

Nathalie Piquemal

and

Bret Nickels

University of Manitoba

Cultural Congruence in the Education of and Research With Young Aboriginal Students: Ethical Implications for Classroom Researchers

The purpose of this article is twofold: (a) to explore in an inner-city kindergarten classroom how Aboriginal students' interaction patterns differ from, and are often in dissonance with, what their non-Aboriginal teacher would expect from his or her non-Aboriginal students; and (b) to explore some of the ethical tensions that we experienced as researchers involved in ethnographic research with these children and their teacher with special attention to the interplay between research and advocacy. While addressing issues of cultural congruence in this classroom, we explore some of the relational complexities that we experienced as we thought about how we should position ourselves in relation to the students and to the teacher and in relation to our perceived ethical responsibilities as researchers. We suggest ways in which researchers might combine caring with advocacy.

Cet article a deux buts: (a) analyser les formes d'interaction chez les élèves autochtones dans une maternelle des quartiers déshérités pour évaluer dans quelles mesures elles se distinguent, et souvent vont à l'encontre, des attentes qu'a leur enseignant non Autochtone face aux élèves non Autochtones; et (b) étudier certaines tensions éthiques auxquelles nous avons fait face en tant que chercheurs poursuivant une recherche ethnographique qui porte sur ces enfants et leur enseignant et qui prête une attention particulière aux interactions entre la recherche et la défense d'une cause. En étudiant la congruence culturelle dans cette salle de classe, nous jetons un regard sur quelques complexités relationnelles que nous avons confrontées alors que nous nous demandions comment nous situer par rapport aux élèves, à l'enseignant et à nos responsabilités professionnelles en tant que chercheurs, telles que nous les percevions. Nous proposons quelques façons qui permettraient aux chercheurs de combiner la compassion et la défense d'une cause.

Introduction

Using ethnographic and reflective narrative methods in an inner-city kindergarten classroom with a high proportion of Aboriginal children of Ojibway and Cree ancestries, we explore how many of these students' interaction patterns differ from, and are often in dissonance with, what their non-Aboriginal teachers seem to expect from their students (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). Our purpose in this article is twofold: (a) to address the need to be sensitive and responsive to interaction patterns that are consistent with Aboriginal ways as

Nathalie Piquemal is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education. Her research interests include Aboriginal/cross-cultural education and research ethics.

Bret Nickels is an instructor for the Faculty of Native Studies and is presently doing postdoctoral research in Aboriginal community economic development.

experienced in the context of a particular classroom; and (b) to explore our perceived ethical responsibilities as researchers engaged in relational ethnography with special attention to issues of power and advocacy.

Four research questions were asked in this study: (a) How do Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal teacher interact in the classroom? (b) How do culturally different perceptions and interpretations of interactions influence classroom expectations of, and relationships between, Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal teacher? (c) How can knowledge of these perceptions and interpretations help researchers, teachers, and teacher educators engage with Aboriginal student learning in culturally relevant ways? (d) How do we position ourselves as classroom researchers engaged in relational ethnography in ways that are consistent with an ethic of caring and advocacy? While addressing issues of cultural congruence in the classroom, we explore ethical tensions that we experienced as we thought about how we should position ourselves in relation to the students and their teacher, with special attention to the tensions between research and advocacy.

The first premise on which this research is based is the cultural discontinuity hypothesis that suggests that differing cultural elements between in-school and out-of-school experiences such as behavioral, interactional, and communicative norms, as well as the social values that influence these norms, have a significant effect on young Aboriginal students' school experiences (Huffman, 2001). These differing cultural elements between the home environment of many Aboriginal students and the formal environment of the school frequently lead to conflicts and misunderstandings, thus often resulting in school failure (Hornett, 1990; Ledlaw, 1992). In particular, John (1972), Philips (1972), and Cazden (1982) contend that early socialization experiences affect learning styles. A common example cited in the literature is the avoidance of eye contact, which is often interpreted by non-Aboriginal teachers as indicating a lack of concentration (Philips, 1983). For many Aboriginal children, these experiences are inherently shaped by traditional values including sharing, noncompetitiveness, reluctance to speak out, and noninterference (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFramboise, 2001). Knowledge of these values is important, for research has shown that minority children who have a strong cultural identity have a better chance of succeeding in school, provided their particular ways of being are honored (Cummins, 1986; Vadas 1995).

The second premise that guides this research is related to the complexities of power relations. Feminist poststructuralism serves as a guide potentially to help teachers, researchers, and teacher educators understand the notion of cultural disability (McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Zhao, 2001), meaning "the reasons why certain students succeed within particular classroom contexts whereas others are less successful" (Baxter, 2002, p. 6). It also serves as a guiding structure potentially to enable educational researchers "to confront and consider the processes of situating oneself in a conscious manner that examines the nuances of relationships of power" (Knight, 2000, p. 171), as also argued by Fine (1994) and Gottfried (1996).

Although a vast amount of literature deals with the challenges of teachers from mainstream society working with diversity, the need to respond ethically when working in cross-cultural research and educational contexts, and par-

ticularly with Aboriginal people, has not been adequately addressed. Delpit and Dowdy (2002), Nieto (1999), Sindell (1997), Toohey (1998), McCarty, Lynch, Wallace, and Benally (1991), and Piquemal and Kouritzin (2003) contend that students whose culture differs from the mainstream culture experience difficulties in their school experiences because they do not conform to how schools define what constitutes learning. In our article we explore specific ethical challenges researchers may face when positioning themselves in a classroom context in which cultural discontinuities are lived by students and constructed by teachers.

In addition, although issues of research ethics are now widely discussed in qualitative research (de Laine, 2000; Punch, 1986; Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002; van den Hoonaard, 2002), there remains a need to explore further how researchers may be inclusive of Aboriginal values and perspectives in relational ethnography. Furthermore, a number of studies focus on ethical issues involved in school-based research with children (David, Edwards, & Alldred, 2001; Denscombe & Aubrook, 1992; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Morrow & Richards, 1996). There remains a need to explore more specifically some of the ethical issues that researchers may face in their classroom research depending on how they position themselves in relation to the teacher and the children, as well as in relation to their own "academic agenda." As such, we echo Weinberg's (2002) research in a maternity home on dilemmas of maintaining a relationship of trust while being truthful to uncomplimentary material, by looking into issues of advocacy, power, and caring in the specific context of a classroom ethnography. In this article we explore the researcher's positionality in relational ethnography with Aboriginal people in a classroom context.

We begin our inquiry with a classroom situation encountered in our research.

A Classroom Moment: "Look at me!"

From my perspective, the teacher Vera (pseudonyms are used to protect participants' anonymity) seemed to disapprove of the behavior of Alex, Hannah, and Sonny, three Aboriginal students in the class who sat at the back of the room and were not participating in a class reading exercise. Vera verbally scolded them for not being more attentive and active with the rest of the class. She told them, "When I'm talking, your eyes should be looking at me, and your bodies should be turned this way." The obviously shy Aboriginal students reluctantly moved toward the gathered throng of students, noticeably shaken by their public humiliation. Their involvement throughout the remainder of the reading exercise seemed strikingly distant, aloof, and cold, as represented by their blank expressions and lack of participation in answering questions Vera posed regarding the reading. Despite Vera's attempt to draw the three students into the discussion and praise them for rejoining the group, the students continued their reserved, solitary existence for the rest of the afternoon, remaining mostly distant from the other students, as well as the teacher. (Field Notes from Bret's Journal, January 28, 2002)

Vera seemed to be cherished by many of the children and the parents. She was kind and would always find ways to encourage and praise the children for their efforts. She was approachable, and the students always seem happy to come to her classroom. She loved working in the inner city; she had been

working in this school for over 10 years. Many of her students were from immigrant and Aboriginal families. Over 60% of her students were of Aboriginal ancestry. During our interviews Vera expressed her belief that Aboriginal children needed to learn how to interact in ways that were consistent with the dominant culture, so that they would have the same opportunities in life as their non-Aboriginal peers. She wanted them to escape poverty, and in her view, this meant that they would have to learn Western ways of behaving, regardless of their cultural background. When asked about the place of Aboriginal culture in her teaching, Vera explained that she knew little about it and thus did not feel that she had the authority to teach it. She hoped that parents would teach their children Aboriginal ways as she believed these ways to be a valuable part of Canadian culture. The introductory story of this article is intended to highlight, without assigning blame, the complexities inherent in cross-cultural teaching and research situations.

Research Context

The time of the event described in Bret's field journal was mid-January 2002, four months into our research in the classroom. Our research team was composed of two Faculty members and a research assistant. Nathalie was one of the two Faculty members and Bret was a research assistant. We were conducting ethnographic research in an inner-city kindergarten classroom in Western Canada. We had selected this school for the study because of its large proportion of Aboriginal students of Ojibway and Cree ancestry. We spent two afternoons a week with the children and their teacher from October 2001 to June 2002. Our research project focused on interaction patterns involving Aboriginal students and cultural discontinuity experienced by Aboriginal children as they moved from their home environment to school. We focused on 10 students of Aboriginal ancestry (for whom we had received free and informed consent). We also worked with their parents, teacher, principal, and community members. We conducted ethnographic research using video, classroom observations, semistructured interviews, and field notes. Children were videotaped during class, and particular segments were then shown to parents, who were asked to comment on their children's interactions with their peers and with the teacher. Although we had obtained approval from the University's research ethics board, the school division, and the principal, and consent from the teacher, the parents, and the children, our own positioning as researchers living in relation with the teacher and the students raised ethical issues that we had not anticipated.

Methodology

Cultural discontinuity establishes the need for educational and research practices that recognize the specificity of Aboriginal interactional etiquette. Philips (1988) and Brant (1990) argue that Native North American interaction patterns are widespread and resistant to change and that Aboriginal interaction patterns such as nonverbal behaviors are prevalent in early childhood education. We explored how cross-cultural interactions with Aboriginal students are sometimes misinterpreted by teachers and researchers. In doing so we focused on Aboriginal interaction patterns often referred to as strategies of indirection (Darnell, 1988) such as noninterference and noncompetitiveness. We then

questioned our role as researchers involved in interactions with Aboriginal children who may struggle between their own cultural conventions and those of the school. We did so by reflecting on our own research experiences with Aboriginal people in educational and research contexts. In addition, we asked Aboriginal educational consultants and parents to comment on video segments that highlight cultural differences in interaction patterns. Finally, we explored the implications of specific Aboriginal behavioral norms, namely, strategies of indirection, with special attention to the tension we experienced between our research agenda and our responsibilities to teacher and students. Our specific dilemma relates to the incongruence that often exists between culturally relevant interactions with Aboriginal children and teachers' beliefs: we ask how we can conduct ourselves ethnographically in ways consistent with perceived commitment and responsibilities and suggest how classroom ethnographers might research with caring and advocacy, an approach we call *relational advocacy*.

Aboriginal Interaction Patterns and Cross-Cultural Ambiguity in Education

We were not surprised by the moment of cultural ambiguity between the teacher and the students in Bret's field note. We thought about how psychiatric, clinical, and teacher assessments of Aboriginal children often describe students as passive, difficult to assess, and not forthcoming (Brant, 1990). We also recalled a conversation about Aboriginal ways of interacting in learning situations between Bret and a Cree education consultant. The Cree consultant explained how behavioral assessments are often the result of misconceptions about Aboriginal people's ways of interacting. Quiet listening is often mistaken for passiveness and indifference (1999, personal communication).

Many researchers (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Brant, 1990; Good Tracks, 1973; Kirk, 1972; Longclaws, 1989; MacArthur, 1968; Mason, 1969, 1971; Ross, 1992) explain Aboriginal interaction patterns in school contexts in the light of the child's cultural background. They show that interpreting behavior as resistance, passive-aggression, opposition, depression, or withdrawal may fail to recognize the effect of the individual child's cultural heritage on his or her behavior in an educational setting. Brant (1990) lists these cultural, ethical, or behavioral strategies as "non-interference," "non-competitiveness," and the "attitude toward praise and punishment" (p. 535).

The Ethic of Noninterference

According to Brant (1990), noninterference is a "behavioral norm that promotes positive interpersonal relations by discouraging coercion of any kind, be it physical, verbal or psychological" (p. 535). Manifestations of this behavioral norm have been observed and described by Wax and Thomas (1961) and Kelso (1981), who contend that a high degree of respect for every human being's independence leads Aboriginal people to view coercing or attempting to persuade others as undesirable behavior. Instead, group goals are achieved by consensus and reliance on voluntary cooperation (Good Tracks, 1973). Armstrong and Patterson (1975) contend that this ethic is often misinterpreted by mainstream society as permissiveness, and that such permissiveness can have a detrimental effect on student learning.

A significant feature of the ethic of noninterference is the avoidance of direct eye contact as a way of showing respect to the teacher and not imposing meaning on others (Darnell, 1988). It seemed as if Vera interpreted Alex, Hannah, and Sonny's avoidance of eye contact as avoidance of involvement in the teacher-student relationship. In requiring that Alex, Hannah, and Sonny look at her, Vera conveyed the belief that in order to listen attentively, and thus to learn, students had to make eye contact with her. As Philips (1983) demonstrated in a study conducted in grades 1 and 6 on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, Aboriginal children may be reprimanded because how they convey attention differs from how their non-Aboriginal teachers expect them to demonstrate that they are paying attention. She explains that Aboriginal children often "engage in movement that violates classroom norms for appropriate body posture while listening much more of the time than do Anglo students" (p. 104). Consequently, cultural discontinuity occurs as a result of Aboriginal students being forced to behave in ways that are incompatible with the values and norms of their own culture.

Noncompetitiveness and Conversational Strategies

Noncompetitiveness suppresses conflict by avoiding intragroup rivalry and preventing any embarrassment that a less able member of the group might feel in an interpersonal situation. Such noncompetitiveness, Brant (1990) explains, "is often seen by non-Native employers as a lack of initiative and ambition" (p. 535). The Cree education consultant with whom Bret talked concurs.

I have often observed my fellow teachers misunderstanding their Native students who have grown up in a household that follows noncompetitive behaviors. They see the student as lacking any drive to do better in school and often assume that the Native student has no goals. Yet, these students tend not to thrive very well under such instruction. (1999, personal communication)

In the context of our research, we noticed Aboriginal children did not raise their hands to answer a question as often as non-Aboriginal children. When a student raised his or her hand, this usually meant that he or she had the answer to the teacher's question, and often that he or she was competing with other students to try to get the teacher's attention. Raising hands also indicated that the student felt that he or she knew something that others might not have known. However, displaying knowledge in such fashion was often contrary to Aboriginal behavioral norms according to which one does not put oneself above others (Philips, 1983). As a result, class participation in the form of teacher-fronted activities in which the teacher asks direct questions and the children volunteer answers is often incompatible with Aboriginal cultural values (Pewewardy, 2002). Not only do Aboriginal children tend to prefer cooperation to competition (Swisher, 1990; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989; Wolcott, 1997), they also favor responding to comments without being required to answer a direct question (Swisher & Deyle; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987).

In our own field journal, we noted distinctions between Aboriginal children's ways of responding to direct questions in teacher fronted-activities versus responding to comments in small-group student-directed projects. In teacher-dominated lessons, Alex, Hannah, and Sonny, as well as other Aboriginal students, were more silent than they were in small-group activities. They rarely

answered a direct question in front of the class. Nathalie noted that even in more personal one-on-one conversations, direct questions, especially those beginning with *Why*, would often be met with silence. Harris (1990) refers to such a response as passive resistance to what is perceived as too inquisitive. In her field journal, Nathalie notes that this phenomenon occurs quite often.

I have been interacting with these children for about 4 months now, and I often sit with them at a table where small-group activities take place, such as various games involving from 2 to 4 students, or where student-initiated activities take place, such as drawing, cutting, or painting. The children usually seem very happy and relaxed; they engage in conversations with each other (indeed more so now than at the beginning of the year). I have had many conversations with these children. In most situations my direct questions, such as, "Which game are you playing?" "Do you like this book?" and "What are you drawing?" remain unanswered, whereas comments inserted contextually in a conversation such as "I think this book is about a little boy" or "I read this book with Sauwna yesterday, and we both liked the little boy because he has a lot of courage" almost always generate a response, such as "my favorite part of the book is when ..." Alex rarely answers my questions about the games or activities that he is involved in, but he often responds to comments I make about these games and activities. He seems to enjoy joining in a conversation, or sharing an experience, rather than answering a direct question. I think that this stresses the importance of relationships, as trust and sharing. (Field Notes, February, 2001)

As Darnell (1988) states about Cree interactional etiquette, "talking is not an alternation of verbal information in question-and-answer format. Rather, it is the placing of information on the interactional floor" (p. 71).

Praise and Punishment

In Cree interactions "criticism of others, for example, is accomplished by parable and metaphor rather than directly. Praise is rarely stated at all, being conveyed by acceptance" (Darnell, 1988, p. 72). Brant (1990) maintains that "gratitude or approval among Native people is very rarely shown or even verbalized" (p. 536). A person is not rewarded for being good at something (such as a nurse, doctor, or hunter) because that is what one is supposed to be and, conversely, to be less than adequate at a particular task would not be mentioned as it would cause great embarrassment to the person being assessed. As a result, Aboriginal children have a great deal of difficulty dealing with praise, reward, and reinforcement, as well as anger, admonishment, or reprimand (Pewewardy 2002). Brant goes even further in this regard by offering an example of the typical attitude toward gratitude in the education of Aboriginal children.

Native children who are praised by their teachers will often deliberately do something to reverse the teacher's opinion the next day. To be told in front of the class that they have done a good job may be construed by them as being lied to and humiliated if they themselves do not believe they have done things perfectly. They may become ashamed if the positive assessment is not shared by the group. For that matter, even if praise is warranted, it may embarrass their peers who have not done as well, thereby disrupting harmonious relationships in the peer group. (p. 536)

For non-Aboriginal teachers, this attitude toward expressions of gratitude or approval can be disconcerting. They could incorrectly view the situation as one of ingratitude, leading to confusion when the "normal" reward system fails. This is how it appeared to us in Bret's recollections of the three Aboriginal children.

Teachers Experience Cross-Cultural Ambiguity

Dismissing or belittling what this teacher was attempting to do would be to ignore the deep-rooted socialization in Western educational structures. These are based on theoretical ambitions that are believed to prepare the child for the outside world. Members of the established education system are often unaware that many of these ambitions may differ considerably from Aboriginal ethics, values, and rules of behavior such as those discussed above. Thus cross-cultural interactions can be frustrating for the teacher. In Euro-Canadian education, many teachers contend that it is important to learn and act within a certain set of norms that a teacher is expected to promote and enforce. As Harris (1990) points out, "Aborigines cannot avoid learning Western skills if they are to become less dependent in the Western world" (p. 2). This raises the question of whether Western education can occur in the light of—rather than at the expense of—Aboriginal cultural values and patterns of interaction. If so, what are teachers' responsibilities and potential strategies to ensure that educational relationships are inclusive of Aboriginal ways of interacting? What responsibilities do researchers have to facilitate this process?

In our society, Aboriginal values run contrary to Western educational thinking. Noninterference, for example, can be construed as permissiveness, a trait much frowned on in our society (Brant, 1990). Aboriginal values such as noncompetitiveness run contrary to Western ways of thinking, and to employ such thinking may mean a loss of intellectual and educational guidance (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000). When discussing the need to accommodate Aboriginal forms of education (or relinquishing Western forms), Battiste and Youngblood Henderson state that "this way of viewing the world would lead to theoretical nihilism and destroy the established social order" (p. 93).

Bret's field note reminds us that the teacher's response, which seemed to read the situation as passive disinterest by Alex, Sonny, and Hannah, did not appear to work. What cultural assumptions were at work in this case? Were we correct in thinking that cultural norms were displaying themselves in the Aboriginal children's actions? If so, how can we create learning spaces where Aboriginal students can maintain their cultural identities and values?

As researchers committed to learning about how to address cultural sensitivity in the education of Aboriginal students, we wondered whether we should share our thoughts about cultural discontinuity with the teacher. Do we have the authority to step in? Do we have an ethical obligation to say something? If so, to whom? To the academic community? To the students? To the teacher? We wondered about our responsibilities as researchers and teaching assistants in this situation. We questioned whether we should guide our interactions with the children with these Aboriginal cultural norms in mind, or whether we should simply respect the classroom rules regardless of the children's cultural background. We wondered whether we should voice our con-

cerns and share our findings with the teacher and how we could do so while maintaining a respectful research community.

Researchers Explore Cross-Cultural Interactions

To understand our own positioning in this classroom better, we reflected on our own cross-cultural ethnographic experiences with Aboriginal people. The focus of Nathalie's research with Paiute-Shoshone tribes in Nevada was the ethical protocol of free and informed consent, with special attention to how cultural and sociolinguistic differences such as the ethic of noninterference affected the Paiute-Shoshones' understanding of what makes consent informed. One of her main findings was that the consent sought from her participants may often have not been truly informed, because it was negotiated such that it may not have been consistent with Aboriginal communicative norms. Potential participants may respond in ways that may be interpreted as offering consent when in fact the individual was simply acknowledging the researcher's speech respectfully. Nathalie refers to Darnell's (1998) sociolinguistic research among Cree people, who noted that "The expected response of 'ehe,' yes, does not mean 'I agree with you,' only 'I have heard your words'" (p. 71). Nathalie's research in Nevada led to the conclusion that "it is an important task of the researcher to discover how these speech acts come to have social meaning and resultant actions," so that researchers avoid risking "mistaking acquiescence for compliance" (Piquemal, 2001, p. 73). One of the research participants who had been involved in negotiations about issues of excavations said,

A lot of our people aren't aggressive or forceful or anything like that. It's not our way. And because of that, a lot of things happen to us. People impose things on us, make decisions for us about research or excavations; they don't really consult with us; they just assume that because we don't say anything, we agree with it. (personal communication, 1999)

We wonder how the behavioral norm of noninterference would affect Alex, Hannah, and Sonny's relationships with their teacher and, more important, how Vera would make sense of Alex, Hannah, and Sonny's behavior. The norm of noninterference may affect the communicative aspects of the process of seeking free and informed consent such that acquiescence is mistaken for compliance. Thus noninterference may also affect classroom interactions involving young Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal teachers.

One of Nathalie's research participants in Nevada, an Aboriginal educational consultant, believes that children are often misunderstood because they behave differently. She explains:

A lot of our kids sit back. They want to learn by observing. They learn a lot like that. Teachers sometimes don't understand and say to them: "Look at me! Pay attention to me!" And they are listening, they are hearing everything, they are not distracted. They are also trying to show respect. They are taught like that, especially if they are taught by their grandparents; it's a cultural thing. You don't look at them straight in the eyes, because it would be like challenging them. It's like somebody is in your space; it's very uncomfortable. (Field Notes, 2001)

In cross-cultural education involving Aboriginal students, the ethic of noninterference may affect how students interact with their peers and with their teacher, causing teachers sometimes to question their students' ability to concentrate and to perform. It would follow, then, that misinterpretation of the behavioral norm of noninterference by the teacher may hinder school success for Aboriginal children.

We contextualized and deepened our understanding of the event mentioned at the beginning of this article by interviewing Leonard, an Aboriginal educational consultant who had worked in the inner city where this research took place. We also showed Leonard the video segment in which Alex, Hannah, and Sonny were sitting away from the rest of the class and Alex was being reprimanded for playing with his shirt and looking away. Vera told him, "Keep your shirt quiet, turn your body this way, or go sit in the back." Leonard reacted to this event as follows.

That little boy who is sitting in the back, the one who was playing with his shirt, got reprimanded, even though he was listening to her [the teacher]. He was actually answering the questions even though he wasn't looking at her. But once he got reprimanded, he became detached and didn't make himself part of the classroom. He is there in the classroom but he is not really there mentally anymore.

Leonard went on to explain that lack of eye contact is often interpreted to mean that children are not paying attention and thus not learning. Leonard believes non-Aboriginal teachers are more comfortable with direct interactions (eye contact, volunteering to answer questions, etc.) than with indirect interactions.

We also shared our field note about Alex with Andrea, an Aboriginal educational consultant. She explains:

Direct questions are often considered rude, because you're putting people on the spot. We don't do that, and we don't feel comfortable answering direct questions. But when you share something, it's different. Like what you said to the little boy, about why you liked the book he was reading ... That's important, that's good, because you have a shared story, a shared experience. Most Aboriginal kids will respond to that, because they can add to the story. Nobody has to have an answer, you just share. (2002, personal communication)

We wondered about our ethical responsibilities as we interacted with Aboriginal children and their teachers. This was particularly sensitive because of the cultural mismatch between Aboriginal cultural values of noninterference and indirection and teachers' values of eye contact and more direct strategies. We wondered if we should share our cultural knowledge with the teacher. Should we expect teachers to respond to the cultural discontinuity that young Aboriginal children experience in daily interactions? Vera's patterns of interaction seemed to exclude noninterference. Some parents were likely to follow the norm of noninterference (consciously or not). What were our responsibilities as researchers in this situation?

A Teacher's Stance

Vera was always interested in our findings. She wanted to know more about the parents' perceptions of their children's school experiences. She was also interested in the understanding we developed in our interactions with the

children. Although she thought our findings about cultural interactions were interesting, she believed that her job was to teach the children skills and ways of interacting that were consistent with our dominant society. She believed that the children needed these skills in order to have the same educational, social, and economic opportunities as children from advantaged, mainstream backgrounds. As a result, knowing the cultural significance of such mannerisms as avoiding eye contact had little to no effect on her teaching and interactional strategies. Given that eye contact is important in mainstream society, Vera believed that it was important to require the children to make eye contact. Many of her speech patterns expressed this belief: "Where should your eyes be looking right now?" "Look at me!" "Your bodies should be facing me," and so forth.

Vera would not consciously believe that she was following an assimilationist strategy. She integrated multicultural content into her curriculum and always welcomed parents' suggestions. Her pedagogical stance stemmed from her belief in what the children must learn from mainstream communicative codes. Another part of it stemmed from her recognition that she did not have the authority or the knowledge to impart Aboriginal values. Yet we believed that exploring students' cultural norms was important for developing a bridge between Aboriginal children's home experiences and their school experiences. We often felt caught in a dilemma.

Researchers Face a Dilemma

We were both torn between reproducing and recreating patterns of interactions similar to and consistent with those of the teacher and acting in ways that were consistent with Aboriginal communicative and behavioral norms. These ways were often, yet not always, in conflict. Clearly we had to respect classroom rules and routines and not send the children mixed messages about these rules. We were temporary guests in a classroom that already had established its own organization. Yet what was a researcher's responsibility in a classroom? We were more than observers. We had a research agenda. We were also developing relationships with the children. The children seemed to relate to us as visiting teaching assistants.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) show how Aboriginal students could be regarded as "coming to" school to partake in what the school has to offer. From this perspective, the school can be perceived as being an established and sustainable institution with its own policies, practices, programs, and ethos, all of which have been developed to serve the society in which the school is embedded. However, from the perspective of the Aboriginal students and their families, the notion of entry into school may be one of "going to" school and participating in the school from their own cultural knowledge base. Such a positioning may mean that students and their families are not willing to become socially integrated into the cultural setting of the school if doing so is at the expense of the culture they bring with them. For such students, the experience of school may be valuable only in terms of the extent to which the school is willing to build on and respect the cultural integrity that students bring.

When Aboriginal students do not readily adapt to school norms and expectations and do not achieve the levels of "success" comparable to that of other students, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) suggest that the school's response

may be to focus on Aboriginal students as being aberrant and may intensify efforts to socialize them into the institutional setting. Yet a critical aspect of maintaining credibility for Aboriginal students and adults in their own world and in the world of work or school is the need to maintain two ways of being and communicating. Philips (1988) argues that nonverbal behaviors, including lack of eye contact, noninterference, and use of silence, are widespread and resistant to change because they are acquired early in life through socialization practices. Culture is believed to have a significant and long-lasting effect on young children. Philips further argues that this resilience is due not only to early enculturation practices, but also to physiological factors such as how this knowledge is processed by the brain. This provides evidence of the need for educational and research practices that are sensitive to, and inclusive of, Aboriginal interaction patterns.

Implications for Practice: Relational Advocacy

The implications of this study for cross-cultural research with and education of Aboriginal people are twofold. The first concerns cultural values, meaning the issue of cultural congruence in the education of Aboriginal students. The second concerns ethical values, meaning the issue of researchers' responsibilities in cross-cultural relational ethnography in a classroom context.

Cultural Congruence in Education

Unless mainstream researchers and educators realize that Aboriginal people have a radically different set of cultural imperatives, they are likely to continue misinterpreting their acts, misperceiving real problems, and imposing potentially harmful remedies. Although we believe there is a need for a culturally responsive pedagogy with Aboriginal children such as Sonny, Alex, and Hannah, we need to acknowledge the challenges teachers like Vera may face when situating their professional and personal knowledge alongside the lives of their students. We wondered how further inquiry into Vera's world might have helped us understand where her cultural beliefs came from. We wondered to what extent she had been socialized into a Euro-Canadian framework by our teacher-education programs. We also wondered how the school's stories shaped Vera's beliefs and whether there was any space for her to inquire about her students' worlds. Raising these questions shows that it is important for us to balance our perceived claim to advocacy with our duty as researchers to understand the contextual factors that shape a teacher's stance.

We believe that changes that require the development of culturally sensitive relationships with Aboriginal children, parents, and community members are the responsibility of all, not just the classroom teacher. Teachers cannot fight poverty and systemic racism on their own, nor can they delete centuries of oppression in the collective memory of Aboriginal students and their parents. Although there is much teachers can do, these changes cannot happen without support from school administrations. Many inner-city schools have developed programs and policies that aim to address the needs of Aboriginal children and their families. Although these schools have Aboriginal education policies on how to integrate Aboriginal culture into the curriculum, time is often an issue for teachers who try to implement these changes. Teachers and school administrators may have to begin to be more present in various cultural communities

and develop relationships that are responsive to the goals of the programs implemented in the schools.

Similarly, we believe that universities need to be more responsive to the increasing number of Aboriginal students in schools throughout the country. In particular, meaningful student teaching experience in an Aboriginal community should be required for all student teachers in their programs. In addition, given that interaction patterns are learned at a young age, and given that they are resistant to change, it would make sense to enable more Aboriginal people to access teaching through faculties of education that embrace Aboriginal perspectives.

Ethical Values in Research

We believe that researchers have an important responsibility to share their research findings with the academic community, but more important, their responsibility lies with those with whom they are in relation. Researchers are in relation with those who have taken risks opening their doors and those for whom the research is conducted. We address below the nature of this responsibility and suggest how educational researchers may think about their ethical responsibilities in classroom research.

Researchers have many responsibilities: funds, deadlines, reports to funding agencies and to the academic community, data collection, data analysis, and so forth. In relational inquiry, the notion of responsibility is defined in terms of what these responsibilities are, but more important, in terms of how these obligations play out in the relationships that researchers develop with their participants. In our research, we felt a responsibility to the teacher, the students, and to the academic community. Our dilemma arose from the fact that the responsibility we felt to the teacher seemed to contradict the responsibility we felt to the students and to the academic community. We felt a responsibility to respect the teacher's stance and the classroom rules, yet we also felt a responsibility to respond to the children in a way that seemed culturally relevant. We also wished to contribute to the body of literature that addresses cultural discontinuity.

Vera, the teacher, holds most of the power in the classroom and some power in the research. She structures routines and determines the rules and the type of behavior that is acceptable. In the research, she holds some power, which is mainly represented in the negotiation of free and informed consent. Among other things, she has assurance of privacy and confidentiality, may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty, and has the right to a copy of the transcripts of her interviews. The students hold virtually no power in the classroom as far as rules, routines, and acceptable patterns of behavior. In the research, the students hold some power represented by their parents' negotiation of the terms of free and informed consent that are similar to the teacher's. As researchers we hold no power in the classroom as far as rules and routines. In relation to the students, we at times acted as teaching assistants, assisting children in their activities, and at other times just as observers. We believed that we could not challenge the established code of conduct, but that we could practice more open-ended conversational strategies with the children, and more generally strategies of indirection as these did not challenge the established classroom structure.

The construction of our research stories raised the issue of representing voices. In the disseminating phase of the research, we believed that our responsibilities increased with our power and authority. We thought we had an obligation to be honest and true to who we were as researchers and to be faithful to the moral objectives of the research. The Aboriginal students were to be the primary beneficiaries of this research. Given that teachers were the means by which Aboriginal students' school experiences might improve, we needed to reach out to them with respect. We shared our findings with Vera and tried to engage in critical discussions with her about the kind of cross-cultural tensions we thought some of the children experienced. In addition, we chose to share these stories with the larger academic community. We wanted our research stories to express the students' experiences and voices. It was they who needed to be heard. We believe that a polyphonic text with multiple and differing perspectives is a way of living ethnographically with *professional caring*. Indeed, like Noddings (1986), we believe that it is important to maintain the caring community by asking the question "What effect will it have on the caring community we are trying to build?" (p. 499). Noddings suggests that researchers engage in critical discussions with their participants. Although this is a valuable suggestion, this may sometimes lead to uncritical tolerance if the dialogue between the two parties ends with mutually exclusive viewpoints. We argue that researchers should follow an ethic of *relational advocacy* whereby the moral stance of the research motivated by beneficence (in this case for Aboriginal children) takes precedence over the emotional aspect of the relationships at stake.

In summary, we suggest that researchers think about ethical relational inquiry with teachers and students by considering the following questions.

1. Who are the people with whom I am interacting in this research? How are we positioned in relation to one another?
2. How does power play out in these relationships, particularly in terms of my responsibilities as a researcher versus my responsibilities as a classroom guest?
3. Why does this particular interaction generate a dilemma for me in relation to the participants? Why do I experience some kind of ambiguity?
4. How does this event affect each participant?
5. What are my options in how I choose to respond to this event? How will each course of action affect the participants?
6. Who are the primary beneficiaries of this research?
7. How does the course of action chosen (e.g., naming a pedagogical practice as culturally destructive) help me maintain caring relationships with the participants while fulfilling my role as a researcher committed to the betterment of educational environments (in this case for Aboriginal students)?

The students in Vera's classroom are not a unitary group, and no single model of instruction is likely to succeed with all students. However, given the structure of power relationships that continue to shape our present school practices at the expense of Aboriginal people, we see our primary responsibility as identifying with a commitment to social change. Cross-cultural classroom research based solely on an ethic of caring intended to protect all participants' feelings may result in an inability to name practices and situations that require

attention such as those related to issues of poverty, social justice, inequities, and cultural discontinuities. Research based solely on advocacy may happen at the expense of relationships. Research based on relational advocacy, meaning combining both an ethic of caring and an ethic of advocacy, should happen in the light of relationships without compromising its mandate.

Acknowledgments

We thank the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for funding part of the research on which this article is based. We also thank the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

References

- Armstrong, H., & Patterson, P. (1975). Seizures in Canadian Indian children: Individual family and community approaches. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 20*, 247-255.
- Battiste, M., & Youngblood Henderson, J. (2000). Decolonizing cognitive imperialism in education. In M. Battiste & J. Youngblood Henderson (Eds.), *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage* (pp. 86-96). Saskatoon, SK: Purich.
- Baxter, J. (2002). A juggling act: A feminist post-structuralist analysis of girls' and boys' talk in the secondary classroom. *Gender and Education, 14*(1), 5-19.
- Brant, C. (1990). Native ethics and rules of behaviour. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 35*, 534-539.
- Cazden, C.B. (1982). Four comments. In P. Gilmore & A.A. Glatthorn (Eds.), *Children in and out of school: Ethnography and education* (pp. 209-226). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review, 56*, 18-36.
- Darnell, R. (1988). The implications of Cree interactional etiquette. In R. Darnell & M.K. Foster (Eds.), *Native North American interaction patterns* (pp. 69-77). Quebec, QC: National Museums of Canada.
- David, M., Edwards, R., & Alldred, P. (2001). Children and school-based research: "Informed consent" or "Educated consent"? *British Educational Research Journal, 27*, 347-365.
- de Laine, M. (2000). *Fieldwork, participation and practice: Ethics and dilemmas in qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Delpit, L., & Dowdy, J.K. (2002). *The skin that we speak*. New York: New Press.
- Denscombe, M. & Aubrook, L. (1992). "It's just another piece of schoolwork": The ethics of questionnaire on pupils in school. *British Educational Research Journal, 18*, 113-131.
- Fine, M. (1994). Dis-stance and other stances: Negotiations of power inside feminist research. In A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and method: Political activism and educational research* (pp. 13-35). New York: Routledge.
- Good Tracks, J. (1973). Native American non-interference. *Social Work, 18*(6), 30-34.
- Gottfried, H. (1996). *Feminism and social change: Bridging theory and practice*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Graue, E.M., Walsh, D.J. (1998). *Studying children in social context: Theories, methods and ethics*. London: Sage.
- Harris, S. (1990). *Two-way Aboriginal schooling. Education and cultural survival*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Hornett, D.M. (1990). Elementary-age tasks, cultural identity, and the academic performance of young American children. *Action in Teacher Education, 12*(3), 43-49.
- Huffman, T. (2001). Resistance theory and the transculturation hypothesis as explanations of college attrition and persistence among culturally traditional American Indians. *Journal of American Indian Education, 40*(3), 1-23.
- John, V. (1972). Styles of learning, styles of teaching: Reflections of the education of Navajo children. In D. Cazden, V. John, & D. Hymes (Eds.), *Functions of language in the classroom* (pp. 331-343). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kelso, D. (1981). *Bibliography of North American Indian mental health*. Westport CT: Greenwood Press.
- Kirk, S. (1972). Ethnic differences in psycholinguistic abilities. *Exceptional Children, 39*, 112-118.
- Kirkness, V., & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four R's—Respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education, 30*(3), 121-145.
- Knight, M.G. (2000). Ethics in qualitative research: Multicultural feminist activist research. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 170-176.

- Ledlaw, S. (1992). Is cultural discontinuity an adequate explanation for dropping out? *Journal of American Indian Education*, 31(3), 21-36.
- Longclaws, L. (1989). Social framework and the medicine wheel framework. In B. Compton & B. Galaway (Eds.), *Social work processes* (pp. 24-33). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- MacArthur, R. (1968). Some differential abilities of northern Canadian Native youth. *International Journal of Psychology*, 3(1), 43-51.
- Mason, E. (1969). Cross-validation study of personality characteristics of junior high students from American Indian, Mexican and Caucasian backgrounds. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 77, 15-24.
- Mason, E. (1971). Stability of differences in personality characteristics of junior high students from American Indian, Mexican and Anglo ethnic Backgrounds. *Psychology in the Schools*, 8, 86-89.
- Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J., & Miller, T. (2002). *Ethics in quantitative research*. London: Sage.
- McCarty, T.L., Lynch, R.H., Wallace, S., & Benally, A. (1991). Classroom inquiry and Navajo learning styles: A call for reassessment. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 22(1), 42-59.
- McDermott, R.P., & Varenne, H. (1995). Culture as disability. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 26(3), 324-348.
- Morrow, V., & Richards, M. (1996). The ethics of social research with children: An overview. *Children and Society*, 10, 90-105.
- Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes. Creating multicultural learning communities*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Knight, M.G. (2000). Ethics in qualitative research: Multicultural feminist activist research. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 170-176.
- Noddings, N. (1986). Fidelity in teaching, teacher education, and research for teaching. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, 496-510.
- Pewewardy, C. (2002). Learning styles of American Indian/Alaska Native students: A review of the literature and implications for practice. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41(3), 23-56.
- Phillips, S. (1972). Participant structures and communicative competence: Warm Springs children in community and classroom. In C. Cazden, V. John, & D. Hymes (Eds.), *Functions of language in the classroom* (pp. 370-394). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Philips, S. (1983). *The invisible culture: Communication in classroom and community on the Warm Springs Reservation*. New York: Longman.
- Philips, S. (1988). Similarities in nonverbal groups' nonverbal behaviour and their relation to early child development. In R. Darnell & M.K. Foster (Eds.), *Native North American interaction patterns* (pp. 150-167). Quebec, QC: National Museums of Canada.
- Piquemal, N. (2001). Free and informed consent in research involving Native American communities. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 5(1), 65-79.
- Piquemal, N., & Kouritzin, S. (2003). Angela: A pedagogical story and conversation. *Multicultural Education*, 10(3), 33-42.
- Punch, M. (1986). *The politics and ethics of fieldwork*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ross, R. (1992). *Dancing with a ghost: Exploring Indian reality*. Markham, ON: Octopus.
- Sindell, P.S. (1997). Some discontinuities in the enculturation of Mistassini Cree children. In G.D. Spindler (Ed.), *Education and cultural process. Anthropological approaches* (pp. 383-392). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Swisher, K.G. (1990). Cooperative learning and the education of American Indian/Alaska Native students: A review of the literature and suggestions for implementation. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 29(2), 36-43.
- Swisher, K., & Deyhle, D. (1989). The styles of learning are different, but the teaching is just the same: Suggestions for teachers of American Indian youth. *Journal of American Indian Education, Special Issue*, 1-14.
- Toohy, K. (1998). "Breaking them up, taking them away": ESL students in grade 1. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 61-84.
- Vadas, R. (1995). Assessing the relationship between academic performance and attachment to Navajo culture. *Journal of Navajo education*, 12(4), 16-25.
- van den Hoonaard, W. (2002). *Walking the tightrope: Ethical issues for qualitative researchers*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Vogt, L.A., Jordan, C., & Tharp, R.G. (1987). Explaining school failure, producing school success: Two cases. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 18, 276-286.
- Wax, R., & Thomas, R. (1961). American Indians and White people. *Phylon*, 22(3), 305-317.

- Weinberg, M. (2002). Biting the hand that feeds you. In W. Van den Hoonaard (Ed.), *Walking the tightrope: Ethical issues for qualitative researchers* (pp. 79-94). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Whitbeck, L.B., Hoyt, D.R., Stubben, J.D., & LaFramboise, T. (2001). *Journal of American Indian Education*, 40(2), 48-61.
- Wolcott, H.F. (1997). The teacher as an enemy. In G.P. Spindler (Ed.), *Education and cultural process: Anthropological approaches* (3rd ed., pp.136-156). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Zhao, G. (2001). A cross-cultural approach toward students with disabilities. *Educational Foundations* 15(1), 25-38.