect to Aboriginal issues in Canada, it is the feigning of ignorance that is, in part, responsible for severing the link between knowledge and acknowledgement and reveals a deep seeded investment in one’s identity as a ‘good white person’ (Thompson, 2003, p.7). The ways in which ‘fostered resistance to knowledge’ manifests is explored in further depth in the following subsection.

6.2.1. Self-Serving Denial: Resistance to Critical Discourse

Drawing upon Albert Memmi’s (1965) influential work The Colonizer and the Colonized, political scientist, Adam Barker (2010), distinguishes between the colonist who actively and unashamedly engages in colonization and ‘the colonist who refuses’ (p.318). According to Memmi, the colonist who refuses, “invokes the end of colonization, but refuses to conceive that this revolution can result in the overthrow of his situation and himself” (1965, p.40, cited in Barker, 2010, p.318). In other words, the colonist who refuses will openly concede that colonialism is wrong, yet will not jeopardize their own power and privilege by taking meaningful action to redress power imbalances. The fear and resistance displayed towards acknowledging the legacy of colonialism that defines Aboriginal/Settler relationships is thus rooted in an aversion to disruption.

In the course of our interview, Beth recounted an instance where she witnessed overt resistance to being disrupted during a workshop on White privilege:

I went to a workshop at one of the schools here. And it was Pro-D, and it was open to all the teachers in the area. And it was a workshop on White Privilege led by an Asian woman... And it was about colonization and white privilege, right? But within that brochure about the Pro-D workshop, it talked about that it was going to be focused on Aboriginal traditions and history and Canadian colonization. [...] I went because I wanted to see what she had to say. [...]
So she divided us into groups. There were four areas. She put the four directions and said, “I’m going to allow you guys to choose what the topics are for each direction, so I want one person to choose a topic and go to one of the directions.” And, right off the bat, this white male stood up, and he talked about, “well I’m sick of being blamed for everything that’s happened – going wrong – in this country. I’m sick of being the person that’s held accountable for all of the mistakes of the past, ’cause I don’t think it’s my fault, so I’m going to go in this direction.” Then it went around to the other four directions, and once they had the four directions covered, then everybody else divided up. So I thought, ‘well I’m going to go see this guy.’ […] We had a long, long discussion on what white privilege was and how he felt that it was unfair, that there was no such thing as white privilege, and all those arguments that are out there about that. And I was totally blown away by the amount of support that he got for that in that group of teachers. I thought, ‘what kind of teacher education do we have where teachers are coming out still basically denying that such a thing as racism exists, and all of those colonization practices are not that bad?’

The woman that led the workshop tried her best to take the conflict out of the situation. [She tried explaining to him], “but [privilege] is there. That’s what gives you the right to say that; that white privilege doesn’t exist,” right? Anyone that’s not white can’t actually say that. “But you can, and you have the right to be angry” - because he was angry. And she said, “look at how emotional this is for you.” But I’m sure he left there still firmly entrenched in the belief that there’s no such thing (Interview, Apr 5, 2012).

To analyze the anger and denial inherent in this workshop participants’ response, and to answer Beth’s question, ‘what kind of teacher education do we have where teachers come out denying that racism exists,’ we must explore the Settler ideologies that lay at the root of resistance to Settler disruption. As Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis (2003) discovered in their experience working with predominantly White teacher candidates in a compulsory anti-racist course, resistance to critical discourses is all too common. The authors identify three assumptions that impede a critical interrogation of racial inequality, namely, that race does not matter; everyone has equal opportunity; and through individual acts and good intentions one can secure innocence as well as superiority.

The first assumption, that race does not matter, trivializes and masks over the effects of power that different racialized identities have. As some of the pre-service teachers in Schick and St. Denis’ (2003) study express:
As far as I’m concerned, we’re all part of the same human race and that’s all that matters. I don’t see the color of the person’s skin.’

‘We all need to appreciate and celebrate our racial differences. We just need to get along.’

‘The problem is that their values and beliefs are so different from ours’ (p.5).

As these comments indicate, the problems of inequality are thought to stem from cultural difference and not racial inequity. As George Dei (2005) points out, “the discourse of sameness ignores the racialized asymmetrical power relations in which the politics of difference are inscribed” (p.35). The discourse of cultural difference is thus preferable to that of racial inequality because these discussions do not challenge the status quo. However, taking a colour-blind approach to social inequality does not allow Settlers to engage in genuine dialogue surrounding these pertinent issues.

The second assumption of meritocracy is grounded in the belief that everyone has equal opportunity. Because it is assumed that everyone has equal access to societal resources, success is dependent upon an individual’s hard work and effort. Consequently, if certain people or groups of people are unsuccessful, it is assumed they have failed because they are lazy, have low character, morals, or are not intelligent. As one pre-service teacher terms it: “People are victims because they choose to be victims” (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, p.7). However, this perspective ignores the reality that one’s social goals are actually mediated by many unacknowledged factors, such as one’s class, gender, and race. As Patrick Slattery (2006) explicates, different groups have different access to societal privileges because of the amount of cultural and symbolic capital that they have. Within North American contexts, those who are White-identified have the greatest cultural capital, and consequently, have greater access to societal resources. It is important, then, that Settlers, as beneficiaries of this system, are aware of these inequities in order to begin working toward a more just society.

The third, and perhaps most harmful assumption, is that one’s own individual goodness can absolve them from being complicit within a system of domination (Schick & St. Denis, 2003). Statements like the fellow made in the workshop Beth attended, specifically, “I’m sick of being the person that’s held accountable for all of the mistakes of
the past” presumes innocence of the domination over others. As a result, the reality that people are differently positioned within society according to race, class, gender, and sexuality, goes unacknowledged. As Schick and St. Denis elaborate, if one does not participate in individual acts of racism, such as name-calling and other such forms of discrimination, one assumes innocence and abdicates responsibility from engaging in such a dialogue. Specifically:

A position of goodness and innocence is held as proof of superiority. The claim of innocence acts as both cause and effect: one is produced through innocence as superior; and superiority is claimed as a sign of one’s innocence. Only conscious and deliberate actions that everyone would denounce as discriminatory are owned as that for which one can be held responsible (p.9).

Schick and St. Denis’s (2003) assertions link back to Govier’s (2003) statements from the previous section, wherein she noted that feigning ignorance is a way of avoiding implication. Thus, we can infer that the participant whom Beth spoke about reacted angrily, potentially because he did not want to be vulnerable, but also because he did not believe that he harboured racist views or was a person of privilege. The angry response this man exhibited was thus based upon the disruption of a Settler/colonial identity justified by ideologies of colour-blindness, meritocracy, and individual absolution.

Based on her encounters with student resistance in university classrooms, educational philosopher Megan Boler (1999) attributes defensive anger to two key features: “fear as a response to change, and fear of loss. Fear of loss may be a fear of losing personal or cultural identities, or a literal, material loss. In most cases of fear, it is often easier to react angrily rather than feel one’s vulnerability” (p.192). In the case of the workshop participant, it could be said that he reacted heatedly to the ideas espoused by the workshop leader, rather than open himself up to think critically and reflexively about his investments in his assertion that racism and privilege are non-existent. Drawing upon Dion (2007), the excuses the participant made for not wanting to be ‘held accountable for the past’ can be interpreted as a defense mechanism “from having to recognize their own attachment to and implication in the knowledge of the history of the relationship between Aboriginal people and Canadians” (p.331). For Beth, the problem
of denial is also linked to Western notions of duality, "especially good or bad. So if there
is oppression, then you're either doing it or you're not doing it, so if I'm not doing it, then
it's not there. So it becomes a denial in a self-serving kind of way" (Interview, Apr 5,
(2003) have maintained, noting that resistance to a critical interrogation of one's
underlying ideology is rooted in two common Settler assumptions: "the dualistic notion
that oppression is either present or it is not, and the idea that, when one is deciding
whether or not oppression is present, intention counts more than impact" (p.120). Thus,
to restore comfort to oneself as a good person, it is necessary to resist perceived
assaults on one's individual and national identity constructions. This rationale arguably
underpinned the reaction played out in the workshop situation described by Beth. As she
relays above, it is a scary thing, at least on the part of many who have been oppressed,
to witness those individuals who are going to be teaching youth denying that oppression,
privilege, and racism exist.

On this view, many White subjects of the modern nation-state work with the
assumption that being White is no different than any other racial or ethnic experience
(Steinberg, 2005). By disregarding the sociopolitical, historical and economic contexts
that serve as social stratification mechanisms, many white people, such as the students
cited by Schick and St. Denis (2003), and the resistant workshop participant identified by
Beth, maintain the privilege of denying difference through accusations of reverse racism
and white victimization. As noted earlier by Schick and St. Denis (2003), the privilege to
deny is upheld by a firm investment in meritocracy, which maintains that everyone has
equal opportunity to social capital and that all that is required to succeed is hard work
and determination. A belief in this ideology allows one to shift the responsibility and
onus for failure and marginalization onto the oppressed while, at the same time,
observes, “to do otherwise would engender our own collective identity crisis and expose
us to the trauma of admitting uncomfortable truths” (p.34). A denial of the ways in which
Settler people are beneficiaries of the injustices against Aboriginal peoples is particularly
problematic for reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and Settler Canadians, as
racism and unequal power relations are integral to the experience of First Nations
peoples in Canada, both past and present. As Regan and others have argued (see, for
example, Dion, 2009; St. Denis, 2007), to deny this legacy is to deny an essential component of Aboriginal/Settler relations. Acknowledging the resistance that teacher candidates and other White subjects have in opening themselves to disruption, the next section explores the different strategies posited by participants and scholars regarding how to confront these defensive challenges to critical discourses.

6.3. Recovering From Historical Amnesia: Important Qualities for Intergroup Relationship Building

In his chapter entitled “The Pedagogical Insistence of Public Memory,” Roger Simon (2004) prompts the reader to think about how we can attend differently to traumatic and disruptive narratives in ways that prompt us to accept our responsibility to others and open us up to unpack our own comfortable narratives. While Simon acknowledges that there are various responses available to us – such as memorialization, historical study, apology, etc. – he maintains that another, parallel form of recognition must accompany these forms of non-indifference; that is, “remembrance as simultaneously an ethical and a pedagogical practice” (p.187). As such, Simon explores how remembrance can be understood in ways that advance and encourage critical learning practices and “impels us into a confrontation and ‘reckoning’ not only with stories of the past but also with ourselves as we are (historically, existentially, ethically) in the present” (ibid., emphasis in original). Remembrance, in such a view, is a call to accountability, an invitation to embrace a ‘politics of relationality’ that considers what it means to live with others, both in the present and in the past.

Simon (2004) uses the evocative phrase ‘a touch of the past’ to describe the pedagogical and political implications of attentiveness. To be touched by something or someone is most commonly defined as being ‘moved,’ in other words, having an affective, typically empathetic, response. However, ‘touch’ need not be limited to affective sensibilities. Citing philosopher Edith Wyschogrod (1980), Simon suggests that “touch is not a sense at all; it is in fact a metaphor for the impingement of the world as a whole upon subjectivity… [T]o touch is to comport oneself not in opposition to the given but in proximity with it” (cited in Simon, 2004, p.189). Thus, to be touched is to allow oneself to be vulnerable and to begin to interrogate the established framework that
structures one’s world. In essence, “‘being touched’ demands taking the stories of others seriously, accepting such stories as matters of ‘counsel’” (Simon, 2004, p.189). Here, Simon draws upon German literary critic Walter Benjamin’s (1969) definition of ‘counsel’ in order to elucidate how the stories of others can ‘touch’ us.

According to Simon (2004), Benjamin (1969) was concerned with the erosion of connections between each others’ experiences. In his view, the glut of stories and images that accompanied the propagation of news reports via visual and textual media reduced the experience of others to a “phantasmagoric flow of information” (Simon, 2004, p.189). As a result, individuals were estranged from “the wisdom of experience” (ibid.). The inability to meaningfully experience the testimony of others thus stymied the possibility of those stories actually making a difference in the life of the listener, either by influencing one’s actions or exposing one’s existing personal narratives to scrutiny. As a counter to this phantasmagoria, Benjamin proposed that we accept stories as ‘counsel,’ that is, as a proposal to continue the conversation that the story has introduced. Stories, as such, are not answers to questions; they are invitations to reconsider our own unfolding stories in unexpected and potentially disruptive ways.

Simon (2004) suggests that, in order to prevent the stories of others from being reduced to a “spectacle of suffering,” we must consider listening as a form of thought and be attentive to the kinds of questions we find ourselves asking (p.190). He terms this mode of listening as “double attentiveness,” which requires that we attend to both the testimony being shared and to the questions that arise within us as a result of what we’re being told (p.195). As Simon elaborates, “we must pose questions to ourselves about our questions, interrogating why the information and explanations that we seek are important and necessary to us” (ibid.). One potential ramification of such responsible listening might be that we are made aware of our own historical ignorance and might be prompted to learn more about it. However, Simon urges us that we must go beyond learning about to learning from testimony; that is, we must not only work to alleviate our own ignorance but must also challenge the very social conditions that allow us to be ignorant in the first place. Still, this is only one part of responsible listening. The other half requires that we engage in a practice of critical remembrance. To begin a process of critical remembrance, Simon asks the reader to consider that our questions to
testimony might not be questions at all, but rhetorical statements based on the assumption that we can understand what we are being told because somewhere in our consciousness, there exists knowledge of a similar scenario. To remember critically, we must consider what knowledge and understanding is being suppressed in the transposition of one narrative onto another and must avoid the desire to collapse differences between separate realities. Simon acknowledges that it is impossible to completely eliminate the practices of judgment and comparison when encountering new testimonies. However, “what is at issue is taking full measure of how and why the terms of our judgments are invoked in the practice of listening, and what this prevents us from learning” (p.197). Further, Simon recognizes that some might see his insistence for reflexivity as promoting navel gazing, whereby engaging with the stories of others results in a preoccupation with our own matters, rather than those of others. Again, he contends that the fundamental issue is a change in the way we view our collective history: “For this change to happen, we will have to learn to listen differently, take the measure of our ignorance, and reassess the terms on which we are prepared to hear stories that might trouble the social arrangements on which we presume a collective future” (ibid.). To justly hear testimony, to accept the stories of others as ‘counsel,’ we must realize that the hearing of others demands a logic of accountability; that we must work to create a public that encourages the critical exploration of questions and uncertainties and provides a forum for our own stories to change via the ‘exchange of experience’ with others.

The themes of critical remembrance and listening as ‘double attentiveness’ have profound pedagogical and political implications for Aboriginal-Settler relationship building and have influenced the works of both Aboriginal and Settler scholars. Susan Dion (2007), for instance, engages teachers in a critical pedagogy of remembrance, wherein she asks teachers to interrogate their relationship to Aboriginal people by working with their memories and examining them in relation to the work of Aboriginal storytellers, artists, and filmmakers. Through this process, teachers begin to investigate their investments and commitments to personal narratives and how these stories have been influenced and formed by dominant discourses. Paulette Regan (2010), in her exploration of how non-Aboriginal people can ‘unsettle’ themselves and confront the history of colonization, cites listening as ‘double attentiveness’ as an ethical way of
listening and responding to testimonies of colonial violence. These pedagogical imperatives are also highly influential in my reflexive engagement with participant responses regarding what it means to be an ally to Aboriginal peoples and causes. In the following sub-sections, I highlight how the qualities identified by participants as important for intergroup relationship building mirror the logic of accountability laid out by Simon (2004) and built upon by Dion (2007) and Regan (2010).

6.3.1. How Do We Listen? Embracing a Practice of Responsible Listening

The complexity of issues related to Aboriginal youth requires that educators acknowledge colonialism and its impacts. As Shirley stated earlier, when asked how aware she perceived her colleagues to be about Aboriginal history and the legacy of colonization, it is important to place emphasis on a meaningful critical engagement with that history, or else, as I would argue, learning about the history of Aboriginal people risks becoming a consumption of the ‘other’s’ story (Barker, 2010; Thompson, 2003). As Simon (2004) suggests above, adopting a logic of accountability entails embracing a practice of responsible listening. However, such an ethical response is impeded by deeply engrained colonial ideologies that view listening as consumption. As educational philosopher, Audrey Thompson (2003), cautions, “the problematic character of white interest in and support for people of color lies in how we engaged with non-white others. We may listen, but how do we listen?” (p.17). More specifically, Dion (2005) asks, “what do non-Aboriginal people hear when we speak?” (p.35). Oftentimes, the voice that speaks is not the voice that is heard (Jones, 1999).

For example, Darlene, an elementary school teacher of Aboriginal descent, noted her wariness of individuals who begin conversations with her by apologizing:

You know when people feel bad when they start to say, you know, “I feel really bad that I don’t know,” or “I apologize for,” – they start the conversation that way. And then, you know, it kind of alerts me. I go, ‘okay, well are you going to feel sorry for me if I start to tell you certain things?’ I start to think that. So I kind of check them out a little bit, to see if they really want to hear, or if they’re going to be focusing in on what their own needs are. Because I want to have a conversation that’s going to be healthful to both of us, not just, ‘you listen to my sorry story and feel sorry for me and you’ll try to come to
my rescue.’ So I’ll try to avoid conversations like that (Interview, Feb 24, 2012).

Darlene’s comments alert us to the dangers of colonial empathy and its impacts upon genuine listening. Regan (2010) asserts that the Settler impulse to appropriate marginalized stories in voyeuristic ways is misguided in that it requires no actual adjustments to our underlying beliefs. In other words “feeling good about feeling bad” demands no critical inquiry on the part of Settler peoples regarding how they have and continue to be beneficiaries of colonialism (p. 47). By apologizing or publicly declaring that they ‘feel bad’ about what happened, the people Darlene refers to are, at once, focusing on their own need for absolution, rather than engaging with Darlene in a meaningful way. As she observes, they don’t “really want to hear”; they want to focus on “solving the Indian problem” in order to feel better about their own insufficiencies (Regan, 2010, p.46). A conversation “that’s going to be healthful for both of us,” requires that Settlers attend differently to the testimonies of Aboriginal people. As Beth surmised, “I think it’s a willingness to learn, a willingness to hear. It’s basically a willingness to open yourself up. And it’s hard. I understand that it’s hard to do” (Interview, Apr 5, 2012). To open oneself up requires a willingness to interrogate comfortable narratives and question our questions, as is indicated in the participant responses below.

6.3.2. Facing Fear: The Importance of Questions in Intergroup Arrangements

As Simon (2004) observes in the above section, asking questions is an integral part of responsible listening. Likewise, Darlene noted that she liked working with individuals who asked questions. In her words,

I like the ones who ask questions, more than they give information, because then I ask more questions. Because that’s how I like to communicate, by asking questions of people. Because then you get thinking going and then you do problem solving together. So I think those people, I feel, are really interested, because they don’t want for you just to give that information. They want to actually learn something, so they keep asking those questions. And I always encourage them; just keep asking questions (Interview, Feb 24, 2012).
For Darlene, working with people who asked questions generated problem solving potential. As she indicates, she felt that those who asked questions were more engaged and interested, which increased her involvement in the collaborative process. In her view, those who asked questions were not seeking to be beneficiaries of the partnership; they were active contributors who wanted “to actually learn something” (ibid.). Despite Darlene’s encouragement, there can be a fear associated with asking potentially troubling questions (Dion, 2007). I include the following interaction between Shonna, an elementary school teacher of Settler descent, and myself to demonstrate the ways in which Settlers can shut themselves down from active participation in intergroup contexts.

During this portion of the interview, Shonna was relaying to me her experience participating in the Enhancement Agreement (EA) process of her school district. She mentioned that, while Aboriginal participants introduced themselves by indicating which specific nation they came from, she was unsure if it was inappropriate for her to announce her Settler heritage to the group. “And finally at one point, I asked a friend of mine who was in the BCTF if it would be appropriate for me to say my cultural heritage, or was that not appropriate. And what she in turn said to me, was ‘you need to ask the group,’ ” (Interview, March 16, 2012). Despite her friend’s suggestion, Shonna did not ask the group. To quote “I [didn’t] think I could ask the group because I felt that they would say, if I wanted to, I could. I felt that the dynamic would be there. And so I didn’t” (ibid.). It wasn’t until the Settler husband of one of the group members attended the meeting and introduced himself as being of Settler descent that Shonna felt potentially ready to announce her own background:

Shonna: I sort of carefully watched [him]. ‘Okay. So now I can try this.’ But it was still at least another six months before I tried it. So that’s just an example for you of how I felt to be a respectful member of the group, I needed to watch and learn and try and understand, and actually, not ask a lot of questions. Just try and watch and learn, and occasionally, if an opportunity presented, I would ask a question.

Sadie: Was there any fear involved –

Shonna: Not fear. They were never an intimidating group. But certainly I didn’t want to make a misstep because I can appreciate how fragile my relationship with the people of the committee could be,
because I am white, and I am blond, and I am of the dominant race, right? So I didn't want to make that misstep - I mean, I know it would take a long time to rebuild that. And it's an important committee for me to be on, personally, and it's important for me to be a respectful, appropriate member of the committee (Interview, Mar 16, 2012).

While Shonna denied that fear of reproach underpinned her trepidation to ask the group whether or not it was appropriate to announce her Settler heritage, her deflection of my probe, followed by her explanation that, although she felt that the group would permit her to announce her heritage, she declined to do so, as well as her subsequent announcement that she “didn’t want to make a misstep,” appears to indicate that on some level, fear was a factor in her decision to stay silent for so long. And while Shonna’s conflict over the declaration of her heritage may seem innocuous, the fundamental issue is to explore the bedrock in which the fear that prevented her from speaking out and asking a question is rooted.

Reflecting on what Shonna shared with me, I am reminded of the comment made by Beth earlier in the chapter regarding oppression; that, abiding by Western notions of duality, “if there is oppression, then you’re either doing it or you’re not doing it, so if I’m not doing it, then it’s not there. So it becomes a denial in a self-serving kind of way” (Interview, Apr 5, 2012). The position described by Beth can limit the ability of many Settler individuals to be comfortable with ambiguity and to accept the processual and non-linear nature of decolonization. Rather than working to understand the societal structures and narratives that underpin one’s behaviour, thoughts, and reactions, adherence to a discourse of dualities retains a focus on individual absolution. In what follows, I suggest that Shonna’s hesitancy to announce her heritage may be attributed to a desire to be seen as a “good white person” (Thompson, 2003, p.9).

In her article “Tiffany, friend of people of color: White investments in antiracism,” educational philosopher Audrey Thompson (2003) examines the different ways in which white individuals, who identify as progressive and antiracist, position themselves within such discourses as ‘good,’ thereby keeping their authority and whiteness at the center of antiracist studies. In particular Thompson problematizes the investment that “whites” have in being seen as a ‘good white person’ (p.8). According to Thompson, “the desire to be and to be known as a good white person stems from the recognition that our
whiteness is problematic, a recognition that we try to escape by being demonstrably different from other, racist whites” (p.9). Thompson contends that by shifting the focus to those who are ‘more racist than us,’ white people permit themselves to feel self-congratulatory about the critical work that they have done, rather than take responsibility for questioning their perceptions, investments, and involvements in antiracist work. Thompson goes on to elucidate how Western conceptualizations of ethics and relationship serves to “[pin] down meaning, insuring that moral action is referenced as an abstract ideal rather than a local, particularistic conception of the good” (p.18). Having a ‘universal’ code of behaviour organizes white conceptions of what it means to be good and moral, such that acting ‘good’ becomes procedural. Thompson critiques white stages-of-development models for their investment in “an ideal endpoint of white racial development,” suggesting that, in assuming one knows what it means to be a good, antiracist person, “it is easy to stop thinking of ourselves as on a journey and start thinking of ourselves as having arrived” (p.20). In Shonna’s case, I would argue that the same discourse that promises individual actions will lead to goodness also structures her notions of what it means to be respectful in Aboriginal education contexts.

In enacting what she seemingly understood was required to be a respectful member of an intergroup Aboriginal education initiative, Shonna reinscribed a discourse of individual accountability. Her hesitation to ask whether or not announcing herself as a Settler was appropriate, despite feeling as though the group would, in fact, permit her to do so, speaks to how deeply embedded and important it may be for her to be known as an ally. By implying that the stability of the intergroup relationship is dependent upon whether or not she acts appropriately, Shonna avoids an examination of the epistemology in which her hesitation to ask is based. However, as Darlene stated above, asking questions is integral to the collaborative process. It demonstrates to those with whom you enter into a relationship that you “are really there to learn” (Interview, Mar 16, 2012). In this respect, asking difficult questions can propel us toward a deeper exploration of our own investments and the epistemological and ontological foundations upon which those investments rest.
6.3.3. Becoming a Worker in your own Liberation: Self-Awareness as a Necessity for Intergroup Engagement

Ann Bishop (2002) writes that part of becoming an ally is “becoming a worker in your own liberation” (p.100). Rather than deny the potentially troublesome nature of testimonies of the oppressed, Bishop maintains that it is important to work through difficult impulses, thoughts, and feelings in order to begin a healing journey. Feminist scholar Analouise Keating (2002) suggests that, by changing ourselves, we change the world. She describes such a process as “a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (p.523). Cynthia Burack (2004) also affirms the importance of self-awareness as an integral starting point for positive inter-group engagements. She suggests that “coalitions within the self” strengthen possibilities for respectful intra and inter-group encounters (p.148). Darlene, in turn, emphasized the need to be aware of oneself in order to communicate well with others:

If you’re not aware of who you are, then you can’t make those connections, because that’s going to be where there’s some effective, positive interactions is where you’re able to make those connections with each other. But if you’re not aware of yourself, you’re just there to be an observer. You’re just there to use other peoples’ stuff to identify with [...] If we know ourselves, we can share, right? Then I can connect with you. [...] If we’re able to do that, then we can share a lot easier. And then we’re open, right? It opens us up for us to share what we need to know (Interview, Feb 24, 2012).

Darlene’s comment – “if you’re not aware of yourself, you’re just there to be an observer” – speaks to a dangerous Settler proclivity in intergroup relationships, which is voyeurism. Cultural critic Rey Chow (1996) views the activity of watching as the primary agency of violence. It is an act that pierces and interrogates the Other and constructs them as objects on display. This act of surveillance is aggressive in its involuntary baring and defiling of the Other. Watching is thus pornographic and voyeuristic in its attempts to reveal the ‘truth’ behind the Other, or the truth as ‘we,’ the imperial gazer, desire it to be (p.123). Educator Carl James (2010) adds that, refusing to see oneself as having a cultural or racialized identity is, at once, an attempt to avoid naming and acknowledging one’s privilege and position as a beneficiary of colonialism. The insidiousness of this imperialist tendency is all the more reason to embrace a practice of
responsible engagement that interrogates one's assumptions and motivations for inter-
group coalition and problematizes the grounds on which these assumptions are allowed
to exist. In doing so, a space opens up for us to connect with one another, to 'share
what we need to know.'

Like Darlene, Gwen felt that self-awareness was essential in establishing
relationships with others. In her words:

you have to have gotten rid of a lot of the 'ow'ies in you. And if you
haven't, then it's going to come out in your communication. [...] (T)hat's getting to know yourself; it's so important to get that across. I
have to do that. I have to take responsibility for the words that come
out of my mouth and how it comes out of my mouth, what inflections
are behind it and stuff. So that's why I realize it is so important, 'cause
I really want to build bridges“ (Interview, June 12, 2012).

For Gwen, getting to know yourself entails taking responsibility and ownership for
what you say. Moreover, taking accountability for the words that we say and how we
say them is necessary to ‘build bridges’ between us. I am reminded of the passage by
Gloria Anzaldua (2002) that I initially highlighted in Chapter 2, regarding what it means to
‘bridge’ between differences. To review,

To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and
without. [...] To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk
being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being
wounded (p.246).

The theme that recurs through both Gwen and Anzaldúa’s statements is the
assertion that to bridge is to attempt community. To do that, it is important to hold
ourselves accountable to ourselves and to others for the words that we say. The
acceptance of this responsibility entails the risk of delving deeply into discomfort, both
within ourselves and in our interactions with one another. As Thompson (2003) points
out “growth in understanding is no guarantee of an enhanced, improved or better sense
of self” (p.22). Rather than answers, it may be more productive to strive for different
forms of responsiveness and new ways of being in the world that do not rely on linear
models of progress. As both Darlene and Gwen allude to, such an openness and self-
awareness is key if we are to engage meaningfully in coalition building.
6.3.4. Witnessing and Responsibility

Responsibility for knowledge dissemination and witnessing were practices that participants of the study deemed as being important for creating improved Aboriginal-Settler relations. Beth states,

once you’ve been given that information, it becomes your responsibility, then, to deal with it. In your classroom or with yourself first, if you have to. But without having that there, you can still say, ‘no, I don't have to’ (Interview, Apr 5, 2012).

For Beth, once you learn about the colonial legacy, it is your responsibility to pass that information on, and to act in a different way. As Cherokee/Greek writer, Thomas King (2003) emphasizes in his Massey Lecture Series, The Truth About Stories, “Don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (p.29). Without an ethic of responsibility that prompts us to reckon with our individual and collective pasts, the knowledge that we are witness to is not passed on. As Beth and King both maintain, once you have heard the information, you no longer have an excuse to say that ‘you did not know’. Susan Dion (2007) concurs, maintaining that an ethic of responsibility entails that we grapple with questions of privilege and relationality. To reiterate Beth’s earlier observations, although you may begin within yourself, if you have to, the ultimate goal is to move beyond your inner sphere to external circles of influence, like one’s classroom.

Darlene likened the responsibility of the individual to enact change is akin to witnessing:

It reminds me of the feasts where you go and you witness something, your responsibility is to pass it on, and to share it with someone else, to educate. So that’s always been something I knew about being Aboriginal is that I have that responsibility to pass that on. And so do non-Aboriginal people. You’re taking that responsibility to pass on that information and what you know. If you get to know yourself, you know what you have to take from that education, right? And you work with that. And so, for me, that’s what I’ve been doing. I’ve been getting to know myself as an Aboriginal person. [...] It means I can share that knowledge, I can share that experience and it can hopefully – What I’m sharing with you doesn't mean that you're going to have my experience. It means that you're going to hear the knowledge – you're going to hear it, but you're going to do something else with it;
you pass it on. It’s like that thought, that idea, and you expand on it, and so forth (Interview, Feb 24, 2012).

Paulette Regan (2010) explores what it might mean for Settlers to be witnesses to Aboriginal testimony and describes the significance of witnessing as it relates to Coast Salish communities. Citing, in particular, the practices of the Gitxsan and Wet’suwet’en Nations, Regan outlines the important role that feasts play in establishing and maintaining relationships between other nations. Drawing upon Chippewa/Anishnaabe lawyer John Borrows (2002), Regan (2010) explains that,

A hosting House serves food, distributes gifts, announces the House’s successors to the names of deceased chiefs, describes the territory, raises the totem poles, and tells the oral history of the House. Chiefs from other Houses witness the actions of the Feast, and at the end of the proceedings they validate the decisions and declarations of the Host House (Borrows, 2002, p.78-9, in Regan, 2010, p.198).

It is clear from Borrows’ (2002) explanation that the role of the witness is an immense responsibility because they must listen attentively, paying attention to all the details of the evening so that they can respect and honour what they have heard via dissemination. Regan (2010) states that, for Settlers to become witnesses, we must embrace a practice of ethical listening, whereby we take an active role in the engagement of Aboriginal testimony and accept our responsibility to pass on what we have heard. Boler (1999) adds to this, suggesting that witnessing is a dynamic process and, “as a witness, we undertake our historical responsibilities and co-implication” (p.186). Darlene’s comments on witnessing powerfully connect listening-as-double-attentiveness, self-awareness, and witnessing as a Settler responsibility. The responsibility to pass on the information you have been given is, at once, a solicitation to work with that information, to get to know oneself, to understand what you need to know from what you have been told. It is also a caution against appropriation, that just because “I’m sharing with you doesn’t mean that you’re going to have my experience.” Instead, the story that is shared must be accepted as ‘counsel,’ it is information that prompts you to do something else with it, to pass it on. This links to the principle of En’owkin introduced in Chapter 2. To review, the process of En’owkin, that is, the process that is to be actively and openly engaged with difference, can be likened to “a drop that permeates through the top of the head and suffuses the rest of the body,”
(Armstrong, 2004, p. 31). In a similar way, the information that has been told to us infiltrates like a drop through the top of the head. As we work through that information within our selves, it gradually “suffuses the rest of the body” until that expansion spills out into the larger body politic; “a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (Keating, 2002, p.523). At the same time, there are limits to Settler witnessing. The inaccessibility of some knowledge and spaces is also important to consider in relation to coalition building. These boundaries are explored in further depth in the section below.

6.4. Exploring the Limits of Solidarity

In her discussion of coalition politics, Bernice Reagon (1983) distinguishes between home and coalition. In her view, home is a nurturing space where one can rejuvenate when coalition becomes too exhausting. Once the energy stores have been raised “then you go back out and coalesce some more” (p.359). Coalition work, then, is not done at home. “Coalition work has to be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do” (ibid.). Because of the potential danger of coalition work, there are spaces needed where one can feel ‘at home.’

Sara Ahmed (2012) relays how tiring it can be to be surrounded by “a sea of whiteness” (p.35). She notes that one of the pleasures she received going to different events as part of her research on institutional diversity and equality was to be surrounded by people ‘like her’ and how invigorating it was “not to feel so singular” (p.36). She observes how difficult it can be to escape Whiteness. She describes her experience at one particular conference and how, as she looked around the room, she was bombarded with Whiteness: “The event was also structured around whiteness; all the plenary speakers were white” (ibid.). She was relieved to find that a caucus explicitly framed for participants of colour had been established, but was equally guarded: Would the event continue to “stay white”? Who would turn up? In all, ten individuals attended the caucus, four of whom were white. The organizer of the event handed out a description of the event to the participants of the room, which reiterated that it was a session exclusively for people of colour. Despite this, none of the white individuals made a move to leave. Individuals then took turns explaining what had prompted them
to attend the workshop. The white participants provided different rationales that “had given themselves permission to turn up at a black caucus: being interested in questions of race; a sense of solidarity, alliance, and friendship; [...] a belief that race didn’t matter because it shouldn’t matter” (p.37). As the participants of colour spoke, they explained why they wanted the caucus to be an event for persons of colour. One individual mentioned that it was interesting that, in a black caucus, 40% of the participants were white. Eventually, the white individuals left. Their parting comments ranged from recognition of the necessity for such space to aggression at feeling forced to leave. Ahmed notes that, “When the black caucus became itself, such joy, such relief! Such humor, such talk! What I learned from this occasion was the political labor that it takes to have spaces of relief from whiteness. I also realized the different ways that whiteness can be ‘occupying’” (p.37).

I include this anecdote by Ahmed (2012) because she intimately encapsulates the exhaustion that may accompany working and writing in white spaces and the need for marginalized persons to come ‘home’ and be with those who share the lived realities of oppression. The Settler/colonial mentality sees space as unbounded; there is no place we cannot go (Razack, 2002). However, there are physical and ideological spaces, which are off-limits. The Settler proclivity is to collapse the distinction between ‘coalition’ and ‘home’ because we are the somatic norm of nearly every space; there are very few places that many Settlers feel we do not have a right to occupy (Chow, 1996). The necessity for colonial Settlers to have spaces only for us is non-existent because, everywhere we go, we are able to find others ‘like us;’ to return to Ahmed’s analogy, Settler/colonial individuals are the sea through which persons of colour navigate to connect with each other (Ahmed, 2012).

Uma Narayan (1988) contends that, in attempting coalition, outsiders must attempt both methodological humility and methodological caution. By ‘methodological humility’ Narayan suggests that those outside of the group must assume that there is always something they are missing, and what might seem, to her, to be a ‘mistake’ may make more sense, were she privy to an insider level of knowing. By ‘methodological caution,’ Narayan cautions that criticism of the insider’s point of view must not be an attempt to belittle or reject the validity of their experience in its entirety. While such a call
for self-consciousness might seem, to outsiders, an impediment to easy communication, she notes that, given the potential for serious dissent in inter-group dialogue that may result otherwise, the added precaution is a small price to pay. For this reason, Settler collaborators must deeply consider our motivations for wanting to engage in potentially ‘off-limit’ spaces and question the ideology that supports our occupying impulse. If Settlers genuinely embrace a politics of solidarity, it is important to recognize that there are indeed spaces where we simply cannot go.

6.5. Working Across Difference: The Importance of Reparative Relationships

In Chapter 2, I introduced arguments about the importance of attending to a politics of difference and cited Cynthia Burack’s (2004) conceptualization of reparative coalitions as arrangements that actively solicited differences and afforded opportunities for bridge-building. Reparation, as it applies to coalition politics, offers an understanding of working across difference that can be applied to inter-group relationship building as I have discussed in this chapter.

Reparative coalition politics brings together the various ‘frames’ of coalition building – between self, members of our own group, and members of other groups – and links them together via an ethic of concern. As Burack (2004) expresses, “I understand reparative groups to be those that collectively work through issues that routinely plague groups without giving in to the worst, most destructive, and unfortunately most common group possibilities” (p.59). Burack emphasizes that reparative groups do not gloss over the histories of asymmetrical power-relations or “genealogies of harm-doing between groups” (p.111). Rather, reparative groups are those who interrogate the history of unequal relations and examine their own implications within such history. Such communities are supported through an openness and flexibility that recognizes and addresses differences. Further, Burack maintains that it is on such an open spirit of engagement that reparative relationships depend.

Feminist and political theorist Iris Marion Young (1997) adds to the conversation by introducing the principle of asymmetrical reciprocity. She challenges the traditional
definition of reciprocity, arguing that it presumes that the perspectives of oneself and another are interchangeable. In actuality, “each participant in a communication situation is distinguished by a particular history and social position that makes their relation asymmetrical” (p.39). Young outlines her definition of asymmetrical reciprocity as such:

We meet and communicate. We mutually recognize one another and aim to understand one another. Each is open to such understanding by recognizing our asymmetry. A condition of our communication is that we acknowledge the difference that others drag behind them, shadows and histories, scars and traces, that do not become present in our communication. Thus we each must be open to learning about the other person’s perspective, since we cannot take the other person’s standpoint and imagine that perspective as our own. This implies that we have the moral humility to acknowledge that even though there may be much I do understand about the other person’s perspective through her communication with me and through the constructions we have made common between us, there is also always a remainder, much that I do not understand about the other person’s experience and perspective (p.53).

The sentiments expressed by Young connect to my earlier reference to Narayan’s (1988) discussions of methodological humility and caution, Burack’s (2004) notion of reparative politics, Regan’s (2010) understanding of Settler witnessing, and Simon’s (2004) articulation of what it means to be ‘touched’ by the past. There is a thread that runs through these works, which is that access to another is always incomplete. There will always be things that one cannot know based on our differentiated subject positionings, and it is in acknowledging and embracing these differences, these spaces of ‘not-knowing,’ of ‘cannot be known,’ that effective coalition work has the potential to be actualized. I conclude this section with an excerpt from my interview with Denise, who offers up an important reminder regarding collaborative arrangements:

whether you work with one person for one hour, you work with one person for a lifetime, that is collaboration. Again, you just never know where those ripples are going to go. And that’s one of the things that is really huge for me, is those tiny little drops and where those ripples go. [...] I learned through my Master’s program that collaboration is really important; the possibilities, and how we can collaborate and not agree (Interview, Mar 2, 2012).
Here, Denise calls attention to the reality that, whether our engagements with others are brief or enduring, the principles that underpin respectful engagements matter. All of it, no matter how fleeting, is collaboration and, for this reason, encourages us to attend to the transformative possibilities of engagement. Being self-aware, asking questions of ourselves and others, listening responsibly, being a witness, and accepting one’s limits of knowing are several of the important criteria identified by participants as necessary for reparative coalitions between Aboriginal and Settler peoples. These participants suggest that it is imperative to be ever mindful of these protocols for, as Denise sagely observes, “you just never know where those ripples are going to go” (Interview, Mar 2, 2012).

6.6. Summary

In this chapter, I returned to the issues I initially presented in Chapter 2 by exploring the difference between knowing and acknowledging the colonial legacy and understanding its relationship to the present in further detail. I then went on to explore how Settler/colonial myths, like colour-blindness, meritocracy, and individual blamelessness, serve to obstruct a willingness to explore critical discourse that challenges dualistic framings of injustice (Regan, 2010; Schick & St Denis, 2003). These issues were explored in the context of a workshop experience relayed to me by Beth, wherein she witnessed a blatant and emotional instance of resisting privilege. I highlighted the work of Roger Simon (2004) to demonstrate how practices of critical remembrance and responsible listening were imperative for open inter-group engagements. I then drew upon the voices of participants and a variety of critical theorists and feminists to highlight respectful protocols that they variously argue may enable the conditions for reparative inter-group coalitions to be formed. These included the importance of self-awareness, attentive listening, asking questions, embracing one’s role as a witness, and accepting the limits of knowing and solidarity with the oppressed on the part of Settler collaborators. A review of the salient themes raised during participant interviews, as well as thoughts on further coalitional possibilities will be explored in the following chapter.
Chapter 7. Learning ‘About’ to Learning ‘From’: Possibilities for Coalition Building

7.1. Introduction

In this penultimate chapter, I weave together the strands present in this dissertation to emphasize the salient messages that the experiences of the participants point to. I begin by returning to a discussion of standpoint theory, originally introduced in Chapter 3, and assert its importance to understanding the experiences of Aboriginal educators in K-12 contexts. In the second section, I argue that continued denial of institutions, with respect to social and racial oppression, has resulted in the ongoing invisibility of Aboriginal educators within schooling institutions and return to participant experiences to reiterate how this is manifested within schools. I then move to an analysis of fear and the ways in which it may serve as an impediment to coalition building. I conclude the chapter by focussing on the coalitional possibilities that may arise from daring to speak to uncomfortable issues and share a participant experience that encapsulates what this may look like in practice. I now turn to focus on standpoint theory and its relevance to investigating the continued salience of colonialism within educational contexts.

7.2. Standpoint Theory and Its Applicability to Aboriginal Education Contexts

In Chapter 3, I first introduced standpoint theory as an important framework through which to understand the experiences of Aboriginal educators in K-12 contexts. Here, I set the stage for the sections that follow using standpoint theory to support my assertion that the participant responses highlighted within this dissertation have important implications for thinking about Aboriginal educators’ experiences within
education contexts as a group and the processes of colonialism and racialization that construct those experiences.

To review, Collins (1997) suggests, “the notion of a standpoint refers to historically shared, group-based experiences. Groups have a degree of permanence over time such that group realities transcend individual experiences” (p.375). Collins draws upon her lived experiences as an African-American woman to support her claim. She contends that African-Americans have been a subjugated group since before she was born and will likely continue to be long after she has passed away. She observes that while her individual experiences with institutionalized racism might be distinctive, “the types of opportunities and constraints that I encounter on a daily basis will resemble those confronting African-Americans as a group” (p.375). Within this framework, ‘standpoint’ refers to groups who have a shared history based in their shared positioning within power relations. In her words:

It is common location within hierarchical power relations that creates groups, not the results of collective decision making of the individuals within the groups. Race, gender, social class, ethnicity, age, and sexuality are not descriptive categories of identity applied to individuals. Instead, these elements of social structure emerge as fundamental devices that foster inequality resulting in groups (p.376).

Further, Collins (1997) argues that standpoint theory is an appropriate paradigm to analyze social and/or race relations because similar institutional structures work to foster inequalities in each context. Within the context of this research, the experiences of participants can be seen as examples of the ways in which Aboriginal people, as a group, continue to be subjugated in educational contexts. Certainly there is a plethora of research examining the ways in which Aboriginal youth are marginalized within schools (see, for example, Antone, 2000; Battiste, 1995; Chalifoux & Johnson, 2003; Cowley & Easton, 2004; Donovan, 2007; Kehoe & Echols, 1994; Richards & Vining, 2004; van der Woerd & Cox, 2003). Less often considered is the ways in which the experiences of Aboriginal educators are representative of the colonial legacy that endures in contemporary educational institutions. Speaking from her subject-position as an Indigenous woman, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) argues that all Indigenous women share a common experience of living in a society in which they are, or have been,
persistently belittled. She goes on to state that an Indigenous woman’s standpoint is, in part, shaped through a legacy of dispossession, racism, sexism, and a negotiation of sexual politics between and within cultures. I would extend Moreton-Robinson’s assertions to suggest that the participant narratives of the preceding chapters also represent a standpoint based in a legacy of colonization, which includes cultural and familial alienation, racism, and stereotypical representations that attempt to relegate Aboriginal workers into racialized roles. As I demonstrate in subsequent sections of this chapter, the narratives of participants also suggest that power relations within educational contexts are sustained through Settler resistance to critique and through the maintenance of structural inequalities.

7.3. Being E-raced: The Legacy of Racial and Social Oppression

In “Race, gender, and the university: Strategies for survival,” Mohawk lawyer and professor Patricia Monture (2010) reflects on her experiences as an Aboriginal academic working in university contexts and contends that educational institutions continue to deny their complicity in perpetuating social and racial oppression. Further, she argues that the experiences of Aboriginal women in higher education institutions remain largely invisible and that the lack of attention to these experiences has resulted in continued exclusion and silencing. I would extend Monture’s observations to the contexts in which the participants of this study work to suggest that schooling institutions, including the K-12 system, have rendered the experiences of the majority of these Aboriginal educators equally invisible.

When discussing perceptions of institutional and peer support, participants responded in much detail. The ensuing discussions yielded a complex picture of psychic and spatial exclusion, discrimination, and silencing that was part of the lived experiences of many Aboriginal educators. I explored these experiences in Chapter 4, wherein I examined the ways in which Aboriginal workers were ostracized and posited why this might be the case. Drawing upon Puwar (2004), I suggested that Aboriginal staff members were ‘space invaders’ in that they occupy positions for which they are not the somatic norm. As a consequence of entering occupational spaces that are not
‘reserved’ for them, I proposed that Aboriginal individuals are subjects of Settler surveillance, assuming both the ‘burden of doubt’ and the ‘burden of representation’ for occupying roles not typically held by them in the past. Further, I argued that the presence of Aboriginal staff might be disorienting to white colleagues in that the confrontation with those previously on the outside, who are now on the inside, disturbs the boundaries that have contributed to a privileged sense of whiteness. I further proposed that the fear of displacement and the feeling that ‘other’ bodies have invaded the physical space of the institution results in the amplification of numbers, whereby non-white individuals are seen to take up more space than they actually do. These claims were supported by the accounts of participants such as Henrietta, Daniella, and Darlene, who reported pushback from administration as a result of repeated requests for greater numbers of Aboriginal staff. Darlene and Henrietta, in addition to Brenda and Beth, also shared their experiences of increasing surveillance and accountability on the part of the institution. Further, Thomas, Andrea and Gwen relayed their experiences of having to handle ‘all things Aboriginal’ by virtue of their racial backgrounds. Finally, Denise, Andrea, Daniella, and Henrietta shared their feelings of insignificance and struggles for appropriate physical and psychic space.

The breadth and depth of responses I received on this issue appeared to be indicative of ongoing experiences of marginalization and invisibility that many Aboriginal educators face. This invisibility is sustained through institutional resistance to critique and assertions of colonial dominance. For example, Shonna’s recounting of the process of drafting the Enhancement Agreement (EA) in her school district, wherein the District Vice Principal of Aboriginal education was impelled to rewrite introductory paragraphs that named racism as a key factor underlying Aboriginal/Settler relations, underscores the difficulties of attempting to effect change in institutional contexts. By refusing to acknowledge a narrative that names racism and places the colonial relationship of Aboriginal and Settler peoples at the forefront of the document, the District Principal’s actions affirm the continued illegitimacy of talking about race in Settler workplaces and to reinscribe Settler authority. Institutional resistance to disruption and critique was further evidenced in the use of EAs as measures for institutional performance, ‘standing in’ for the changes in Aboriginal education that the documents claim to support. Many of the participants, including Thomas, Beth, and Brenda, for example, perceived the EAs as
constituting a ‘tick-box’ approach to Aboriginal education, something that “looks good in theory,” but offers “no concrete commitment” to change (Interview with Brenda, July 3, 2012). Drawing upon Ahmed (2012), I suggested that having a policy on Aboriginal education becomes equated with being good at Aboriginal education. As a form of image management, the presence of an EA creates an image of a school district as being open to and accepting of Aboriginal education. In the process, the inequities that the documents were meant to address are further concealed.

In addition to pointing to the continued failure of institutions to seriously consider social and racial oppression, the responses of participants also signified the difficulties of attempting to effect change within institutional structures and revealed frustration with institutional rigidity and resistance to change. Moreover, these experiences of marginalization, silencing, and continued institutional rigidity beg attention to the sets of conditions that uphold a resistance to change. Monture (2010) argues that the colonial oppression that Aboriginal people survived continues to be entrenched within Canadian institutions. She states, “when people wonder why Aboriginal people just can’t let the past be the past, they don’t understand the present-day impacts of institutional oppression… that we have survived” (p.25). In addition to Monture, Razack (2002) considers the ways in which the organization of spaces sustains social hierarchies. She argues that the origins of Settler society lie in the dispossession of Aboriginal populations and that contemporary relations continue to be structured by this racial hierarchy. Further, Razack maintains that the colonizer has created national mythologies, which reimagine Settlers as the original habitants and bearers of civilization. She explains: “A quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour… In this view, violent colonization simply did not happen” (p.2). The erasure of the violence and dispossession inherent in Canadian nation building thus render the experiences and history of Aboriginal peoples invisible. To return to Monture (2010) the past is not just ‘the past’; for many Settlers, the ‘past’ is a myth based in an investment of history that overlooks the colonial relationship between Settlers, Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian nation state. Further, a ‘past’ that envisions the land we now call Canada as terra nullius, developed by enterprising Settlers, relegates Aboriginal people to pre-modern, anachronistic spaces; a “racial
shadow” on the Settler landscape (Razack, 2002, p.3). Aboriginal people, as pre-modern, are thus absorbed into the landscape and rendered transparent (ibid.).

I would argue that the ideology underpinning Canadian national mythology, which enables Settlers to settle and colonize national space by rendering Aboriginal people invisible, also justifies the marginalization of Aboriginal workers within educational contexts. As the experiences of the participants indicate, Aboriginal people are kept ‘in place’ on the part of Settler administration through a refusal to recognize continued complicity in racial and social oppression and a resistance to change. With respect to nation building, Razack writes, “to contest white people’s primary claim to the land and the nation requires making visible Aboriginal nations whose lands were stolen and whose communities remain imperilled” (p.5). Likewise, to challenge Settlers’ primary claim to educational institutions entails making visible the marginalization and continued ostracization of Aboriginal educators. As the participants of this study suggest, impelling administrators to recognize and commit to change is an ongoing and frustrating struggle. In what follows, I elaborate on how the ideologies that justify the continued invisibility of Aboriginal workers within educational spaces also poses challenges for coalitions to be built within these contexts.

7.4. The Politics of Fear: Loss, Self-Preservation, and Other Impediments to Coalitions

When talking to participants about the nature of relationships that they developed within schools, some individuals candidly shared their perceptions of inter and intra-group cohesion. In Chapter 5, I analyzed participants’ responses in order to examine the underlying and interwoven threads of colonialism, intragroup dissent, and intergenerational trauma. An analysis of the tensions existing within an Aboriginal education team made apparent how systemic and internalized racism contributed to intragroup dynamics by manifesting as verbal and emotional violence (Anzaldúa, 2009). Further, in Chapter 6, I explored the difference between knowing and acknowledging the colonial legacy and understanding its relationship to the present. I then moved to explore how Settler/colonial myths, like colour-blindness, meritocracy, and individual blamelessness served to obstruct a willingness to explore critical discourse that
challenges naturalized frameworks. Here, I return to the topic of intra and intergroup cohesion by examining a further theme that emerged throughout my discussions with participants: that of fear and, in particular, a consideration of how fear may prevent individuals from coalescing.

In her analysis of the fears underpinning religious intolerance in Western societies, philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2012) considers how fear manifests and is reinforced. Beginning with the biological basis of fear, Nussbaum observes that fear is a primitive emotion whose origins are associated with the amygdala, a part of the brain that is common among all vertebrates and not associated with higher cognitive functioning. For example, while compassion and anger require perspectival and causal thinking, respectively, fear does not require complex mental processes: “All it requires is some rudimentary orientation toward survival and well-being, and an ability to become aroused by what threatens” (p.25). Nussbaum further remarks that human fear is deeply rooted in evolutionary tendencies. As an example, she cites the frightful reaction many humans have to shapes that resemble a snake, which would have been helpful to our evolutionary ancestors. In this respect, fear serves as a valuable mechanism in that it triggers a strong repulsive reaction to perceived threats or dangers to our personal safety and well-being. Nussbaum notes, however, that our natural impulse of fear does not serve us well when it becomes extended and shaped by culture, politics and rhetoric. To cite, “we react to perceived danger, and that is not always the same thing as real danger. As society gets more complex, occasions for potential dissonance between appearance and reality multiply” (p.27, author’s emphasis). Ahmed (2004) implicitly extends Nussbaum’s (2012) observations, arguing that fear involves relationships of proximity and temporality, which are integral to establishing ‘apartness’; that is, we fear an object, one we have identified as a ‘threat’, that approaches us in anticipation of future hurt or pain. She considers discourses of fear as concerned with the preservation, rather than gratification, of subjects, and posits that fear “might be concerned with the preservation not simply of ‘me’, but also ‘us’, or ‘what is’, or ‘life as we know it’, or even ‘life itself’ ” (Ahmed, 2004, p.64). Along this line, Ahmed argues that fear is also connected with loss, in that the subject fears the taking away that which secures her or his relation to the world. In her words, “The anxiety about the possibility of loss becomes
displaced onto objects of fear, which seem to present themselves from the outside as dangers that could be avoided, and as obstacles to... fulfilment" (p.67).

While the theme of fear has recurred throughout the course of this dissertation, I wish to return to two particular discussions as examples of how fear may prevent individuals from coalescing: The first is Shonna’s recounting of her experiences participating in the EA drafting process from Chapter 6, and the second is Beth’s thoughts on intragroup cohesion from Chapter 5.

To review, the incident recounted by Shonna concerned her uncertainty around whether or not it was appropriate to announce her Settler heritage to the group when others were identifying their Aboriginal ancestry. Although a friend had suggested that she consult the group regarding proper introductory protocols, and although she felt that “the dynamic would be there” to announce her heritage, Shonna refrained from doing so and only felt potentially ready to publically identify as a Settler when she witnessed another Settler identify himself as such to the group (Interview, March 16, 2012). Importantly, it took her another six months for her to self-identify to the caucus. When I asked Shonna if fear was a contributing factor to her hesitancy, she appeared to equate fear with intimidation, responding that, while the group was not unapproachable, she did not want to “make a misstep because I can appreciate how fragile my relationship with the people of the committee could be” (ibid.). In the previous chapter, I suggested that Shonna’s hesitancy to announce her heritage may be attributed to a desire to be seen as a “good white person” (Thompson, 2003, p.9). I further argued that, by implying that the stability of the intergroup relationship is dependent upon whether or not she acted appropriately, Shonna avoided an examination of the epistemology in which her hesitation to seek clarifying knowledge is based. In extending this discussion here, I would advance the idea that fear, as has been discussed above, may have also underpinned Shonna’s reservations.

To elaborate, Ahmed (2004) describes vulnerability as being a feeling of openness and susceptibility to attack. In this frame “fear involves reading such openings as dangerous; the openness of the body to the world involves a sense of danger, which is anticipated as a future pain or injury” (p.69, author’s emphasis). As such, Shonna’s
refusal to ask may be seen as a mechanism of defence that serves as a form of self-protection. Shonna’s concern, then, may be preserving her self-conceptualization as an ally with Aboriginal peoples and causes. In order to be vulnerable, Shonna would have to risk disruption. Given her view that a misstep may result in a long process of rebuilding (Interview, March 16, 2012), the identity that Shonna seemed concerned with preserving was that of a “respectful, appropriate member of the committee” (ibid.). However, as Dion (2009) maintains, “respectful silence,” that is silence rooted in uncertainty about what to say “pre-empts the possibility of working through the difficult learning in which [we] are called upon to participate... we cannot use our fear of saying the wrong thing as an excuse for not doing the work” (p.55). In order to coalesce, it is important for individuals to risk vulnerability in order to bridge connections between ourselves and others (Anzaldúa, 2009). I explore this notion in further detail in the following section. First, I return to Beth’s discussion about intragroup cohesion.

Fear of loss also factored in to Beth’s observations on intragroup cohesion in Chapter 5. To review, Beth drew parallels between intragroup struggles faced by the Aboriginal education team and the politics inherent in bands determining membership. Based on experiences with her own band, she commented that members on-reserve were reluctant to admit new members because they did not want to share what little resources that were available to them. She added that the issue was applicable to, “Aboriginal people as a whole because we’re struggling to hold on to what little we have. And I wonder, is that what we’re doing as educators as well? Are we struggling to hold on to what little we have because we don’t want to lose it?” (Group interview, June 14, 2012). Her question is worth reiterating here because it points to an important aspect of fear that may deter people from coalescing. In Chapter 5, I analyzed this issue in relation to a larger colonial infrastructure that can result in intragroup conflict amongst Aboriginal people. Here, I wish to examine how fear of loss serves as a mechanism for shoring up institutional structures, thereby keeping the colonial status quo in place and impeding efforts to build coalitions.

Ahmed (2004) writes that, within political theory, fear is understood as primary to the emergence of government, in that the elimination of fear is the promise of social order: “it is fear of anarchy that makes subjects consent to being governed” (p.71).
Ahmed continues: “fear [thus] functions as a technology of governance: the sovereign power either uses fear to make others consent to that power, or civil society promises protection, and the elimination of fear, to ensure consent” (ibid.). In applying this premise to Beth’s question, I would extend Ahmed’s (2004) argument to suggest that the governing factor in sustaining intragroup divisiveness within educational institutions is a fear of loss, particularly as it relates to ideological superiority. In other words, it may be a fear of loss that ensures the maintenance of the institutional status quo in that the possibility of a loss of power discourages dissent. As such, the currency of institutional maintenance could be seen to be power. As Anzaldúa (2009) observes, instances of contention are rooted in issues related to power in decision making: Because marginalized groups share a long history of “theft of entitlement,” (p.285) borders between become tightened and reinforced in order to protect against encroachment: the fewer the individuals within the inner circle, the fewer persons to vie for decision-making power. However, in this context, the possibilities for coalition are limited in that, in attempts to preserve the group, there may be a desire to claim a space, “bar the door, and check all the people who come in” (Reagon, 1983, p.358). While Reagon admits that nurturing spaces are important for shoring up strength, she emphasizes that the reactionary closing of borders is inadequate to surviving in a world of diversity. Coalition work, she maintains, is done “in the streets,” not in barred rooms (p.359). Further, she adds, coalition is not necessarily nurturing: “if you feel the strain, you may be doing some good work” (p.362). Solidarity, in this regard, is not about sameness, but about finding strength in difference. I expand upon this and other coalitional possibilities in the section that follows.

7.5. Learning ‘About’ to Learning ‘From’: Possibilities for Coalition Building

Dion (2009) distinguishes between ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from.’ For her, learning about is an experience that presupposes distance. Students acquire information about a topic in a way that detaches the learner from what is being learned. By contrast, learning from is a more intimate experience as it requires learners to position themselves in relationship to what is being learned. As she explicates, “For
Canadians, learning about Aboriginal people, history, and culture from the position of respectful admirer or patronizing helper is easy and familiar. Learning that requires recognition of implication in the relationship and a responsible response is not easily accomplished” (p.58). Simon (2004) adds to Dion’s distinction, suggesting that learning from testimony means that we must not only work to alleviate our own ignorance but must also challenge the very social and ideological conditions that allow us to be ignorant in the first place.

In discussing how to employ our differences as strengths, Lorde (1984/2007) maintains that, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may temporarily allow us to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (p.112, author’s emphasis). In my analysis of the phrase in Chapter 4, I interpreted Lorde’s use of the word ‘tool’ to refer to an ideological paradigm, a colonial mindset that has become internalized. Here, I maintain that analysis and return the reader’s attention to the phrase precisely because of its import in considering possibilities for coalition building. To learn from the experiences of the participants herein calls the reader to locate her or himself in a process of coalition – of discomfort and a reconciliation of difference – first with the self, as Burack’s (2004) coalitional frames suggest, and then rippling outward to position oneself in relationship to what is being learned via intra and intergroup contexts.

In Chapter 6, I drew upon participants and a variety of critical theorists to highlight respectful protocols that may enable the conditions for reparative coalitions to foster. These were: embracing a practice of responsible listening, asking questions, becoming self-aware as a requisite of communicating with others, and the responsibility of witnessing, that is, passing on the knowledge that one has received to others. In this final section, I would like to draw attention to an additional strategy that may potentially bring about change: in particular, speaking in the face of difficulty.

In her discussion regarding survival in institutional contexts, Monture (2010) maintains that change will not occur if experiences of minoritized peoples within the institution remain personal. Although she acknowledges the risks inherent in naming issues of racialization within the academy, and admits that she has experienced
backlash, Monture states, “I speak to these issues because it is the only way to unmask and destabilize the power held over so many of us” (p.26). Monture continues, remarking that, as part of surviving in the institution, minoritized employees must recognize the value of their experience as knowledge. She observes that “universities are isolating places by nature, and any individual who is othered experiences multiples of the base isolation” (p.30). She maintains that the isolationist nature of these structures is precisely the reason why one must allow one’s experience and knowledge gained through struggle and marginalization to inform the way in which institutions are challenged. Importantly, Monture distinguishes that what that looks like will be different, depending on one’s positionality. However, in challenging the structural isolation that many individuals experience, Monture maintains that “through sharing our experiences, even the difficult ones, we can start to build communities of racialized scholars… Nothing is going to change if we keep quiet” (ibid.). In “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” Lorde (1984/2007) emphasizes the importance of speaking, “even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood” (p.40). As she powerfully articulates: “the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak… we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottle, and we will still be no less afraid” (p.42). While she acknowledges the appeal not to be afraid, she contends that learning to put fear in perspective can be a source of strength. Silence, she further observes, will not protect us. For this reason, she encourages her audience to speak, to articulate ‘what must be spoken’ so that we will not become immobilized by silence (p.44).

To illustrate the power of what Monture (2010) and Lorde (1984/2007), have offered, I turn to Darlene, who relayed an experience of challenging taken-for-granted knowledge during a professional development session that she had participated in. The topic was poverty, and one of the teachers had brought up the importance of getting kids to donate more for the food bank. During the teachers’ brainstorming session as to how this may be achieved, Darlene told me that,

what really bothered me was that the focus was on us, not on poverty. And after listening to the different people talking, “How are we going to motivate them? Oh, well we’ll make it into a competition and whoever brings the most will get this and this,” I finally put up my hand and I said, “I think we’re focusing on the wrong thing here. Shouldn’t we be focusing on motivating them by educating them about poverty?” And then the teacher who brought up the whole idea said,
“Oh I talked to them about it before we sent out the notice about the food bank.” And I said, “Did you talk to them, or did you educate them?” And of course he was a little bit taken aback because I was challenging him. And then I was so happy because one of the EAs [Educational Assistants], let’s say ‘of colour,’ in the group... she said, “I agree with Darlene. We need to start educating about poverty. Not just making it into a contest about who’s bringing in the most food.” because then it just becomes about you. The whole idea is to understand what’s really going on for those families and people who need that food, not just the fact that they’re poor. It would be like saying I went to residential school because I was Aboriginal and leaving it at that. There’s more to it than that. The government was involved. Again, the government is involved in poverty. Let’s take a look at this and let’s give kids an opportunity to really examine that issue (Interview, October 2, 2013).

In drawing attention to an alternate way of educating youth about poverty, Darlene challenged a normalized way of motivating youth based on Settler myths of individualism and competition. Here, Darlene makes a distinction between talking about and educating on an issue. For Darlene, education pertains to drawing attention to the structural conditions that uphold poverty and inequality. Her challenge to the educator in question, and to the group, can be seen as an example of speaking against the status quo. Instead of learning about poverty, Darlene challenged her colleagues to educate youth in such a way that they may learn from the issue by recognizing larger structural implications.

Another important actor in this vignette is the Educational Assistant who dared to voice her support for Darlene and add weight to Darlene’s challenge. It may be said that Darlene took a risk in speaking against a dominant viewpoint and being ‘unpopular.’ However, the choice of the Educational Assistant to speak up in the group had the potential to destabilize and challenge taken-for-granted understandings of what it means to impel youth to action.

In thinking about coalitional possibilities, it is perhaps useful to think about starts, rather than endpoints. As Thompson (2003) maintains, “when we start congratulating ourselves on how far along we are, it is easy to stop thinking of ourselves as on a journey and starting thinking of ourselves as having arrived” (p.20). Instead, she suggests that we focus on emergent approaches to change, using what has been
learned thus far to continue to shift our “perceptions, investments, and involvements, [thus seeking] to alter situations enough so that, from the resulting experience and understanding, we can explore fresh possibilities of responsiveness” (ibid.). The experience recounted by Darlene represents a coalitional possibility in that it affords an opportunity for the teachers in the room to work together through discomfort to expand their perception of what it might mean to educate about poverty from a structural, rather than individualistic, basis.

Reflecting on the reaction of the teacher she challenged, Darlene informed me that she “felt the fear of this teacher” due to the disruption of his epistemological moorings. She continued: “I tried not to feel frustrated because I thought, “Okay, this is where we’re at, and this is the work that we need to do – not only with kids, but with adults.” … We have to find ways to educate teachers and giving them the confidence to get through their fear,” (Interview, October 2, 2013). She reflected on the impact of fear, stating that, “fear is natural. It’s important, because it’s what is signalling to us that we need to deal with something and that we need to transform it into something else. Action. Wonder.” (ibid.). The experience Darlene recounts appears to indicate the need for an educational paradigm that incorporates the principles of coalition politics into education for both students and teachers alike. Drawing upon her experiences working with students in graduate and undergraduate university courses pertaining to Indigenous education, van der Wey (2012) observes that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike must coalesce “if together we are to begin to address the long-term implications of the colonial legacy for the ‘broadest possible good’” (p.199). She goes on to suggest that, to do so, both parties must actively commit to coalescing, despite the inherent tension and discomfort that arises from doing so, both at the level of the self, between, and within groups. “To engage purposefully in coalition politics, then, requires a genuine willingness to disrupt the status quo, to be vulnerable and to let go of any stance of innocence in relations with others” (p.200). While the particular teacher in Darlene’s narrative was not potentially prepared or willing to engage in such a way, her decision to ‘talk up’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2000) to the predominant viewpoint in the room presents a space where the opportunity to engage in such a way is potentially possible. Educating students and teachers on how to challenge each other in ways that create room to explore issues in further depth is an important component of this process.
As a complement to van der Wey's (2012) position, essayist and feminist Adrienne Rich (1985) writes that we are all products of history; “we are the latest to set foot in a tangle of oppressions grown up and around each other for centuries” (p.12). She questions what prompts people to change: “Our old fears and denials – what helps us let go of them? What make us decide we have to re-educate ourselves?” (p.16). She argues that the movement for change resides in actions and words. It is de-masculinization, de-westernization, “becoming a critical mass that is saying in so many different voices, languages, gestures actions: It must change. We ourselves can change it” (p.17, author’s emphasis). As the scholars and participants within this dissertation have demonstrated, part of this change entails working through the differing implications of our shared history, as well as our assumptions and investments in the identities that history supports or denies. While fear and disruption are interconnected to a process of coalition building, these states of being cannot be used as excuses to avoid doing the work (Dion, 2009; Regan, 2010). In this final participant excerpt, Darlene suggests the need to transform fear into an energy that impels us to act. Perhaps within this space of transformation from fear to action, coalitional possibilities may be achieved.

7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I drew together the strands present in this dissertation to emphasize the salient messages that the experiences of the participants herein point to. I began by returning to a discussion of standpoint theory and asserted its importance to understanding the experiences of Aboriginal educators in K-12 contexts. In the second section, I argued that continued failure of institutions to take social and racial oppression seriously has resulted in the ongoing invisibility of Aboriginal educators within schooling institutions and returned to several participant experiences to reiterate how this is manifested within schools. I then moved to an analysis of fear and the ways in which it may serve as an impediment to coalition building. I concluded the chapter by focussing on the coalitional possibilities that might arise from daring to speak to uncomfortable issues and shared Darlene’s experience in a professional development discussion about poverty to illustrate what this might look like in practice. In the final chapter of the
dissertation, I summarize my main arguments, and offer some possible implications of the research.
Chapter 8. Summary, Implications of the Study, and Possibilities for Future Research

8.1. Summary of the Study

I began this research in order to investigate what it means to equitably and respectfully coalesce in Aboriginal education contexts from the points of view of both Aboriginal and Settler educators. This interest was motivated by the belief that the possibility for a better collective future resides in coming to an understanding of how our identities, investments and ways of relating to one another have been and continue to be informed by the legacy of colonialism. Through the course of individual interviews, a group interview, and two follow-up interviews, I spoke with fifteen Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators who taught me a great deal about what it means to relate to one another in equitable ways. As a result of such stimulating conversations, data analysis, writing, and continuous reflection, I honed my research questions to the point where it appeared that two overarching themes drove the research. These are as follows:

1. What investments underpin Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators’ motivations to participate in Aboriginal education initiatives in urban public school contexts?

2. Do these educators deem it important to form relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues with respect to Aboriginal education contexts? If so, how do they form relationships?

These research questions shaped the design of this study, which primarily consisted of two stages: (1) semi-structured individual interviews wherein participants were asked questions related to the overarching research questions mentioned above; and (2) a follow-up semi-structured group interview in which participants reflected on key themes that I had identified as emerging from the individual interviews through a process that involved transcription, coding, and qualitative data analysis of participant responses.
Through this research design, I intended to engage participants in an exploration of the nuances of relationship building in Aboriginal education contexts.

Over the course of my data collection activity, several topics were foregrounded in ways that I had not anticipated. For example, when asked about the levels of institutional and peer support in education, many individuals engaged in open and, often, poignant discussions about the institutional and systemic racism they experienced. The frequency and impact of these stories led me to examine both the physical and psychic barriers that individuals encounter in finding a ‘place’ within schools and the ideological rationale for such ostracising, as I explored in Chapter 4.

Another question that prompted unexpected responses centered on participants’ perceptions regarding the importance of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. While commenting on intergroup dynamics, conversations often shifted to intragroup contexts, where individuals spoke of tensions that occurred on Aboriginal education teams and pondered what might be underlying such divisiveness. In Chapter 5, I investigated the complexity of relationships within Aboriginal education teams and considered how the colonial influence on Aboriginal identity politics affects intragroup cohesion. To do this, I drew upon the scholarship of critical women-of-color feminists and activists to suggest that healing from colonial trauma, in part, entails breaking the silence around the shame of oppression.

In addition to these topics, participants spoke to the importance they attached to inter-group relationships between Aboriginal and Settler peoples, and the challenges that can accompany cross-cultural collaboration. Participants offered powerful and insightful suggestions regarding the kinds of conditions that could enable reparative coalitions to form. Their insights were highlighted in Chapter 6, wherein I also explored the difference between knowing and acknowledging the colonial legacy and understanding its relationship to the present. I then engaged in an investigation of how Settler/colonial myths, like colour-blindness, meritocracy, and individual blamelessness can serve to obstruct a willingness to explore critical discourses that challenge naturalized frameworks.
Finally, in Chapter 7, I argued that continued failure of institutions to acknowledge their continued complicity in perpetuating social and racial oppression has resulted in the ongoing invisibility of Aboriginal educators within schooling institutions and returned to participant experiences to reiterate how this is manifested within schools. I began the chapter with a focus on standpoint theory and argued for its relevance to investigating power relations within educational contexts. I also engaged in an analysis of fear and the ways in which it may serve as an impediment to coalition building. I then concluded the chapter by reflecting on the coalitional possibilities that may arise from daring to speak to uncomfortable issues and shared a participant experience to demonstrate what this may look like in practice.

8.2. Implications of the Study and Possibilities for Further Research

I intend this research to be particularly relevant for educators working in K-12 contexts, and also pre-service or in-service teacher training contexts, where there is an interest in cross-cultural relationship building and the incorporating principles of coalition politics into such engagement. I also mean to add to education and sociological scholarship by presenting the insights from the participants as examples of an Indigenous standpoint theory, whereby participant narratives can be seen as representative of the dispossession, racialization, and ostracization that are largely experienced by Indigenous people as a group. This is not articulated with the intent to collapse differences and to retract from the individual experiences held by members within the group. Rather, the point to be made is that standpoint theory has the potential to draw one’s attention to the mechanisms of institutional power. “In this sense, group history and location can be seen as points of convergence within hierarchical, multiple, and changing structural power relations” (Collins, 1997, p.377). This point is among the key insights that participants’ narratives reveal, which also include: (1) the assertion that group based experiences continue to matter, particularly as they relate to social and racial contexts; (2) the suggestion that hierarchical power relations within educational contexts are sustained through Settler resistance to critique and structural inequalities; (3) that working in coalitions, and the different levels of self, intra, and inter-group that
are encompassed within this framework, is a valuable undertaking for working through the tensions inherent in Aboriginal-Settler relationships.

There are many possibilities for further research suggested by this study. In Chapter 3, I stated that I conducted two follow-up interviews with Darlene and Krista with an eye to having them link their practice to broader societal issues, in particular with regards to working through difficult learning with students and the implications this might have on broader workplace contexts, or Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationship building strategies generally. There is great potential for a research project such as this that would focus on specific pedagogical strategies and their broader applicability to addressing the rigidity and seemingly impermeable nature of institutional structures.

Another potential area of inquiry would be an exploration of ideas of what it took to be an effective administrative leader in Aboriginal education contexts. During semi-structured interviews, a number of participants commented on what both effective and ineffective leadership looked like with respect to championing Aboriginal education within schools. Such an exploration might be useful for those in leadership or administrative contexts with an interest in foregrounding Aboriginal curricula and initiatives within K-12 contexts.

8.3. If this Thesis were a Bridge... Concluding Thoughts

In her essay, “The New Mestiza Nation,” Gloria Anzaldúa (2009) states that mestizas doing coalition work are “bridge-persons,” connecting between ethnic and academic communities, feminist to non-political groups. Anzaldúa claims that we have different choices of the kind of bridge we want to be. The drawbridge is a person who withdraws for part of the time, acknowledging that she needs to recharge and regenerate before going back out “to coalesce some more” (Reagon, 1983). There is also the sandbar, which attaches an island to the mainland. The sandbar is Anzaldúa’s choice of bridge affiliation “because it’s natural and it’s underwater, which means I can be alone when I desperately need to, or I can connect to people” (p.212). Thinking about the kind of bridge I would want to affiliate with this work, and myself, I would choose a spiral bridge.
A spiral bridge (also referred to as a pig-tail or a loop bridge) is a bridge, which loops over its own road. Such a bridge is useful in steep terrain, and its shape is often used for pedestrian walkways and crowded metropolises, like the Nanpu Bridge in Shanghai, China, or the Kawazu-Nanadaru Bridge in Japan, where the gradient is so steep that a linear ramp is not possible. This seems to me to be an apt metaphor for coalition building, given the primacy within coalition politics to continuously engage and critically reflect upon differences within the self, within groups, and between groups in such a way that results in one ‘spiralling back’ through these various coalitional frames.

As Anzaldúa (2009), Burack (2004), Dion (2009; 2007), Lorde (1984/2007), Regan (2010), Simon (2004), and many other scholars featured in this study have expressed, it is imperative that we ask questions of ourselves and our own assumptions, motivations, and investments as we work to coalesce with others. Like the spiral bridge doubling back on itself, so too must we double over the road that we have come, examining our own ‘biographies of relationship’ to the people that we encounter and our motivations for engagement. The spiral bridge is necessary in geographical locations where the gradient is too steep. So too, is coalition work steep and arduous. Coalition work, hopefully, becomes a little easier when we have the spiral of self-reflection to help propel us forward, to move us further up the gradient before it is finally time to bridge out into the unknown.

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I have attempted to double-back on my own investments and motivations, to interrogate insidious colonial patterns and thought processes that I have carried forward into this work. This thesis is a story of many stories, a compilation of invitations to adopt a stance of non-indifference. Were I to have any hopes for the potential impact of this thesis, it would be these: that the stories and lives contained herein provide opportunities to the reader to reflect on their own relationships and investments in coalition work; that they refrain from using ‘apology’ as either excuse or permission for ignorance; that they accept the stories they have been exposed through this dissertation to as counsel, that is, as invitations to carry on a conversation that is unfolding; that they accept their role as a witness to the testimonies they have encountered and pass on what they now know. Finally, if this
thesis is a bridge, let it be one that connects the reader to the spaces of engagement needed both within and without.
References


Assembly of First Nations (n.d.) Description of the AFN. Retrieved from http://www.afn.ca/


Appendix A
Official Apology to the Survivors of Indian Residential Schools

Prime Minister Harper offers full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools system

Ottawa, Ontario – June 11, 2008

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history.

For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870’s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child". Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

One hundred and thirty-two federally-supported schools were located in every province and territory, except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most schools were operated as "joint ventures" with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches. The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities. First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.
The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada’s role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey. The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

Nous le regrettons
We are sorry
Nimitataynan
Nimininchowesamin
Mamiattugut

In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools, implementation of the Indian Residential
Schools Settlement Agreement began on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and Aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership.

A cornerstone of the Settlement Agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system. It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.
Appendix B
Critical Discourse Analysis of the Federal Residential School Apology: Activity

Time: 40-45 min
• 20 min – group work
• 20/25 minutes – group discussion and debrief

Materials: A copy of the Federal Residential School Apology

Activity Objective:
• To enhance students’ critical thinking skills through a discursive analysis of the Federal Apology
• To begin to recognize unstated assumptions and values through textual interpretation

Instructions:
• Divide into groups
• Review the Federal Residential School Apology and consider the following questions:
  o How is the content of the text presented?
  o What angle is Stephen Harper taking?
  o What concepts/issues are emphasized?
  o What concepts/issues are deemphasized or left out altogether?
  o What is the text trying to achieve?
  o What attitudes, assumptions, points of view are presupposed?
  o What else could have been said?
  o Whose interests are being served by the choice of words and phrases?
• We will reconvene as a whole group to discuss the insights from our smaller groups.
Appendix C
Invitation to Participate – Online Survey

Title: Forging Alliances in Aboriginal Education: An Investigation into Aboriginal-Settler Relationship Building

Dear School District Staff Member,

My name is Sadie Donovan. I am a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, and I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum Theory & Implementation, and I would like to invite you to participate.

Specifically, I am interested in how educators, such as yourself, think about how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can coalesce more effectively in Aboriginal education contexts. I would like to invite you to participate in a survey that asks you questions based on the subject of Aboriginal education, particularly centering on your involvement in Enhancement Agreement process of your school district. Because the Enhancement Agreement is the primary document used by your school district to articulate their mandate for Aboriginal education and their relationships and responsibilities to the Aboriginal students they serve, I am interested in your views about it. The survey consists of approximately 10-15 questions and should take approximately half an hour of your time. The link will be active for two weeks to allow you to answer the questions at your convenience.

You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to, and participation is confidential. Since the survey housed on a secure server in Canada, your anonymity is protected. By accessing the link, you will be directed to a consent form, which states that by filling out the survey, you are agreeing to participate having read and understood and agreed to the consent form.

This is the first phase in a three-phase research study, and there is a possibility that you may be contacted for further participation. Of course, you are free to decline participation at any time. Though you will not benefit directly from participating in this study, your answers will provide insight into the challenges and successes and motives of educators who, like yourself, are committed to improving Aboriginal education for both teachers and learners. A brief summative report of the survey will also be e-mailed to you once the answers of the survey have been analyzed.

I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You can find my contact details in the signature portion of this e-mail. Questions pertaining to the study may also be directed to my supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey; __________. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Hal Weinberg at the Office of Research Ethics; __________.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate in this first phase of research, please click on the <NEXT> button to access the consent form preceding the survey questions.

With kind regards,
Sadie Donovan
(Ph) __________
(E) __________
Appendix D
Sample Letter of Re-contact – Semi-Structured
Interviews and Group Interview

Title: Forging Alliances in Aboriginal Education: An Investigation into Aboriginal-Settler
Relationship Building

Dear Mr./Ms/ <Insert Name>,

I would like to invite you to participate in the second and third phases of my research study, which
seeks to understand how educators, such as yourself, conceive of what equitable relationships in
Aboriginal education may look like and the impacts of this on the students with whom you work.
The first part consists of an individual interview. The second, a focus group with fellow
participants to discuss themes emerging from the individual interviews.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview about your
experiences as an educator in Aboriginal education contexts and to participate in a group
discussion about Aboriginal education policies and initiatives at the district level. During the one-
on-one interview, we will discuss topics relating to your motives for involvement in Aboriginal
education, your thoughts about Aboriginal education in contemporary contexts, and your
perceptions of relationship regarding the peers and students with whom you work. The meeting
will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place and should last about 60 minutes.
During the group interview, we will discuss the themes that have emerged as a result of the
interviews you participated in. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and
place and should last about 90 min.

The interview will be audio taped and the group interview will be videotaped so that I can
accurately reflect on what is discussed. The recordings will only be reviewed by me for the
purposes of analysis and transcription. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not
wish to, and participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a locked cabinet in my
home, and only I will have access to the information.

You are free to decline participation during any stage of the process. Though you will not benefit
directly from participating in this study, your answers will provide insight into the challenges and
successes and motives of educators who, like yourself, are committed to working with and
improving the education of Aboriginal youth. Interview transcripts will also be e-mailed to you for
review once the data has been transcribed.

I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You can find my contact details in
the signature portion of this e-mail. Questions pertaining to the study may also be directed to my
supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey at __________ or __________. If you have any questions
about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Hal Weinberg at the Office of
Research Ethics: ____________.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate in this second phase of
research, please e-mail me or contact me at the number listed below to discuss participating

With kind regards,
Sadie Donovan
(Ph) __________
(E) __________
Appendix E
Consent Form – Online Survey

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Simon Fraser University

Study Title: Forging Alliances in Aboriginal Education: An Investigation into Aboriginal-Settler Relationship Building
Principal Investigator: Ms. Sadie Donovan, PhD Candidate
Application #: __________
Phone: ______________
E-mail: ______________

DISCLOSURE

You are invited to participate in research conducted by Ms. Sadie Donovan, PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and there will be no negative consequences if you refuse to participate in it, withdraw from it, or refuse to answer certain questions. This research has been approved by both Simon Fraser University and the Burnaby School District. Please note that the Aboriginal Council was not approached, as the research results will not be attributable to, or will affect, the communities that Aboriginal participants identify with (See SFU’s TCPS 2 Policy “Research Involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada”).

Please read all the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. When all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, you may then, if you so choose, sign the consent for to volunteer and participate in this research study.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate how educators, who are involved in Aboriginal education, think about how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can coalesce more effectively in Aboriginal education contexts. By providing insight into the perspectives of educators, this study aims to contribute to the overall project of equitable education for Aboriginal peoples through suggestions and recommendations for in-service professional development.

PARTICIPATION DETAILS

This study is being carried out in three stages: the first phase is an online questionnaire, the second is an interview, and the third is a group interview. The participant details in this consent form pertain to the first stage of research. Please note that by filling out this survey, you are consenting to participate.

If you agree to participate in this portion of the research, you will be asked to answer approximately 10-15 questions pertaining to your involvement in the Enhancement
Agreement process of your district. For your information, an Enhancement Agreement is the primary document used by a school district to articulate their mandate for Aboriginal education and their relationships and responsibilities to the Aboriginal students they serve. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to, and participation is confidential. Since the survey is housed on a secure server in Canada, your anonymity is protected.

There is a possibility that you may be contacted for further participation in subsequent stages of this research. Of course, you are free to decline participation at any time, and there is no risk to participating in this study. Though you will not benefit directly from participating in this study, your answers will provide insight into the challenges and successes and motives of educators who, like yourself, are committed to working with and improving the education of Aboriginal youth. A brief summative report of the survey will also be e-mailed to you once the answers of the survey have been analyzed.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Please print a copy of this consent form for your own records. At any time you may revoke your permission to use data acquired from you at any time preceding submission for academic presentations and/or publications by notifying the principal investigator using the contact information provided above.

Confidentiality regarding the information that you provide will be assured through the use of a secured server housed in Canada, and your individual answers will not be shared. The data will be securely stored and password protected. Only I will have access to the password and data. Moreover, since the questionnaire is filled out online, there is no way to track or identify you. No names, e-mails or IP addresses will be recorded. All data collected by the online survey is securely stored in Simon Fraser University’s on-site servers and completely controlled by the University’s privacy policies regarding personal data.

No one other than myself will have access to the raw digital audio, video, interview recording sheets, notes, and survey digital archives. These will be stored in a locked cabinet or on a password protected, secure, encrypted server, for a minimum of two years as required. After this time, a shredder will destroy all hard copy files and digital data will be deleted.

I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You can find my contact details in the introductory portion of this consent form. If you have any direct concerns or complaints, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey at _________ or _________. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics at _________ or __________.
Statement of Comprehension and Voluntary Agreement

I am being asked to participate in a research study related to the education of Aboriginal youth. By signing this informed consent for, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above, that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Understanding that all of the data I provide will be anonymously maintained, analyzed, presented, and published, I am providing my consent to participate in this research study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Signature of Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<NEXT> <EXIT>

I have explained the research to the participant, and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this document and freely and willingly consents to participate:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name of Investigator</th>
<th>Signature of Investigator</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Appendix F
Consent Form – Semi-Structured Interviews and Group Interview

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Simon Fraser University

Study Title: Forging Alliances in Aboriginal Education: An Investigation into Aboriginal-Settler Relationship Building
Principal Investigator: Ms. Sadie Donovan, PhD Candidate
Application # _____________
Phone: _____________
E-mail: _____________

DISCLOSURE

You are invited to participate in research conducted by Ms. Sadie Donovan, PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and there will be no negative consequences if you refuse to participate in it, withdraw from it, or refuse to answer certain questions. This research has been approved by both Simon Fraser University and the Vancouver School Board. Please note that the Aboriginal Council was not approached, as the research results will not be attributable to, or will affect, the communities that Aboriginal participants identify with (See SFU’s TCPS 2 Policy “Research Involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada”).

Please read all the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. When all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, you may then, if you so choose, sign the consent for to volunteer and participate in this research study.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate how educators, who are involved in Aboriginal education, think about how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can coalesce more effectively in Aboriginal education contexts. By providing insight into the perspectives of educators, this study aims to contribute to the overall project of equitable education for Aboriginal peoples through suggestions and recommendations for in-service professional development.

PARTICIPATION DETAILS

This study is being carried out in three stages: the first phase is an online questionnaire, the second is an interview, and the third is a group interview. The participant details in this consent form pertain to the second and third stages of research.
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview about your experiences as an educator in Aboriginal education contexts and to participate in a group discussion centered around themes arising from the one-on-one interviews. During the one-on-one interview, we will discuss topics relating to your motives for involvement in Aboriginal education, your thoughts about Aboriginal education in contemporary contexts, and your perceptions of what is needed in order to ensure equitable relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peers and students. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place and should last about 60 minutes. During the group interview, we will discuss the themes that have emerged as a result of the interviews you participated in. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place and should last about 90 min. The interview will be audio taped and the group interview will be videotaped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. Please note that by consenting to participate in the focus group, you confirm that any information you encounter will be kept confidential and not revealed to parties outside the focus group. Although the objective is to maintain confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed.

Though there are no risks to participating in this study, you are free to decline participation at any time. Though you will not benefit directly from participating in this study, your answers will provide insight into the challenges and successes and motives of educators who, like yourself, are committed to working with and improving the education of Aboriginal youth. Interview transcripts will also be e-mailed to you for review once the data has been transcribed.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You will receive a copy of your signed consent form. At any time you may revoke your permission to use data acquired from you at any time preceding submission for academic presentations and/or publications by notifying the principal investigator using the contact information provided above.

Confidentiality regarding the information that you provide will be assured through the use of a locked filing cabinet to protect hard data (such as notes taken) and a separate USB key on which to save digital data so that it remains separate from my main computer.

No one other than myself will have access to the raw digital audio, video, interview recording sheets, notes, and survey digital archives. These will be stored in a locked cabinet or on a password protected, secure, encrypted server, for a minimum of two years as required. After this time, a shredder will destroy all hard copy files and digital data will be deleted.

I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You can find my contact details in the signature portion of this e-mail. If you have any direct concerns or complaints, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey at _________ or _________. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics at _________ or _________.

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Statement of Comprehension and Voluntary Agreement

I am being asked to participate in a research study related to the education of Aboriginal youth. By signing this informed consent for, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above, that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Understanding that all of the data I provide will be anonymously maintained, analyzed, presented, and published, I am providing my consent to participate in this research study:

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Appendix G
Consent Form – Group Interview

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Simon Fraser University

Study Title: Forging Alliances in Aboriginal Education: An Investigation into Aboriginal-Settler Relationship Building
Principal Investigator: Ms. Sadie Donovan, PhD Candidate
Application # __________
Phone: ____________
E-mail: ____________

DISCLOSURE

You are invited to participate in research conducted by Ms. Sadie Donovan, PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and there will be no negative consequences if you refuse to participate in it, withdraw from it, or refuse to answer certain questions. This research has been approved by both Simon Fraser University, the Vancouver School Board, and the Burnaby School District. Please note that the Aboriginal Council was not approached, as the research results will not be attributable to, or will affect, the communities that Aboriginal participants identify with (See SFU’s TCPS 2 Policy “Research Involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada”).

Please read all the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. When all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, you may then, if you so choose, sign the consent for to volunteer and participate in this research study.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate how educators, who are involved in Aboriginal education, think about how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can coalesce more effectively in Aboriginal education contexts. By providing insight into the perspectives of educators, this study aims to contribute to the overall project of equitable education for Aboriginal peoples through suggestions and recommendations for in-service professional development.

PARTICIPATION DETAILS

This study is being carried out in three stages: the first phase is an online questionnaire, the second is an interview, and the third is a group interview. The participant details in this consent form pertain to the third stage of research.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me and your colleagues for a focus group interview discussing the themes that have emerged as a result of the
interviews you participated in. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon
time and place and should last about 90 min. The group interview will be videotaped so
that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. Please note that by consenting to
participate in the focus group, you confirm that any information you encounter will be
kept confidential and not revealed to parties outside the focus group. Although the
objective is to maintain confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed.

Though there are no risks to participating in this study, you are free to decline
participation at any time. Though you will not benefit directly from participating in this
study, your answers will provide insight into the challenges and successes and motives
of educators who, like yourself, are committed to working with and improving the
education of Aboriginal youth. Focus group transcripts will also be e-mailed to you for
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Confidentiality regarding the information that you provide will be assured through the use
of a locked filing cabinet to protect hard data (such as notes taken) and a separate USB
key on which to save digital data so that it remains separate from my main computer.

No one other than myself will have access to the raw digital audio, video, interview
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I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You can find my contact
details in the signature portion of this e-mail. If you have any direct concerns or
complaints, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Dolores van der Wey at ___________
or __________. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed
to Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics at __________ or
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Statement of Comprehension and Voluntary Agreement

I am being asked to participate in a research study related to the education of Aboriginal youth. By signing this informed consent for, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information provided above, that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Understanding that all of the data I provide will be anonymously maintained, analyzed, presented, and published, I am providing my consent to participate in this research study:

Name of Participant    Signature of Participant    Date

I have explained the research to the participant, and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this document and freely and willingly consents to participate:

Name of Investigator    Signature of Investigator    Date
Appendix H
Online Survey Questions

Survey Goals:

(a) To obtain a better sense of the demographic that worked on the Enhancement Agreement
(b) To garner insight into how EA participants understood the EA process, particularly with respect to how colleagues related to one another during the process and perceptions of Aboriginal education outcomes.

Questions:

1. Are you or have you been a staff member at Burnaby School District?
2. If so, what is/was your occupation? If teacher, please include subject and grade. If administrator, please include age level you administer. If Aboriginal Youth & Family Worker, please state what age level with whom you primarily work.
3. How long have you been with Burnaby School District?
4. Are you aware of how people were selected to work on the Enhancement Agreement?
5. What prompted you to become involved in the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement process for Burnaby school district?
6. What was your role during the Enhancement Agreement Process?
7. Can you describe your experience working on the Enhancement Agreement? For example, was there a lot of consensus pertaining to the overall aims and objectives that ought to be included in the EA, or was there disagreement? If so, what were the areas that proved to be the most agreeable or contentious?
8. Are you a part of the Enhancement Agreement Advisory Committee? If so, what is your role, and how long have you been involved?
9. What are the goals of the Enhancement Agreement, as you understand them?
10. What does Aboriginal education mean to you?
11. What aspects of the Enhancement Agreement do you think are the most salient and why?
12. In your view, have the principles of the Enhancement Agreement been effectively implemented? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?
Appendix I
Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Interview Goals:

(a) To gain insight into the investments that underpin Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators’ motivations to participate in Aboriginal education initiatives.
(b) To understand if educators feel it’s important to form relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants in Aboriginal education contexts.
(c) To understand how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators define Aboriginal education and what the implications of their definitions are on the education of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth.

Sample Questions:

Investments

1. What prompted you to want to participate in this study?
2. What prompted your interest in working in Aboriginal education?
3. What factors have been the most influential to you with respect to the development of your pedagogy to Aboriginal education and why? For example: policies, professional development, previous education, role models.

Relationships

4. Tell me about what you perceive to be the importance of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?
   a. What is the importance of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in education contexts?
5. Do you currently feel that you have institutional and peer support for your involvement in Aboriginal education? Could you elaborate in what ways you feel (or do not feel) supported?
   a. How has the Job Action affected Aboriginal education initiatives in the District?

Enhancement Agreement

6. Were you involved in the creation of the Enhancement Agreement?
   a. (If answered in the affirmative) Can you describe your experience working on the Enhancement Agreement?
   b. (If not) Have you been involved in the Enhancement Agreement Advisory committee at some point? (If so) What has your experience been like working on the committee?
7. What are the goals of the Enhancement Agreement, as you understand them?

8. What aspects of the Enhancement Agreement do you think are the most salient and why?

9. In your view, have the principles of the Enhancement Agreement been effectively implemented? Why or why not? If so, in what ways?

**Education**

10. What does ‘Aboriginal education’ mean to you? Do you make a distinction between ‘Aboriginal education’ and ‘the education of Aboriginal students’?
   a. In your view, what are the implications of such a distinction?

11. In your view, what are the most pressing challenges in Aboriginal education today?

12. For whom is it important to be aware of the issues pertaining to Aboriginal education?
Appendix J
Semi-Structured Group Interview Schedule

Interview Goals:

(a) To explore prominent themes as identified through data analysis
(b) To triangulate semi-structured interview data

Sample Questions:

1. What may explain or underpin tension between Indigenous peoples in intra-group contexts?
   a. What are the implications of those differences playing out?

2. When asked about institutional and peer support, many of you spoke to the fact that the level of support varied from school to school and that administration played a key role in bridging relationships. I’m wondering what is the impact of leadership for addressing inter and intra-group relationships? What do you perceive to be the impact of leadership for addressing inter and intra-group relationships?

3. The third and final aspect of the interviews that I’d like to discuss in further detail is the theme of voice. Participants repeatedly shared with me the importance of voice. For many, it was a primary reason for them to become involved in the study. An overwhelming number of individuals stated that they wanted to share their experiences, to be a champion for their students, to perhaps influence someone’s thoughts in some way. Given that having a voice is so important, I’m curious as to what it is that you feel silenced about?
   a. What are the implications of a lack of voice?
   b. How might the issues of voice be collectively addressed? How might the data from the research be disseminated beyond the dissertation write up?