

White Teachers, Critical Race Theory and Aboriginal Education

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Abstract

This project examines the popular belief that integration of Aboriginal content will ensure Aboriginal student success in schools in Saskatchewan. Given that a high percentage of the teaching population is white identified, it is important that the author, along with these teachers, understand the continuing significance of race and how it continues to matter in education despite the notion that Canada, as well as schools, are race neutral. The primary goal of this project is to provide a race analysis of education using Critical Race theory as a theoretical framework, problematizing the emphasis on Aboriginal culture in dominant educational discourse. Secondly, this project examines the potential of anti racist pedagogy (accompanied by a knowledge base in CRT) to provide professional development for white teachers to assist us in meeting the needs of not only Aboriginal students but non-Aboriginal students as well.

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I. Introduction

The claim that authentic integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives across all curriculum areas will result in Aboriginal student success continues to have currency in educational discourse in Saskatchewan. Despite policy initiatives in this area, Aboriginal students continue to leave school in unacceptable numbers compared to their non-Aboriginal peers. Non-Aboriginal/white/racially dominant teachers constitute the majority of those who are called upon to deliver Aboriginal content and perspectives. However, these policy initiatives cannot and will not be effective without white teachers' grounding in a critical race analysis of education.

As a white teacher in the Catholic division in Saskatoon, I have come to this realization after almost 20 years of teaching. I began my career in the early 80's, when multiculturalism became the dominant discourse in education. I remember feeling quite pleased with myself that a "Folkfest" concluding project for a social studies unit (the three d's – dining, dance and dress) was a wonderful way to address the diversity in my classroom. I attempted to individualize my instructional program, however I had the uneasy feeling that I was not really meeting the needs of my Aboriginal students.

Fifteen years later, I was placed in a community school. Aboriginal culture was emphasized as an attempt to be inclusive of and validating for Aboriginal students. The emphasis on culture, I felt, appeared to be the answer to meeting Aboriginal student needs. The integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives became my mantra and I attended numerous AWASIS conferences and any other workshop I could to increase my knowledge of Aboriginal people and their culture.

However, my journey continued. Five years ago, I attended an anti-racist in-service that changed my life. Racism, classism, sexism, ableism, homophobia and white privilege and domination were put on the table. Both individual and systemic racism were discussed as a probable reason for Aboriginal student failure. This opened up a totally different world for me and it is from this place that I write this paper.

I start from the premise that I

cannot work against racism until I understand its place in my life and until I expose the ways in which dominant practices have worked to conceal my own part in racist acts. By uncovering and calling attention to these practices, I hope to create a location from which I can move forward.

(Norquay 1993 p. 241)

Before I can begin any analysis of education or make any suggestions for change, it is imperative that I acknowledge my own racism, white privilege and my complicity in perpetuating both. “Acknowledging that racism exists is not so hard. Knowing what to do with it is the issue” (Frankenberg, 1996, p. 14). In this paper, I propose one way of “knowing what to do” with racism in education, specifically as it pertains to Aboriginal student success. I begin by exploring two approaches to addressing diversity in education; multiculturalism and multicultural education and anti racism and antiracist education. A critical analysis of multicultural education and a discussion of the potential of anti-racist education follow. Next, I discuss the call for integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives as problematic as it has tended to follow the multicultural education tradition. There is value in the integration of Aboriginal content and

perspectives for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. However, the limitations of the call for integration point to the need for a critical race analysis of education.

Critical Race Theory provides a theoretical framework for a race analysis of education and has implications for non-Aboriginal teachers who want to make a difference. A knowledge base in CRT can inform anti-racist pedagogy. I acknowledge challenges to the implementation of anti-racist education, and conclude my discussion of anti-racist education with suggestions for its implementation for both educational leaders and non-Aboriginal teachers.

As Ladson Billings (2006) says in her Forward to *Courageous Conversations About Race*, it is not my intent to “point out all that is wrong with our schools and the adults who inhabit them” (p.x.) Rather, I want to support and challenge educators who want to make a difference and explore ways together to meet the needs of all students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

II. Two Approaches to Addressing Diversity in Education

Multiculturalism and multicultural education

All students have access to school. But, do Aboriginal students in Saskatchewan receive an education that enables them “to value, negotiate and realize their ambitions in the society in which we live?” (James 2006, p.6). In attempting to answer this question, I will explore two main approaches to addressing diversity in education: multicultural education and anti-racist education. First, I will discuss the origin and definition of multiculturalism and the goals of multicultural education. I will follow this with a critical analysis of multiculturalism and multicultural education and how these ideologies have negative consequences and implications that limit and shape how Aboriginal education is taken up. Secondly, I will define anti-racism and anti-racist education and argue its potential in anti-oppressive work.

Multiculturalism became official Canadian policy in 1971, a response by then Prime Minister Trudeau to calls for minority rights for French language speakers and First Nations people in Canada. It is an approach to address and embrace cultural diversity. Its goal is to “promote an awareness of diversity in terms of its intrinsic value to minorities and/or society at large” (Ministry of Education and Training, 1993 as cited in Fleras, 1996, p.76). Multiculturalism is a philosophy for celebrating differences or the ‘mosaic’ that is Canada. The ideology of multiculturalism assumes shared commonalities and a level playing field (Dei & Calliste, 2000). The aim of multiculturalism is largely attitudinal, the assumption being that enhanced sensitivity will be the result of more knowledge about cultural differences. The underlying belief is that a change in personal beliefs and discarding stereotypes will eliminate racism (Bedard, 2000; Fleras, 1996).

The goals of multicultural education are related to the ideology of multiculturalism. Kehoe (1994) discusses three goals of multicultural education.

Equivalency in achievement is to be realized by changing teacher expectations of ‘other’ children, changing assessment and placement procedures and the implementation of culturally sensitive pedagogy. Positive group attitudes are addressed by teaching acceptance of diversity, empathy and critical thinking skills. The third goal of multicultural education is the development of pride in one’s heritage that involves celebration of the ‘other’, the retention of heritage languages and teaching of the contributions of ‘others’ to Canada. However, Kehoe found that the effects of multicultural education that emphasize attitude change and cultural understanding are not all that effective. Perhaps, the following analysis will explain why this is so.

There are three themes that are recurring in the literature that critique the ideology of multiculturalism. They are: multiculturalism enables Canada to perpetuate the myth of a good and tolerant nation. Secondly, multiculturalism reinforces unequal power relations and perpetuates white dominance. Third, it contributes to the process of ‘othering’ minority groups in Canada. In other word, it does not address racism.

Mackey (2002) states that multiculturalism has become part of Canadian national mythology. She discusses how the “liberal values and goals of inclusion and pluralism” characteristic of multiculturalism, “are an inherent part of building and maintaining dominant power and reinforcing Western cultural hegemony” (p.163). Mackey claims that Canada’s ‘cultural mosaic’ is made up of an unmarked, dominant Anglo-Canadian core culture and ‘other cultures’ defined primarily by what they are not. Raby (2004) argues that Anglo-Canadian identity “constructs the center as benign” (p.375) and Schick & St. Denis (2005) say multiculturalism enables Canada to be a ‘good’ nation. Multiculturalism reinforces a white Canadian identity. It is a “homogenous,

unambiguous entity to which minorities are expected to gradually assimilate” (Hladki, 1995 as cited in Raby, 2004, p.377).

Multiculturalism does little to challenge or change the cultural transmission of the dominant group (May, 1994). It is a form of tokenism, which fails to address the policies and practices that perpetuate racism (Kailin, 1994). Lund (2001) claims it is “little more than a transparent desire for entrenching the status quo and denying legitimate concerns around diversity and equity issues” (p.66). Since men with power created multiculturalism, certain knowledges are given authority. The language commonly used around multiculturalism appears liberal but ensures the dominant group will not have to relinquish power. Multiculturalism does not explore issues of power and privilege or eliminate practices that support white domination and unequal power relations (Bedard, 2000).

Multiculturalism silences voices of the ‘other’ that are included superficially but remain invisible (Bedard, 2000; Mackey, 2002). It promotes the idea of minority culture as fragments of culture that is conceptually divorced from politics and economics (Mackey, 2002, p.66). In discourses of multiculturalism, “the other is both trivialized and contained as a cultural artifact” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p.308). The discourse that multiculturalism is enough to address the inequality that Aboriginal students face is so dominant; it has become ‘common sense’. In summary, multiculturalism is problematic in that it sustains racism by supporting the myth of a tolerant Canada, perpetuating unequal power relations and white dominance and contributes to the process of ‘othering’ minority groups.

Multicultural education then becomes equally problematic. Multicultural education is perceived as the solution, in many instances, to lack of Aboriginal student

success in school. This perspective persists because we are misnaming the problem and trivializing the effects of racism. An analysis of goals, teacher practices and curricula as they relate to multicultural education will follow. Multicultural education is explained as an attempt to secure social justice for underserved students but in reality there is no reference to equity, justice or oppression (Gorski, 2006). The assumption that it will engender empathy, commonality and good will is problematic (Dei & Calliste, 2000; Kumashiro, 2000). It “simply continues to perpetuate in another guise, a system of education which disadvantages minority children” and “emphasizes the lifestyles of minority children rather than their life chances” (May, 1994, p.36-37). Multicultural education simply masks the unchanged nature of power relations and does nothing to ameliorate the disadvantage that ‘other’ children face.

Teachers tend to approach multicultural education as a chance to learn about ‘other’ peoples’ children and celebrate diversity (Delpit, 1988). They often conceptualize the ‘other’ as a cultural being to be understood and with that understanding, gain an awareness of problems the ‘other’ might encounter in schools (Titone, 1998). Sleeter (1993) had similar findings in that teachers perceived staff professional development on multicultural education useful if it gave them information about the ‘other’ facilitating a discussion of ‘them’ not the structural, systemic nature of racism. “When racism is being denied, the talk about it is easily replaced by a celebration of diversity” (Schick & St. Denis 2005, p. 308). However, celebrations and good will are not enough to overcome assumptions and attitudes that accompany power and privilege (Jones, 1999).

The third area in which multicultural education demands a critical analysis is that of curricula. According to Banks (1996) simple ‘add-ons’ to the curriculum leave its dominant character unchallenged and unchanged. It fails to address the issues of racism

and injustice. Voices of the ‘other’ are ignored except to experience music, food, and dance (May, 1994). Montgomery (2005) suggests that Canadian textbooks present Canada as a good and tolerant space that facilitates the perpetuation of racism through stories of the past. Many multicultural education programs such as service learning or cultural plunges are detached from a contextual understanding of equity and justice (Gorski, 2006).

In summary, multicultural education will not address Aboriginal student success due to problems inherent in its goals, teacher attitudes and curricula. We continue to misname the problem – multicultural education does not address the systemic nature of racism that Aboriginal students face on a daily basis. It is easy to “discuss the culture of ‘other’ groups without asking too many difficult questions such as why such groups are not in positions of authority within the education system and Canadian society in general” (Kelly, 2006 p.37). The policy of multiculturalism in education has had grave consequences for how Aboriginal education gets taken up in public education and schools. A critique of multiculturalism opened up a space for Critical Race Theory and anti-racist education. I hope I have done the same in working against the discourse of multiculturalism that dominates against the need for anti-racist or anti-oppressive education.

Anti racism and antiracist education

In the next section, I intend to make the distinction between anti-racism and anti-racist education. I will discuss the potential of anti-racist pedagogy to effect change and argue that all educators have a responsibility to implement anti-oppressive practices to work towards school success for all Aboriginal students.

Anti-racism is a critical discourse of race and racism in society and of the continuing racializing of social groups for differential and unequal treatment (Dei, 1996). It explores the interrelationship of race, class and gender and advocates for equitable access and opportunity. Anti-racism challenges white power and privilege and unequal power relations (Dei, 1996; Dei, 2006; Dei & Calliste, 2000; Singleton & Lipton, 2006). Its aim is to rupture the status quo by disrupting “the symbiotic relationship between stereotypical ideas about racial groups...the attitudes and ideas of individuals that perpetuate racist views and policies and practices of institutions that legitimate racism” (Fleras, 1996, p.176). Not only does anti-racism examine contemporary manifestations of racism but also it critically analyzes the historical, political and economic roots of racism and other social oppressions (Die & Calliste, 2000; Solomon, 2002). Its goal is to redress injustice and work for fundamental structural and societal change (Dei, 2006; Dei & Calliste, 2000). According to anti-racist ideology, minority underachievement is not caused by cultural differences nor will cultural understanding contribute to fundamental change (Fleras, 1996). Therefore, the need for anti-racist pedagogy is obvious.

Anti-racist education is an action oriented educational and political strategy for institutional and systemic change that addresses issues of racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression (Die & Calliste, 2000, p.13; Dei, 1996; Solomon & Levin-Rasky, 1996). It involves moving the “debate away from problematic emphasis on individuals or group educational performance to situate minority disadvantage in schools within wider societal issues of racism” (May, 1994, p.5). Anti-racist education begins from the premise that racism exists and includes a focus on systemic racism and white dominance (Raby, 2004). It brings a critical understanding of how race intersects with

other forms of difference to affect everyday schooling experiences of Aboriginal youth (Dei, 2006; Kumashiro, 2000; Ng 2003).

In advocating the potential of anti-racist pedagogy for addressing inequality faced by Aboriginal students, I will discuss three areas of education where anti-racist education can work towards transformation; schools, teacher practices and pedagogy. Anti-racist education provides an opportunity to look at school practices “that create and sustain injustice and inequality defined in racial terms” (Dei & Calliste, 2000, p.13). It is an avenue to examine how some groups in schools are marginalized while others are normalized and privileged (Kumashiro, 2000; Nieto, 2000 in Gorski, 2006). Anti-racist education aims to structure equitable participation and outcomes for all students in schools (Gorski, 2006; James, 2006). It is a vehicle to change the institutional structure of schools and the unequal power relations within them (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Raby, 2004). It “shifts the debate from equal treatment to that of access and removal of barriers for historically disadvantaged groups” (Ng, 2003, p.206). It is necessary that anti-oppression permeate school climate, culture and practice (Neito, 2000 in Gorski, 2006).

Dei (1996) purports that the ideologies that support anti-racist education have the potential to aid teachers help one another, engage positively, negotiate fairly, and intellectually come to understand difference in their classroom (p.10). He says that teachers have the opportunity to understand and transform existing ways of thinking, knowing, and doing things but need a commitment to political and academic education in order for meaningful change to occur. This academic education would involve examining the historical roots and contemporary manifestation of racism in Canada, examining privilege power and white dominance in education as well as the influence of race and culture on one’s own personal and professional attitudes and behaviour (Blumer

& Tatum, 1999; Dei & James, 2002; Kehoe, 1994). “As long as people are insulated from the realities of racism, they will have little reason to change their behavior let alone their attitudes” (Kehoe, 1994, p.355). Knowledge of racism and its manifestations must be accompanied by an exploration of the production of racially dominant identities and a critique of white identity and whiteness (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002; St. Denis & Schick, 2003). This allows teachers to reflect on their own racialized locations and work towards rupturing dominant power structures in education by challenging current practices and the status quo. (Anchan & Holychuk, 1996; Raby, 2004).

The third area of education for anti-racism that I will discuss is anti-racist pedagogy itself. Its focus is on eliminating racial intolerance, racial injustice, and racial inequality. It values diverse cultures in equitable ways (Anchan & Holychuk, 1996) and “celebrates, affirms, and responds to difference and diversity as strengths” (Dei & James, 2002, p.75). Anti-racist pedagogy values the importance of the multiple identities of students and their relevance to the process of learning (Dei & James, 2002). This pedagogy provides opportunity to interrogate alternative ideas and viewpoints and for the expression of silent voices and ‘other’ knowledges, perspectives, and experiences (Anchan & Holychuk, 1996; Dei, 1996; Donaldson & Seepe, 1999). Dei (2000) advocates for the pursuit of interactive and cooperative learning strategies that teach all learners critical thinking skills to challenge the status quo. Alladin (1996) goes a step further by saying it is imperative to teach students to better analyze and struggle against inequality of power and resources. This would necessitate acceptance of student ideas, spontaneity and allowing for critical classroom debate (Donaldson & Seepe, 1999). Banks (1996) agrees that diversity of opinion, questions, and critical analysis are imperative as student become agents in their own learning process as well as having a

share of the power in schools (Giroux, 1996 as cited in Lund, 2001). All students benefit from education based on equity, anti-racism and social justice. It is the hope of anti-racist pedagogy that students come to an awareness of how race and racism operate to affect their opportunities, possibilities and participation in society and with that awareness, come to know, understand, and perhaps take action to disrupt racism in society (James, 2006). We are all seeking collectively to deal positively with difference and diversity in our schools (Dei, 1996). As I have discussed to this point, anti-racist education has enormous potential to contribute to enhancing human dignity, social justice, and equitable educational experiences for all students. However, the dominant educational discourse at this point continues to center around multiculturalism, or more specifically, the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives.

III. Integration of Aboriginal Content and Perspectives

My analysis of multicultural education is related to the following discussion of the problematic nature of the call for integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives across the curriculum. Ideology around integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives has tended to follow the multiculturalism tradition and therefore has not been the hoped for solution to the problem of Aboriginal student success in school.

Saskatchewan “is at an historical turning point with the growth of the Aboriginal population presenting both a challenge for change and an unparalleled opportunity to create a shared future” (Saskatchewan Learning 2004, p.6). “In Canada, educational institutions have a pivotal responsibility in transforming relations between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society” (Battiste 2005, p.228). A goal of School Plus is to create a harmonious and shared future with Aboriginal peoples. A recurring theme in both non-

Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities is the desire for improved relations between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples and that Aboriginal people have hope and agency to empower them to enjoy the full benefits of society. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples acknowledges that in the area of Aboriginal education, there have been positive changes but problems remain. The commissioners state that despite “so many sincere efforts to change the quality of Aboriginal education”(RCAP Volume3, p.441) not much had changed. There continues to be “too many youth who do not complete high school, they do not have the skills for employment, they do not have the language and cultural knowledge of their people”(RCAP Volume 3 p.434).

This is a problem that has a very long history. There is continued debate as to what contributes to the continuing failure of Aboriginal students. The problem has been interpreted based on the widely accepted belief that culture and cultural difference account for the lack of success of Aboriginal students. Researchers and educators have suggested a number of different strategies related to this interpretation in an attempt to respond to the problem of Aboriginal student failure. Among the most common interventions are; ensuring a more culturally relevant curriculum, hiring more Aboriginal teachers and having Aboriginal elders accessible to Aboriginal students in schools. Despite attempts to implement these strategies, Aboriginal students continue to experience failure.” We know that Aboriginal students are not being served as they should be, by the education systems and its programs” (AEPAC 2000 p.16). “We have not quite figured out how to educate all children well” (Ladson Billings, p. xiv in Singleton & Lipton 2006).

More recently, in Saskatchewan, it has been suggested that authentic integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives across all areas of the curriculum would improve

school experiences of Aboriginal children. The idea that integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives alone will contribute to Aboriginal student success is problematic. Although there are proponents of the merit and hope of this plan (the ideal), there are unexamined assumptions and beliefs inherent in advocating for integration of Aboriginal content that rather than alleviating the status quo actually perpetuates it. There exist limitations to the idea that integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives will guarantee school success for Aboriginal students. One must take into consideration the teacher, the student **and** the curriculum. There are ongoing inconsistencies between the ideal and practice. However, I will discuss support for this claim that is found in academic literature, government policy documents and from educational bodies.

Rationale for integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives

Rationale for the value of integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives is found in academic literature, government policy documents and from educational bodies. The arguments for integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives focus on two main areas: increasing Aboriginal student self esteem and increasing appreciation for and understanding of Aboriginal peoples by non-Aboriginal people in Canada. The academic literature that I researched focuses almost exclusively on the benefits to Aboriginal student success.

“Culture-based curriculum has become the catch phrase for success in Native education” (Hermes, 2005, p.10). It is believed that integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives will transform learning opportunities for Aboriginal students, improve self-

esteem and contribute to their success (Dehyle & Swisher, 1997; Demmert, 1990 in Hermes, 2005; Hermes, 2005). “The central purpose of integrating Indigenous knowledge into Canadian schools is to balance the education system to make it a transforming and capacity building place for First Nations students” (Battiste, 2002, p.29). Klug & Whitfield (2003) add that if education is not culturally relevant, Aboriginal students will not achieve their potential. As we will see, the idea that Aboriginal students would benefit from culturally relevant curriculum informs much of the discussion around Aboriginal education.

Government bodies, especially those in Saskatchewan, through their documents and policies, convey the hope that all Aboriginal learners will experience success in every school that they attend. It is believed that integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives will promote healthy self-esteem, a positive identity and improved attitude towards school (Aboriginal Education Branch Saskatchewan Learning, 2003; AEPAC, 2005; INAC, 2002). However, AEPAC (2005) cites “recognition of the need for action **on many fronts** in order for **real and lasting** changes to occur in the formal educational experiences of Aboriginal students” (p.1). This is encouraging in that it opens the door for initiatives in addition to the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives in the curriculum.

Teacher organizations are also on board with the implementation of integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives in the hope that Aboriginal student success will follow the improved self-esteem that is perceived to be the result of culturally relevant curriculum. British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (2001) also proposes “curriculum and learning resources that are relevant and respectful of Aboriginal culture and its diversity are included as integral parts of the curriculum...not as add-ons marginal to the

regular program” (p.77). The Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit of the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation has distributed to schools a document entitled “Aboriginal Content and Perspectives” as part of its Instructional Strategies kit, to serve as a resource to teachers who need support in the area of integration. The STF also offers professional development to advocate for integration and provides opportunities to collaborate on developing units with integration in mind.

A theme that occurs less often is that integration offers benefits to society as a whole as well as benefits to Aboriginal learners. It is hoped that all of society understands that the Aboriginal worldview is a valid way of knowing, understanding and being in the world and that Aboriginal people have made and continue to make rich contributions to Canadian culture and history. This understanding will help build a strong equitable Canada (AEPAC, 2000; Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002).

In summary, academic literature, government policy and educational bodies advocate the benefits of the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives to promote Aboriginal student self esteem and therefore success in school as well as benefits to society as a whole. However, an analysis of the rationale behind integration finds that we are misnaming the problem and who has to change. Emphasis on Aboriginal learners and cultural difference places the blame on the learner (BCTF, 2002; St.Denis, (2004), rather than examining how schools perpetuate the status quo. “[I]f failure is not the fault of the child, then it lies elsewhere and that elsewhere may be the school” (Six Killer Clarke, 1994, p.121 as cited in St. Denis & Hampton, 2002, p.9). It is important to ask what is going on other than cultural difference. In order to effect real and lasting changes, one must critically examine the beliefs, biases and assumptions inherent in the call for integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives as well as the limitations in such a call.

Assumptions and biases related to integration

There are assumptions that are at the basis of the call for integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives that involve the learner, the curriculum and teacher practices such as emphasizing role models. The first assumption I will discuss involves the Aboriginal learner. The assumption that providing a learning environment that affirms the identity, cultures and values of Aboriginal peoples would automatically be responding to the educational needs of Aboriginal students is problematic. It is assumed that the learner 'needs' culture in order to achieve success and develop positive self-esteem. However, the belief that cultural difference is the problem places the blame on the Aboriginal 'other' (Larocque, 1991; St. Denis, 2004). It is the culture of Aboriginal students that is perceived as the problem. Culture and race are used interchangeably, which prompts the question "Is culture now doing the work of the race concept?" This phenomenon exhibits cultural racism. Race and ethnicity are found in common discourse and can become part of "common sense" beliefs about difference. The attribution of negative characteristics to entire racial groups can lead to stereotypes and generalizations (CRRF, 2002).

These generalizations are applied to Aboriginal students who are perceived to be disconnected from their culture and that becomes an explanation as to why they are not achieving success in school. Hermes (2005) explains "often culture in education is expected to remedy complex and deep rooted social problems" (p.10) but "the impact of poverty [is] a much more prohibitive factor than [difference in] culture" (p.14). Cultural difference is not an adequate conceptual framework to explore Aboriginal education. It does not address problems of poverty and the fact that many Aboriginal communities have little or not control over their own resources and economic well-being.

The second area rife with assumptions and biases is the curriculum. Related to the problematic nature of the culture concept are the assumptions inherent in advocating a curriculum of multiculturalism or respect for diversity as contributors to the success of Aboriginal students, as was discussed in an earlier section of this paper. The ‘celebration of diversity’ often becomes an over emphasis on culture and fails to address continuing hierarchies of power and legitimacy (Donald & Rattansi, 1992 p.2). Multicultural education can become “preoccupied with supplying students with ‘accurate’ and ‘authentic’ representations of particular cultures in the hope that such corrective gestures will automatize tolerant attitudes” (Britzman et al, 1993 p.188-89). Multicultural education in Saskatchewan has not resulted in more tolerant attitudes towards Aboriginal people.

The third equally problematic area relates to teachers’ assumptions around the concepts of integrating Aboriginal role models and teaching bridge building. Sleeter (1993) points out the biased perspective of those who “use role models to instill pride in children and show them that members of *their group* (italics mine) can succeed if they work hard” (p.166). Discussing Aboriginal role models has the potential to generate hope and agency in Aboriginal students. However, teachers must be aware of the possibility of reinforcing the ideology of meritocracy. (Meritocracy will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.) Who is being asked to change?

The metaphor of bridge building is used in relation to cultural difference. If we “acknowledge the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of every child and learn enough about them...[we will] build meaningful bridges” (Children’s Services and Programs Branch 2004, p.6). We continue to misname the problem. Pride in cultural identity, multiculturalism, respect for diversity, Aboriginal role models and bridge building have

not been the panacea to address lack of Aboriginal students' success in school. In summary, biases, beliefs and assumptions around Aboriginal learners, in the curriculum and in teacher practices pose challenges to the non-Aboriginal teacher who is expected to integrate Aboriginal content and perspectives. I have been looking at the rationale and assumptions that accompany the call for integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives. It is now necessary to critically examine them as well as the limitations associated with integration. "Culturally relevant curriculum does not appear to be the answer" (Bowker 1993 p.267).

Limitations of integration

Although many reports and documents cite the need for culturally relevant curriculum to solve the problem of student failure there is no definition of culturally relevant curriculum and no evidence to support the claim that it will enhance minority student success. Research is needed to explore the questions "Does culturally relevant curriculum contribute to success? What would the criteria be to assess cultural relevance?" Despite lack of research in this area, the common claim continues to suggest that culturally relevant curriculum will address Aboriginal students' difficulties in school (Ledlow, 1992). There are limitations in the call for integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives in relation to schools, teachers, curriculum and the larger societal context that includes the issues of poverty and racism

The first limitation is related to schools. In schools, there exists a normalized common sense belief in white superiority and non-white inferiority. Therefore, Aboriginal student success is perceived as helping 'them' become more like 'us' and integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives is assumed to be the vehicle to this

success. Research is needed to “examine the culture of the schools themselves to see what counts as knowledge and truth and what does not...[and] what, or whom the curriculum and pedagogy represses, excludes or disqualifies.” (Battiste, 2002, p.16). It is imperative to “broaden the discussion of Native American culture-based education and raise questions for the general applicability of cultural discontinuity as an all-encompassing explanation for Native American school failure” (Hermes, 2005, p.9)

Until now, my discussion of culture and curriculum has not included the person whose responsibility it is to deliver the curriculum; the teacher. The coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (2002) finds that although “appropriate Aboriginal curriculum, policies, materials, and resources exists, there are major gaps between the ideal situation and the on-the-ground scenario in many Canadian classrooms” (p.18). There are a number of factors that contribute to this situation. AEPAC (2005) recognizes that “teachers need support in their efforts to actualize Aboriginal content and perspectives” (p.18). Kaomea (2005) concurs that teachers “unanimously reported feeling inadequately prepared” (p.36). However, she also found a “genuine ambivalence about...constitutionally mandated curriculum” and that it was “one more subject added to an already crowded school day” (p.37). CAAS (2002) report similar findings; “interest and enthusiasm for Aboriginal studies is not always shared or supported by colleagues” (p.21) and “making resources available to teachers does not ensure that they will be understood or used” (p.23).

Teachers, perhaps unknowingly, interpret and respond to racial inequalities. The discourse in education around these inequalities centers on social problems, cultural identity and cultural discontinuity. The cultural discontinuity hypothesis “assumes culturally based differences in the communication styles of minority students’ home and

the Anglo culture of the school lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and ultimately failure” (Ledlow, 1992, p.23). Cultural discontinuity compels us to think about the problem of student failure in a certain way. Sleeter (1993) criticizes this view as “problems...[are] generally conceptualized through a cultural deficiency perspective” (p.160). We tend to misidentify the problem. “To say that minority students experience failure mainly due to cultural differences between their homes and the school is to deny the historical and structural contest in which those differences are embedded” (Ledlow, 1992, p.32). Bowker (1993) adds that an “emphasis on culture belies the social problem of poverty” (p.275). Bowker states, “dropping out is a multifaceted issue” and “cultural discontinuity is only one factor”. According to Bowker, the “main factor as it related to discontinuity was students’ lack of adjustment, upon entering school, to teacher behaviors, communication styles and expectations” (p.267). She goes on to say, “negative school experiences sets in place a growing sense of dislocation, alienation, and frustration” (p.269). Related to this, Verna St. Denis (2004) comments on the perceptions that Aboriginal youth are ‘lost’; “Describing Aboriginal youth as lost is a benign way to describe the effects of discrimination, exclusion, and sustained violence and aggression they face on a daily basis” (p.43).

The third limitation to integration contributing to Aboriginal student success is the curriculum itself. Curriculum does not acknowledge the diverse worldviews and experiences of Aboriginal students, excludes marginalized voices and does not critically examine past and present government policies that perpetuate poverty and socioeconomic oppression. As well, G.H. Smith (2000) cautions that educators not use “superficial aspects of Indigenous knowledge...as a panacea” and encourages “moving away from conventional teaching methods which use [Indigenous] perspectives in token ways to

simply enable [Indigenous] children to feel good about themselves” (p.221). In my experience at a community school ten years ago, emphasis on culture was an effort to be inclusive but the program was operating under the same ideologies, policies, and practices that had characterized education for many years. Aboriginal content and perspectives across the curriculum has value, without a doubt. However, as I stated earlier, there are more factors to consider. Perhaps that is the reason that Battiste (2002) states, “none of the provincial initiatives taken so far have integrated the expertise of Aboriginal peoples in ways that are truly transformational” (p.16).

There is also the possibility that attempts to integrate Aboriginal content and perspectives can lead to reinforcement of stereotypes. “Teaching beadwork or Native dance without a deeper cultural context can intersect with mainstream stereotypes and students’ notions of equating a Native identity with these traditions” (Hermes, 2005, p.10). Culture is often essentialized. (Levinson & Holland as cited in Hermes, 2005, p.23; St. Denis, 2004). It is imperative therefore to critically examine how the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives is carried out in classroom practice. Teaching about Aboriginal people is not all about ‘culture and celebrations’. We must also deal with difficult knowledge and honor and acknowledge Aboriginal peoples’ history of oppression (Kaomea, 2005; Kaomea, 2003).

Finally, the claim that integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives will contribute to Aboriginal student success minimizes or ignores the effects of unequal power relations that they encounter on a daily basis. Cultural discontinuity does not explain racism and discrimination faced by Aboriginal students or the systemic racism imbedded in all institutions in our society. Ogbu (1987) found the structured inequality of...society to be the cause of minority student failure (cited in Ledlow, 1992, p.30).

Poverty and the realities associated with socioeconomic oppression are more important considerations than differences between cultures when trying to solve the puzzle of Aboriginal student success. (Hermes, 2005).

In summary, I have examined the limitations associated with the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives in all areas of curriculum as they relate to schools, teachers, curriculum and the issues of poverty and racism in a wider societal context. That is not to say that integration of Aboriginal content does not have merit and value. However, it is but one step in addressing the needs of Aboriginal students in our schools.

Need for a critical race analysis of education

“We are accountable in some way when students fail to thrive” (AEPAC, 2000, p.5). We must pose new questions around the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives. There is a need for dialogue on issues traditionally silenced. We must understand the challenge of Aboriginal student success in different ways and therefore, look for new solutions. Developing new ways of understanding will be a guide to effective action. “Schools cannot effectively integrate American Indian culture and language into the curriculum...if racism in schools is not confronted” (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p.254 as cited in St. Denis and Hampton, 2002, p.35). It is important to critically examine how policies and practices in schools can serve to reinforce hegemony and perpetuate oppression and unequal power relations. “In schools, race plays a primary role in sustaining, if not widening the achievement gap. But educators have not been very good about talking about race and its impact on learning” (Ladson Billings, p.ix in Singleton & Lipton, 2006).

Race is the proverbial ‘elephant in the room’ but beginning to talk about it will begin to address the challenges felt by non-Aboriginal teachers who want success for their Aboriginal students. “We know it’s right there, staring us in the face - making life uncomfortable and making it difficult for us to accomplish everything we would really like to do – but we keep pretending it isn’t” (Ladson Billings in Singleton & Lipton, 2006, p.x). How do we take everyday talk and its associated beliefs and assumptions and bring race and racism to the conscious level? Abele et al (2000) explain that in “policy discourse on Aboriginal education” there is “an emerging trend for a stronger connection between issues of Aboriginal education and issues of racism” (p.21). The Task Force on the Role of the School in Saskatchewan (Tymchak, 2001) recognizes “ongoing effort to integrate First Nations and Metis culture and history into the province’s curriculum (p.101) but found “evidence of racism [and]...a lack of awareness of Aboriginal history and culture. [T]here is much work that still needs to be done in support of anti-racist programs and strategies” (p.102).

According to Hermes (2005), teachers also need a culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers would be “more than just responsive to cultural differences, they [would be] aware of the history that these differences are rooted in. More powerful than their knowledge of cultural differences is their knowledge of the big picture – the context of socioeconomic oppression” (p.21). Kaomea (2005) envisions “classroom teachers...[who] serve as allies in Native struggles to reverse centuries of economic, cultural and political oppression” (p.39). She goes on to ask that non-Aboriginal teachers “work collaboratively with Native allies, listen closely to our wisdom as well as to our concerns, interrogating unearned power and privilege (including one’s own) and use this

privilege to confront oppression and ‘stand behind’ Natives so our voices will be heard” (p.40).

How do we create and encourage passion and commitment to the goal of ensuring Aboriginal student success in school? Not only through workshops and in-services on culture in the curriculum that “are abundant” (Hermes 2005, p.14) but through a critical race analysis of education. It means “considering factors other than just...culture in a narrow sense; it means considering the historical circumstances that have resulted in low socioeconomic status and a myriad of related issues” (Hermes, 2005, p.16). One must also be aware of “implement[ing] strategies that might reduce failure and make the system of schooling work more smoothly” but that they “may serve to mask the oppressiveness of the education system” (Sleeter, 1993, p.164). Kaomea (2005) asserts we must “question how [we] may be wittingly or unwittingly serving as collaborators in the perpetuation of...hegemonic dynamics” (p.38). We continue to misidentify the problem. We are asking the wrong questions. There is value in acknowledging diversity and being respectful of that diversity as well as the differing knowledge and perspectives that accompany them. However, it does not go far enough.

This is the challenge to non-Aboriginal teachers who desire the success of their Aboriginal students. It is not an ‘us’ and ‘them’ situation. Non-Aboriginal teachers who integrate Aboriginal content and perspectives across all subject areas have a responsibility to critically examine the assumptions and limitations of the mandate to integrate. As well, it is imperative to participate in professional development that would include a critical race analysis of education accompanied by open dialogue with both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal colleagues. It is this initiative that I intend to develop further in the following section.

IV. Critical Race Theory: A Theoretical Framework for Analysis of Education

If to help us is your wish then stand behind us.

Not to the side.

And not to the front.

- Kalāhele (2002) as cited in Kaomea (2005)

Despite calls for integration coming out of Saskatchewan Learning since 1984, AEPAC (2005) found that “[i]t was clear that not all schools in Saskatchewan were fully engaged in improving educational success for Aboriginal students” (p.4). Is the reason for Aboriginal students’ lack of success due to the fact that Aboriginal content and perspectives are not being integrated in Saskatchewan curriculum? In the previous section I argued that integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives across the curriculum has limitations in ensuring school success for Aboriginal students. Are there other factors that should be considered?

I will argue that a race analysis, using Critical Race Theory, must be an integral piece to the Aboriginal education puzzle. Using the tenets of Critical Race Theory, I will explore how and where it intervenes in an analysis of education in Saskatchewan. At the same time, it is important to employ a critical anti-oppressive analysis of white domination in education and discuss its implications for non-Aboriginal teachers. I believe that a race analysis and understanding the implications of white domination in education would work towards creating and encouraging passion and commitment to school success for Aboriginal students. Kaomea (2005) challenges teachers “to consider how they might use their positions as classroom teachers to serve as allies in Native struggles to reverse centuries of economic, cultural and political oppression

of...Indigenous people” (p.9). Critical Race Theory would provide a theoretical framework to move ahead in the work of white teachers as allies to Aboriginal education.

I will provide a brief introduction to the history and origins of Critical Race Theory. As well, I will discuss three of the characteristics of CRT that I believe are relevant to an analysis of current policy and practice in education in Saskatchewan.

Critical race theory

Critical Race Theory is a theory as well as a social movement. It is a response to the needs of the oppressed who dream of a different world and different values. It is a framework developed by scholars of color to understand and explain their experiences and work toward social change and racial equality (Bergerson, 2003; Matsuda et al, 1993). Historical origins are traced to Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, two legal scholars of color, who were dissatisfied with the slow pace of racial reform in the United States. Their aim was to make structures of racism visible by confronting and opposing dominant societal and institutional forces that were maintaining these structures, even while at the same time these same institutions and structures were professing to be working to end racial discrimination. The civil rights movement and challenges to the American legal system were not moving the cause of minority groups forward. Bell and Freeman’s critique was of litigation and activism that depended on incremental change meaning that they realized that moving civil rights cases through the courts was not going to result in any structural change. Faith in the legal system and hope for progress appeared to bear little fruit in the arena of recognizing minority groups and their valid concerns. (Faith in the education system and hope for change in the area of anti-racist education are not enough either!).

Critical Race Theory is a complex legal and intellectual tool for understanding forms of racial inequity. CRT challenges traditional ideologies of diversity and existing social hierarchies by ascertaining how society is organized along racial lines and hierarchies. CRT also challenges the legitimacy of oppressive structures in society. It considers the historical context of uneven power relations and how the construction of race benefits white people and extends across class and other differences (Matsuda et al, 1993). CRT's goal is to understand how white domination and oppression of 'others' has been created and perpetuated. Frankenberg (1996) states that race and class structure serve to anchor race privilege. CRT is a framework to explore how systems of culture, privilege and power are intertwined. "By taking up CRT as a theoretical framework, one is not necessarily privileging race over class, gender, or other identity category" (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p.57). But, one must be aware that there are advantages and biases inherent in racial positionality that we consciously or unconsciously perpetuate. CRT offers new ways to think about and pursue racial justice. It is a tool to initiate, dialogue, debate, consciousness-raising and political struggle, and to challenge uncritical ways of thinking about social inequality (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Ryan & Dixson, 2006).

There are three characteristics of Critical Race Theory that I believe are relevant to an anti-oppressive analysis of education: the belief that racism is endemic; a critique of liberalism, specifically the ideas of neutrality, color-blindness, and meritocracy; and the valuing of counter-stories.

Racism is systemic, structural, and cultural; it is deeply ingrained in all of us. It is endemic. "Race still matters...[and] continues to be a powerful social construct and signifier" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p.8). Racism continues to function at all levels of society. It subordinates now and has in the past based on the ideology of the superiority

of one group over another. Biological and physiological differences have served to justify differential social, economic, and political participation in society. Race is a significant factor in determining equity and reinforcing existing forms of inequality (Ng, 1993). Racist theories shape conscious and unconscious beliefs. We live in a racialized society that impacts our everyday lives. Critical Race theorists believe the construction of race benefits white people while putting ‘others’ at a disadvantage. Whiteness is positioned as normative while at the same time it is denied and protected. Ideologies that maintain white privilege are a central focus of CRT’s critique of liberalism. Liberalism is defined by its belief in the individual, that all individuals are equal and therefore social problems can be solved through negotiation (Bishop, 2005).

Critical Race Theory’s critique of liberalism was born of frustration when it was realized that liberalism had not served as a vehicle for sweeping change and that whites had benefited from civil rights legislation. Ladson-Billings (2003) finds it problematic that liberal multiculturalism “tries to address the concern of all groups equally without disturbing the existing power structure” (p.53). Liberalism results in the denial, dismissal, and trivialization that race matters. The ideology of equal opportunity, so central to liberalism, does not challenge current racist structures and institutions.

The ideologies of neutrality, color blindness and meritocracy are the underpinnings of liberalism. Neutrality is equivalent to whiteness and whites consider whiteness the norm. Neutrality "erases structural inequality and portrays all people as equal with common problems"(Bishop, 2005,p.64). Dixson & Rousseau (2006) believe neutrality negates the social and historical context of a racialized society and supports the operation of white privilege.

Color blindness is based on the belief that decisions should be made without considering race. Those who have a color-blind perspective equate equality of treatment with equity. In other words, claiming that one does not ‘see’ race translates to justice and equity. The appeal to the color-blind perspective is a political choice that ignores historical and social contexts where race has and continues to matter (Ryan & Dixon, 2006). Many equate color blindness with social justice.

The third ideology of liberalism that is problematic is the belief in meritocracy. Meritocracy is based on the belief that anyone who works hard enough can achieve success; the ‘pull up your boot straps’ idea. However, efforts and rewards do not always work out for people of color. MacIntosh (1998) exposes the myth that democratic choice is available to all. She adds that Canada is “not such a free country” (p.167) and critiques the belief that one’s life is what one makes of it. In fact, MacIntosh’s analysis exposes the racist underpinnings of not only meritocracy, but the ideologies of neutrality and color blindness as well, by demonstrating that whiteness is the invisible norm by which all ‘others’ are measured. Whiteness and its implications will be discussed in further detail later in this paper.

The third characteristic of Critical Race Theory that I will present is its use of counter-stories to challenge oppression. The emphasis is on the voices and experiences of people of color. It is an opportunity to know history from the bottom up through journals, poems, and oral histories that make up the experiential knowledge of a common history of oppression. Counter-stories seek to legitimize the experiences and realities of the oppressed. Stories are used to “analyze myths, presuppositions and wisdoms that make up the common culture about race” (Delgado, 1995 as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2003 p.58). It is a vehicle for critical reflection on the experience of racism by those who

are its target. The educational experiences of all students would be enriched if the lived realities of the racially oppressed were acknowledged and validated (Dei, 1993 as cited in Carr & Klassen, 1997). However, the important question to ask is, are privileged groups willing to listen to the ‘other’?

So far, I have presented the history and origins of Critical Race Theory as well as three characteristics; the claim that racism is endemic, the critique of liberalism, and the use of counter-stories to challenge oppression. Next, I will discuss how Critical Race Theory defines structural, institutional and individual racism. As well, I intend to explore how and where CRT intervenes in an analysis of the education system and the questions CRT asks us to ask.

CRT’s analysis of structural racism examines the ways in which established structures operate as well as how they limit the participation, opportunities, and possibilities of certain groups. It is imperative to explore not only the structural context of racism, but the socio political and historical context as well (Kailin, 1999). Structural racism works in the interests of whites and oppression is carefully managed and regulated through prohibitive social boundaries (Dei et al, 2004). Silences and denials of white privilege are key political tools that sustain unequal power relations (MacIntosh, 1998). Unequal power relations are perpetuated by controlling resources and constraining opportunities. The rationale that justifies the perpetuation of unequal power relations and the systematic unfair treatment of people from oppressed groups is the belief in the inherent superiority of whites (Goodman, 2001). The power and ability of the dominant group to impose assumptions and categories on a perceived inferior group, if unchallenged, are reproduced in institutional racism.

Institutional racism is manifested by systems and structures that reflect the values and advance the interests of the dominant group. There is no discussion around equality and equity. Unequal power relations are created and maintained through interpersonal, cultural, and institutional forces. Racism is embedded in Canadian institutions (Larocque, 1991). Institutional racism exhibited in schools will be discussed in detail in the next section when I will use CRT as a lens for analysis.

Individual racism can be examined through the structural contexts that sustain racism in the individual (Kailin, 1999). CRT looks at how social structures contribute to shaping our identities and examines the discourse of individuals and the underlying assumption it is built on. Dominant ideology shapes our consciousness and experiences. Goodman (2001) explains that individuals of privileged groups see themselves as individuals not as part of a group that enjoys power and privilege. Critical Race Theory unmask and exposes racism in its various permutations (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

As stated earlier, Critical Race Theory provides a lens to examine policy and practice in education. Racism persists in policies, structures, and assumptions on which education is based (Kailin, 1999). I will discuss how CRT intervenes in an analysis of education in general. The tenets of CRT will frame my analysis, including the belief that racism is endemic, the principles of liberalism are problematic and there is value in counter-stories.

CRT and examination of schools, curriculum and teacher attitudes and practices

Critical Race Theory is the foundation from which to develop conversations about why race matters. Racism exists in education in Saskatchewan at the structural, institutional and individual level. Systemic racism is one way to explain the

underachievement and marginalization of Aboriginal students. CRT challenges stereotypes and the assumption that it is the cultural difference of Aboriginal students that contributes to failure. Structural inequality affects school performance; this will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper. Therefore, it is imperative to challenge the institutional structure of and unequal power relations in education (Hermes, 2005). CRT makes systemic cultural and racial patterns that operate in schools more visible (Ryan & Dixson, 2006) by examining how neutrality, meritocracy and colorblindness serve to disadvantage minority students.

Racism continues to be associated with overt racist behaviour. Many educators declare that they are not racist because they are good people who do not engage in hateful actions or language. I can certainly relate to these ideas as I held on to them fiercely before I had the opportunity to participate in an anti-racist in-service. I believed that as a person who believed in social justice, I certainly was NOT racist. Marx & Pennington (2003) comment that it is important to be aware that one can be a good person and still be racist.

To continue my analysis of education I will use the CRT critiques of neutrality, color-blindness and meritocracy. The belief in neutrality as it relates to education is problematic in that whites consider whiteness the norm; therefore, being neutral is equivalent to whiteness. How does education work for Aboriginal students when it is conceived and constructed in whiteness? (Chalmers, 1997). Whiteness is not the neutral base from which all 'others' are judged. Neutrality enables the ability to not be aware of one's race; therefore we think we are colorblind.

Color-blindness is really a requirement that 'others' be more white. It fails to account for the reality of inequities in teacher practices and students' lives. If teachers

feel they are treating everyone equally, they are not motivated to modify their teaching practice to ensure equity in achievement. **If equity is equality of treatment not outcomes, inequitable results are not a catalyst for reflection** (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ryan & Dixson, 2006).

The myth of meritocracy as it relates to education does not favour Aboriginal students. **The idea that any student who works hard can experience success negates the fact that Aboriginal students are systematically excluded from opportunities to succeed. Racism persists in the beliefs and assumptions that policies and structures in education are based on.**

A challenge to many of these beliefs and assumptions in education can come from counter-stories. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) suggest the juxtaposition of counter-stories and dominant stories. The acceptance of 'other' epistemologies can challenge the status quo. Since privileged voices work to deny oppression, it is time to listen to voices of the 'other'. In Saskatchewan, **counter-stories** could be a vehicle to challenge the racist assumption that Aboriginal families do not value education and do not care. Schools have become places in which the complex conditions of parents and children's lived experiences are often excluded and ignored (Chalmers, 1997). Stories enable one to construct different pictures of social and historical conditions and to incorporate different epistemologies to make sense of the world in ways different from the dominant white view (Bergerson, 2003). **Counter-stories would be a vehicle of opening up dialogue to help children understand their social relationships and social discourses about discrimination** (Edwards & Ruggiano Schmidt, 2006). The education of all students would be enhanced with the validation of lived experiences around race (Dei, 1993 in Carr & Klassen, 1997). In summary, Critical Race Theory offers a new lens with which

to examine education and our beliefs and assumptions about factors and practices that contribute to school failure for Aboriginal students.

Critical Race Theory is a framework to facilitate examination of schools, curriculum and teacher attitudes and practices. Schools play an active role in socializing children for class and race roles (Leacock, 1971). The dominant culture of schools promotes the 'right' way of learning. The 'culture of power' in schools reflects the culture of those who have power. Issues of power are enacted in schools via curriculum and teachers who transmit the codes and values for participating in power (Delpit, 2004). Schools "invalidate and silence certain subject positions, as [they] reaffirm, justify, and promote certain other" (Norquay, 1993, p.248). Spindler & Spindler (1988) found that schools employ selective methods in teaching children; some are encouraged while some are marginalized or benignly ignored.

The move towards requiring schools to participate in standardized testing is problematic from a CRT perspective. Traditional evaluation measures are not valid; tests do not measure what students know and can do rather they are more likely to legitimize the deficiencies of the 'other'. Ladson-Billings (2003) claims standardized tests are simply a validation of the dominant culture's superiority. The testing process makes it easier to stereotype, produces racial oppression and discriminatory outcomes (Donald & Rattansi, 1992). According to Ryan & Dixson (2006) it is imperative to understand the racialized nature of standardized testing, teacher hiring and retention practices and instructional methods.

The curriculum also plays a part in racial oppression and discriminatory outcomes. Curriculum is a culturally specific artifact that serves to maintain white dominance and the current social order. It employs a race neutral color-blind perspective

(Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2003). In Saskatchewan, the curriculum is Eurocentric and until lately has denied the lives and accomplishments of Aboriginal people. It creates a superior Canadian identity and inferior Aboriginal identity. Students do not learn to critically analyze the relationship between Aboriginal people and Canada. Curriculum has had no real voice for anyone other than the dominant culture (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Leonardo (2004) states it has failed to teach a critique of white domination. Critical Race Theory will ask, “Who determines what knowledge is worth passing on?” It challenges how knowledge is controlled and produced.

The current focus on multiculturalism in curriculum is problematic in that an over emphasis on culture fails to address the continuing hierarchies of power and legitimacy (Donald & Rattansi, 1992). A superficial celebration of difference does not serve to move forward radical change in the current order. It would be more appropriate to examine how difference serves to advantage some and disadvantage others. Kailin (1999) urges that we must recognize the hidden ways that white supremacy operates in the absence or tokenizing and distortion of Aboriginal people in curriculum and schools.

Teachers also play an important role in the education of Aboriginal students. The lens that CRT provides is invaluable in addressing teacher attitudes and practices. Racism influences the beliefs about and interactions with Aboriginal students. White teachers have an impaired consciousness due to historically and culturally perpetuated stereotypes (Kailin, 1999). A deficit-based mindset allows the tendency to view children through a deficit lens (Marx, 2004). Teachers are not neutral. Therefore, it is important to analyze attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions. One must believe in the educability of all students.

Thirty-five years ago, Leacock (1971) studied teachers’ management techniques and attitudes toward and goals for children to determine if and how a variety of

alternative roles were structured. Her findings continue to be relevant today. Leacock found that class and race determined differential training for children. The capacities and experiences of all children were not respected. Spindler & Spindler (1988) report similar findings in that the teacher had selective interaction with students based on grouping by socioeconomic status and ethnicity. They claim, “one’s cultural background influences what one will value, disvalue and ignore” (p.15).

In general, in Saskatchewan schools, teacher expectations are not beneficial to Aboriginal students. Examining teacher attitudes and practices through a CRT lens make inequalities and inequities visible in new ways. It makes necessary a critique of practice and policy that until now has been considered necessary or ‘best practice’. In summary, examination of education, schools, curriculum and teacher attitudes and practice using the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, exposes racism faced by Aboriginal students at all levels. The assumption that the educational needs of Aboriginal students are being addressed perpetuates unequal power relations or power for the dominant culture. “Racism, so long as it goes unacknowledged will continue to affect policy decisions, practice and the quality of the relationships in schools, school systems and the education system as a whole” (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002, p.17). If we do not acknowledge racism in the schooling of Aboriginal students, then we cannot have a dialogue around the fact that it contributes to the lack of student success (Six Killer Clarke, 1994 as cited in St. Denis & Hampton, 2002).

CRT and white dominance in education

I have cited scholarly literature using CRT as a lens to examine education and schooling for Aboriginal students with some reference to whiteness. It is necessary to

continue with a critical anti-oppressive analysis of white domination in education specifically. Critical Race theorists believe the construction of race benefits white people. One must ask the questions: What does it mean to be white? What are the characteristics of whiteness? How has whiteness been constructed and continue to be constructed? How does whiteness get played out to extend and support racist interest? How is dominance protected and perpetuated?

Whiteness is a highly privileged social construction that confers dominance (MacIntosh, 1998; Marx, 2004). “Whiteness is always more than one thing” and has its effects within context (Ellsworth, 1997, p.266). **Whiteness is constructed as quality, deservingness, and merit.** Most whites do not see whiteness as a racial identity; white is a color that does not have to be named (Bergerson, 2003; Carter, 1997; Willinsky, 1998). It is not that which it projects as ‘other’. **One need only ask colleagues who are white to discuss race and it becomes apparent rather quickly that race stands for other than white. Power and privilege are defining aspects of whiteness, although most whites are unaware of both. White privilege is unearned advantage but we are “conditioned into oblivion about its existence”** (MacIntosh, 1998, p.166). Whiteness consists of multiple identities and experiences; one’s privilege is mediated by one’s other social positions (Ellsworth, 1997; Frankenberg, 1996; Goodman, 2001). Superiority assumes the privileged group is not only normal but also better. Whiteness though, is a hidden norm. Normalcy is when the dominant group becomes the point of reference against which ‘other’ groups are judged and this normalcy is justification for the dominant group’s right to domination and privilege (Goodman, 2001; Jones, 1999). Whites are taught to normalize their dominant position in society. Whiteness is meritocratic and places ‘others’ as deficient (Fine,

1997). In racially constructed societies, the oppressor is the model of normality and never seen in relation to deviance from the norm (Dei et al 2004).

White domination is constantly reestablished and reconstructed by whites from all walks of life (Leonardo, 2004). White people explain racial inequality in ways that avoid responsibility and do not implicate them (Chalmers, 1997; Sleeter, 1993). They avoid, ignore, or minimize the impact of race in their lives (Singleton & Lipton, 2006).

Whites use strategies of denial, avoidance, or resistance to acknowledging one's privilege to protect dominance (Goodman, 2001). Whites deny that race matters and explain away racial injustice and racial inequality by blaming the victim (Kailin, 1999; Larocque,

1991). Whites do not see themselves as racist but see others to be; *they* have the problem. We have a desire for safety, blamelessness and certainty (Thompson, 2003).

We do not view the dominant culture or its institutions as a problem or cause for racial injustice, although institutionalized whiteness confers cultural, economic, and political power. **Because we are white, we are free of the responsibility to challenge racism, white**

privilege or unequal power relations (Roman, 1993; Sleeter, 1993). To maintain the relationship of dominance, there are claims that discussing racism would politicize education and that race should not be an issue addressed in the classroom (Carr & Klassen, 1997). This is an example of how avoidance is rationalized. In schools, the pervasiveness of whiteness assumes the 'other' must adapt to the dominant culture.

Teachers may use strategies to reduce failure or to ensure that school continues to work smoothly but these adaptive practices mask the oppressiveness of the education system (Sleeter, 1993).

In summary, whites use a multitude of strategies to participate in processes that protect and perpetuate white dominance, privilege, and the status quo. To whites, these

strategies are unconscious, 'hidden' and a 'normal' part of every day life. Since whiteness is the 'norm' in education, the question, **to what degree do students need to be proficient in white culture to achieve in schools?** must be asked (Singleton & Lipton, 2006). Dixon and Rousseau (2005) urge an examination of whiteness not only as a construct of privilege but an idea that manifests itself in ways that affect schooling. **Whose voice gets to be heard in determining what is best for children?** (Delpit, 2004). It is imperative that educators problematize and interrogate white dominance and privilege as it relates to schools, curriculum, and their attitudes and practices. The "presence of good will on the part of members of advantaged groups is not enough to overcome assumptions and attitudes born out of centuries of power and privilege" (Jones, 1999, p.308). This is simply a default position. The explorations of white identity and its social implications would be a vehicle to analyze the ways in which racism and privilege influences white teacher beliefs and interactions. Whites have little or no experience talking critically about race. This is a serious problem. Critical Race Theory and the study of whiteness open up avenues to begin such a dialogue. CRT is a tool for understanding how race affects us *all* on a daily basis; what it means for those of us in racially dominant positions as well as for those who are marginalized because of race.

Implications of CRT for non-Aboriginal teachers

An analysis of education and schooling using a CRT framework has implications for non-Aboriginal teachers at the personal and professional level. Firstly, I will discuss these implications from the viewpoint that racism is endemic and non-Aboriginal teachers have a responsibility to acknowledge it, expose its manifestations in schooling and society, and explore the impact it has on our students and us. Secondly, I will argue

that using counter-stories is of value to non-Aboriginal educators, citing suggestions for such a practice from scholarly literature. Thirdly, I intend to challenge non-Aboriginal teachers to use empowering knowledge of white privilege and white dominance in education to explore new possibilities to change the status quo and thereby improve school success for their Aboriginal students.

First, Critical Race Theory reinforces the importance of centering race in our lives and work. A good beginning would be to ‘put the issue of race on the table’ since “a trouble we can’t talk about is a trouble we can’t do anything about” (Johnson, 2006, p.10). We must learn that racism has a historical context that continues to manifest itself in daily practice. Larocque (1991) reminds us to deal with the less creditable aspects of Canadian history as they relate to the racism Aboriginal people have faced and continue to face on a daily basis. To better understand the present, we can reconstruct the past and ask what part we have played in the marginalization of ‘others’ (Norquay, 1993). Asking “how we got in – into this mess called racism...is an important step toward getting out” (Frankenberg, 1993, p.3). The historical and political processes that have constructed difference have enabled the dominant culture to subordinate ‘others’. Silence and complicity on the part of those in the dominant culture perpetuate this subordination and maintain the cycle of oppression (Laurence & Tatum, 2004; Norquay, 1993). Non-Aboriginal teachers must break the silence. It is imperative to analyze how epistemology, knowledge construction, power and opportunity are constructed along and conflated with race (Marx, 2004; Ryan & Dixson, 2006). A critical consciousness among non-Aboriginal teachers is necessary to understand that oppression is both cultural and economic. It is time to interrupt our ‘common sense’ ways of thinking and being in the world (Ng, 1993).

We can take the risk of confronting and questioning the comments and actions of friends and colleagues that perpetuate racism. As well, we can work to create an environment that recognizes the need to ask difficult questions around race, class, and gender issues; the economic, social, and political power of the dominant group; how dominant practices have worked to conceal our own racist acts and the fact that race is a salient factor in ‘others’ lives on a daily basis (Bergerson, 2003; Edwards & Ruggiano-Schmidt, 2006; Kailin, 1999; Norquay, 1993). We can explore the ways that education plays a role in perpetuating racism by challenging the ideas of neutrality, color blindness and meritocracy. “We must begin working in our own spheres of influence to bring about change, to make race visible and ensure the appreciation of difference” (Edwards & Ruggiano-Schmidt, 2006, p.411).

I have discussed the implications for non-Aboriginal teachers of beginning to deconstruct issues of race and racism. I will now enlarge upon the second idea taken from CRT, that the use of counter-stories has value in this work. Counter-stories would be a vehicle to invite traditionally silenced voices and ways of knowing into the classroom (Delpit, 1997; Ryan & Dixson, 2006). Who better to speak to the interests of oppressed groups? Jones (1999) warns that non-Aboriginal teachers must recognize that not only the ‘telling’ of stories is significant but even more important is the fact that the stories are ‘heard’, the marginalized have a ‘voice’. We must give their words complete attention. Non- Aboriginal teachers “must be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness” (Delpit, 1997, p.142). If we put our beliefs on hold and accept that we may not understand their rationale; a dialogue may open up to answer questions around voicelessness, discrimination and the ways in which the marginalized experience the

manifestations of whiteness in their lives (Delpit, 1997). If those of us who are the most privileged listen differently, understanding different perspectives of whiteness may develop new understandings and responsiveness (Laurence & Tatum, 2004; Thompson, 2003).

A third step in the deconstruction of race and racism for non-Aboriginal teachers is examining white privilege and white dominance in education and its implications for their teaching. It is necessary to look at the historical, social and political contexts that gave rise to white privilege and the advantages and biases we bring to our teaching because of this privilege. We must be aware of our own racial socialization and how it influences the perceptions we have of the educability of the students we teach (Laurence & Tatum, 2004). Whiteness influences how we construct beliefs about children. Critical self-awareness will enable us to move past stereotypical expectations and work towards transforming attitudes and raising daily consciousness and practice. We can “use our unearned advantage to weaken systems of advantage” (MacIntosh, 1998, p.169) and interrupt our “tidy, familiar sense of the world” (Britzman, 1993, p.197). Non-Aboriginal teachers should ask how we address white privilege, how invested we are in maintaining it, and what we are willing to give up to dismantle it? (Ryan & Dixson, 2006).

Knowledge of white privilege does not absolve responsibility for action (Levine Rasky, 2000; Singleton & Lipton, 2006). We are challenged to examine our underlying desires to maintain white privilege or advantage and question benefits we receive daily because of them. Acknowledgement of white privilege is not automatically followed by a critical examination of how and why it continues to exist (Levine Rasky, 2000). We must also be cognizant that becoming preoccupied with whiteness can **interfere with** the work of organizing for racial justice and engaging in anti-racist pedagogies (Fine et al 1997).

In summary, an analysis of education using a CRT framework and critical white studies has implications for non-Aboriginal teachers. We cannot work against racism unless we understand its place in our lives (Norquay, 1993). We must be aware of our complicity in perpetuating racism, white privilege, and unequal power relations. With this awareness comes the responsibility to challenge the status quo, disrupt racist school and classroom practices, and open up a conversation about race. It means, “learning to move over in order to permit the speech of those who have been silenced and when to speak against racism in alliance with other” (Roman, 1993, p.84). We must take every opportunity to listen to the stories of people who experience racism on a daily basis and be respectful of their experiences, knowledge and perspectives. As non-Aboriginal teachers we should keep the lines of Kalāhele’s poem uppermost in our minds:

If to help us is your wish then stand behind us.

Not to the side

And not to the front.

Non-Aboriginal teachers who are racially dominant are being relied on to play a significant role. However I advocate the necessity of a race analysis and understanding the implications of white domination in education to augment this role. Critical Race Theory provides a theoretical framework to move ahead in this work. An analysis of education using a CRT framework and critical white studies has implications for non-Aboriginal teachers. We must be aware of our complicity in perpetuating racism, white privilege and unequal power relations. However, knowledge of our dominance in education is not enough. Where do we go from here?

To this point, I have discussed the problematic nature of multiculturalism and multicultural education in addressing Aboriginal student success as well as anti-racism and the potential and challenges to anti-racist education in contributing to that success. In the last section of this paper, I used a CRT framework to critique education, schools, curriculum and teacher attitudes and practices. I now intend to illustrate how CRT can inform anti-racist education.

In connecting CRT to anti-racist education, I will again use the three tenets of CRT that I used in my earlier analysis. They are: that racism is endemic, the ideology of liberalism is problematic and the use of counter-stories is of value. Also, CRT's analysis of white dominance and privilege will be used. Dei's (1996) principles of anti-racist education in Canada provide a perfect frame for this discussion.

The first principle is the necessity to recognize the social effects of race, understand the full effects of racism and that all oppressions are interlocking (Kailin 1994; Raby 2004; Singleton & Lipton 2006). This involves identifying and changing institutional policies and procedures, behaviors and practices that foster racism (Alladin 1996). It can be a "supported opportunity to ask hard questions and engage colleagues in dialogue about race and the impact of racism in the school" (Blumer & Tatum 1999, p.261).

The second principle of anti-racist education is the critique of meritocracy, and other ideologies that underlie liberalism. Dei (1996) asks the question "Why are white norms standard?" It must be recognized that individual agency is tied to and constrained by institutional power. Anti-racist education provides a framework to expose and eliminate educational inequities through a critical examination of practices and curriculum that follow from the ideology of meritocracy. It is imperative to "challenge

the current climate of standard based education in which standardized tests and curricula are produced according to dominant norms and abstract universal benchmarks that defy diversity” (Dei 2006, p.29). It is necessary to disrupt the way things are ‘normally’ done, and “see beyond and through the conventional labels and practices that sustain the status quo” (Cochran & Smith 1991 as cited in Ng 2003, p.216).

The **third** principle of anti-racist education is to problematize the marginalization of certain voices in society. To relate this principle to CRT, it is important to recognize and give space to other epistemologies and experiences. In other words, value counter-stories. Power sharing gives everyone a space to be heard and everyone has something to offer. All experiences in the community are valued. Anti-racist education is an opportunity to explore the different perspectives of different social groups in society (Banks, 1996; Dei, 1993; Freire, 1990 as cited in Alladin, 1996; Giroux, 1988). Schwartz (1992 as cited in May, 1994) speaks of the importance of “non- hegemonic emancipatory narratives” (p.43). Conversations between families and teachers about home experiences can empower parents to participate in their child’s education in personally meaningful ways (Edwards & Ruggiano Schmidt, 2006; May, 1994).

The **fourth** principle of anti-racist education related to CRT is to question white dominance, power and privilege. This should be accompanied by recognition of disadvantage or unequal power relations in school and society. There is a “need to explore the racialized positioning of white...teachers with respect to Aboriginal peoples” (Schick & St. Denis 2005, p.298) and examine the cultural implications of whiteness in schools. Whiteness is an identity based on power and domination. It is necessary to deconstruct white identity to create an identity that does not rely on the ‘other’ and to create an oppositional space to fight for equality in schools (Bedard 2000). Anti-racist

education lends itself to examining how education privileges some and limits others (Gorski, 2006; James, 2006; May, 1994). “We have an obligation to our profession to disrupt...curricula and dogma that offer no space for new ideas about the nature and scope of our work” (p.413). Ladson-Billings (2003) is referring to the use of CRT to inform our practice as teachers who want to make a difference through anti-racist education. The four principles of anti-racist education; recognition of racism and its effects, a critique of meritocracy, problematization of the marginalization of minority voices and a critique of white dominance, power and privilege can be used to move ahead in this work. It is necessary at this point to interject with challenges that will be faced by teachers who have the courage to work toward the implementation of anti racist pedagogy.

V. Challenges to the Implementation of Anti Racist Education

Three areas of resistance

To frame my exploration of these challenges, I use three areas of resistance to anti-racist education that Solomon & Levine-Rasky (1996) found in their work. These are: traditional pedagogic concerns, conservative political views, and conservative views of race and anti-racism. I acknowledge that there will be some overlap from my previous analysis of education using a CRT framework. However, the tenets of anti-racist education enable analysis to move from theory to action.

First, in many instances the ideologies behind anti-racist education are a challenge to established practices and beliefs about the function of education. **The nature of anti-racist education is oppositional; it challenges concepts of the status quo and therefore can lead to controversy** (Anchan & Holychuk, 1996). Challenging the status quo threatens

core principles such as meritocracy; the belief that we are all basically the same and that everyone has equal opportunity if only they work hard enough (St. Denis & Schick, 2003; Tatum, 2004). (I have critically analyzed meritocracy in an earlier section of this paper). We hold on fiercely to the principle of meritocracy as it underlies so many of our beliefs and practices in education. Additional pedagogic concerns often cited are the importance of the ‘traditional’ curriculum (which is dominant) and teaching for standardized tests (a worrisome trend in Saskatchewan). Kumashiro (2000) says we must overcome our resistance to change and learning and be open to knowledge other than what one already knows.

The second area of resistance that is a challenge to anti-racist education is the conservative political views held by many people of the dominant culture. **These views stress the importance of assimilation and being a Canadian.** (Problematic myths around our Canadian identity were discussed earlier in this paper). White views of anti-racist education claim that education should not be politicized (Carr & Klassen, 1997). **Anti-racist work continues to be informed by what whites, from their privileged position, are willing to do rather than what needs to be done** (Thompson, 2000). Goodness, innocence and superiority of whites are secured by individual acts and good intentions. Whites are “not necessarily interested in hearing the difficult things that need to be said or doing the difficult analysis of unpacking their assumptions about inequality” (St. Denis & Schick 2003, p.55). Coupled with this, is the “belief that racial and ethno cultural diversity is threatening to dominant norms” (Solomon & Levine-Rasky 1996, p.28). There is a fear that anti-racism will privilege ‘others’; we become defensive when our power is threatened.

The third and most ubiquitous element that challenges anti-racist education involves conservative views on race and racism. We are reluctant to acknowledge race, racial difference and racism (Bishop, 1994; Donaldson, 1997; Lund, 2006; Lund, 2001; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1996; Tatum, 2004). In fact, Raby (2004) claims that “race, racism and cultural issues were seen to affect non-white people only” (p.375). Problems of cultural difference and stereotypes are perceived as a problem of the ‘other’ (St. Denis & Schick, 2003). Since racism is not apparent in white people’s lives, it appears to them to be insignificant (Kelly, 2006). Therefore, we are responsible for what Donaldson (1997) calls “if it isn’t broken why try to fix it?” syndrome (p.32). She states that teachers will acknowledge racism exists in schools but will not see racial bias in curriculum and instruction and how that bias affects student success.

There is controversy in the process of unlearning racism. White people don’t understand oppression, can’t see their own privilege and both issues often generate powerful emotional responses (Bishop, 1994; Tatum, 2004). Few white teachers think of themselves as racist but see others to be (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Olsson, 1996). Therefore, it cannot be assumed that teachers will address issues of race, class and gender on their own. They must have an awareness of the social and historical context of racism. (Taylor & Webb, 2001). Because of the controversy surrounding discussions of race and racism, often there is “tacit approval for silencing talk of race” (Solomon & Levin-Rasky, 1997, p.30). However, “contrived harmony restricts divergent voices” (Crow, 1994 as cited in Solomon 2002, p.194) and minority voices are intimidated into silence. Controversy may be a challenge to those of us advocating anti-racist education but that challenge is “in no way comparable to the lack of racial privileges that people of color

face in all contexts, regardless of their political, economic, and social circumstances” (Thompson, 1997, p.358).

To summarize there are three main areas of resistance to anti-racist education that challenge its implementation; traditional pedagogic concerns, conservative political views and conservative views of race and racism. As Donaldson (1997) asks “How can we help more teachers recognize the role they play in keeping racism alive?” (p.37). We must keep uppermost in our minds the claim that Singleton & Lipton (2006) make: the “problem of educators not knowing what to do about the racial achievement gap or how to talk about race is not as devastating as the problem of educators failing to seek solutions to the gaps” (p.21). Or as Bishop (1994) tells us “not to decide is to decide” (p.94)

VI. Implementation of Anti racist Pedagogy

The final section of this paper will explore suggestions for putting the principles of anti-racist education into practice, where the rubber must ‘hit the road’. It is not easy, comfortable or safe but can be a project of hope (Ng 2003). “No single ‘anti-racist pedagogy’ can be taken off the shelf and always used successfully” (Gillborn, 1995, p.147). However, there are implications for educational leaders, teachers and students that open up the possibility of institutional change that will lead to equity in education for all students.

Leadership in anti-racist education is paramount. Anti-racist education cannot be left to individual beliefs and practices but must be supported by policies that promote equity, social justice and democracy (James, 2006). There is a need for committed, courageous leadership that articulates the importance of this mission to the school

community. Grassroots efforts are difficult to sustain without administrative support (Blumer & Tatum, 1999; Gillborn, 1995).

Singleton & Lipton (2006) speak of **three critical factors necessary for anti-racist leadership: passion, practice and persistence.** Passion is needed to establish anti-racism as an ethical and moral imperative within schools and to set the expectation that all staff should work toward equity. Passion leads to efforts to acquire the adequate conceptual and theoretical knowledge needed to inform their transformational tasks. It encourages leaders to take the first step in learning about issues of their own racialized location, white privilege and oppression and work collaboratively with staff members to do the same. Passion gives leaders the courage to ask difficult questions around treating all children the same and other taken for granted and common sense ideas (Corson, 2000; Dei, 2000; St. Denis & Schick, 2003). In practice, leaders in anti-racist education can work to move beyond celebrations of diversity and create a community where students can talk about their experiences of racism. All people and all issues are welcomed and addressed (Dei & James, 2002; Singleton & Lipton, 2006; Weisglass, 2006). The emphasis is on ‘power with’ rather than ‘power over’ (Bishop, 1994). Leaders can create a shared vision with shared language to speak honestly and productively about racism and change (Blumer & Tatum, 1999; May, 1994). **They can encourage and model anti-racist education practices such as cooperative learning and participatory, reciprocal and non-hierarchical relationships where everyone’s contribution is valued. Difference is never equated with deficiency and cooperation is valued over competition (May, 1994).** **There is ongoing professional development and critically reflective practice that enables continued critical examination of the content and process of schooling** (Corson, 2000; Gillborn, 1995; Solomon & Levine Rasky, 1996; Weisglass, 2006).

Persistence is the third critical factor required for anti-racist leadership. Anti-racist change can be slow, painful and uncertain. Persistence is needed since “progress is possible though never easy or complete” (Gillborn, 1995, p.193). “Resisting racism and social oppression is having the courage to say both what one is in favor of as well as what one is against” (Dei, 1996, p.38).

As I have discussed, the role of leaders in anti-racist education is critical, however teachers play an equally vital role. Teachers who want to pursue anti-racist education must begin with knowledge of self, understanding our own culture and how cultural perspectives shape our thinking and actions. We need an awareness of racism, classism and sexism within our attitudes and behaviors as well as an understanding of oppression and our role in the perpetuation of oppression (Donaldson, 1997; Laurence & Tatum, 1997; Titone, 1998). Teachers also need awareness of how systems of privilege benefit whites and to learn “about the complexities and intersections of educational inequities and their connections to larger sociopolitical issues” (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p.175). Kumashiro (2000) states that it is imperative to recognize and critique how one is positioned and how one positions others. He says that with an understanding of the processes of othering and normalizing and complicity in these processes, teachers may develop the ability and will to resist and change structural oppression as it is played out in schools.

Teachers who want to move forward with anti-racist education can be critical of power structures and challenge the status quo (Bishop, 1994; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). We can be political by being critical of Canadian identity and policy and acknowledging specific sources and manifestations of racism in Canada (Lund, 2001). We cannot fight for change without an understanding of the current social and political order (Dei, 1996).

Teachers must “reassess who they will be and what they will do in classrooms” (Schick & St. Denis 2005, p.311). We must be perceptive of the educational implications for students due to contextual or identity factors such a race, class or gender (Titone, 1998). Our classroom environment can reflect different learning styles. We need to develop a more critical approach to all teaching methods, policies and materials. Do resources encourage critical thinking about equity and education? What are the biases and stereotypes found in resources? We should ask critical questions daily.

Anti-racism work “involves struggles with our colleagues, our students as well as struggles within ourselves against our internalized beliefs and normalized behaviors. In other words, it is a lifelong challenge” (Ng, 2003, p.217). I have discussed implications for leaders and teachers with respect to anti-racist education. I now turn to an exploration of strategies to empower students as change agents.

“We have an obligation to the students we teach never to avoid the knotty and uncomfortable issues of race, class and gender in our society” (Ladson-Billings 2003, p.413). We can teach about race, social difference and resistance in an attempt to create a critical and powerful voice for students and develop their critical judgment. We can assist them to identify, challenge and resist dominant values, and the structural behaviors that perpetuate racism and other forms of oppression (Dei, 1996; Dei, 2006). As well, students can become critically aware of identities and the intersection of those identities (Dei & James, 2002). Dei (1996) goes one stop further in saying teachers should “assist students to learn how the dominant culture systematically skews a critical understanding, acknowledgment and appreciation of marginalized groups in the school system” (p.37). As part of this process, Berlak (2004) advocates for the challenging of assumptions about

racial hierarchy and challenging students to see themselves as people who have internalized racist messages.

Related to the development of students' critical awareness is Banks' (1996) notion that they should be taught to examine the assumptions, values, and nature of knowledge and ways in which it is constructed. He believes that if students participate in the construction of knowledge, they will see how knowledge is constructed to legitimate and maintain power. Students become agents in their learning process, which becomes the basis for collective learning and civic action (James, 2006). Power sharing with students is a recurring theme in the literature on anti-racist education (Anchan & Holychuk, 1996; Dei & James, 2002; James, 2006; Lund, 2001; 1996). It is an opportunity to "allow meaningful ways of engaging students in a collaborative sharing of the responsibility for bringing about change in schools and communities" (Lund 2001, p.69).

In summary, the principles of anti-racist education have implications for educational leaders, teachers and students that have the potential for positive change in schools and communities. In this paper, I have argued that anti-racist education is the vehicle to educational equity and social justice for the Aboriginal students we teach. Nowhere in the literature does it say that anti-racist education will be a 'walk in the park'. Therefore, I wish to offer ideas to not only support but also continue to challenge those who wish to make a difference.

Firstly, we must explore our own identity and examine its social implications. Thomas (1994) exhorts us to "speak from [our] rejection of racism and not what [we] think or hope others will say" (p.169). We can embrace difference and prepare all children for a future of limitless opportunities. We can speak up, be honest and challenge

privilege (Singleton & Lipton, 2006; Thomas, 1994). “Take advantage of any available vehicle for talking about anti-racism to a wide range of people” (Thompson, 1997, p.355). We must continue to challenge our own racism and white supremacy in general. Bishop (2005) urges us to work together, to take action and know that institutional change will take a long time. In order to facilitate working together for the common goals of educational equity we must “engage in a valuable conversation on our own understanding around our racialized identities and the complexity of activism” (Lund 2001, p.70). Reflective dialogue in a safe environment with like-minded colleagues is an avenue to change. The “more [we] work on making things right, the more mistakes [we’ll] make” (Thomas, 1994, p.170). However, as Ng (2003) says, anti-racist education and the pursuit of equity is a project of hope.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, I first want to re-iterate that there is merit and value in the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives across the curriculum. However, it is one piece of the puzzle for ensuring school success for Aboriginal students. Hermes (2005); Kaomea (2005) and others cited in this paper recognize the need for culturally relevant curriculum but also call for examining the effects of racism and oppression on Aboriginal students as well as the need to work for change.

Dr. Verna St. Denis, my supervisor, challenged me to synthesize my research for this paper into two points that I would advocate for in my division. The first would be to insist that we put race and racism on the table for discussion, to talk about how and why race matters. The second point would be to critically examine educational policies and practices that have at their base the ideologies of neutrality, meritocracy and color blindness. I would argue that knowledge of racism and other interlocking systems of

oppression as well as white privilege and white domination would be a good starting point for discussion. “More powerful than . . . knowledge of cultural difference is...knowledge of the big picture – the context of socioeconomic and cultural oppression of [Aboriginal peoples]” (Hermes 2005 p. 21)

The principles of transformative learning can be applied to developing critical race analyses in education. The principles I will use are: a shift in consciousness that dramatically changes our way of thinking and being in the world, an understanding of power relations in the interlocking structures of race class and gender and a different understanding of the world would necessitate changes in our everyday lives to “actively create the future” (TLC, 2007).

Critical Race Theory is a tool to facilitate a shift in consciousness by understanding how race affects us all on a daily basis. Knowledge of racism begins with learning about ourselves, as white teachers, and our complicity in perpetuating racism and white privilege. It involves a “struggle with our own internalized assumptions and beliefs about race and class” (Hermes, 2005, p. 24) Mezirow et al (1990) say that before social transformation can succeed, one must begin with individual perspective transformation. This transformation would be characterized by a better understanding of our cultural and racial positionality, the power that comes with it and the biases inherent in it (Marx & Pennington, 2003). To accompany knowledge and dialogue in a safe, respectful environment, critical self-reflection could have the potential to profoundly change the way we make sense of our own experiences of the world, others and ourselves (Mezirow et al 1990).

The second principle of transformative learning that informs a critical race analysis of education involves an understanding of power relations in the interlocking

structures of race, class and gender. Dei's (1996; 2000; 2002; 2004; 2006) work on anti racism and anti racist education speaks to this principle. As well, Critical Race Theory's interrogation of education, examines how meritocracy, color blindness and neutrality serve to perpetuate unequal power relations. With new language and understanding, white teachers can see the ways in which racism affects Aboriginal children on a daily basis and also discuss questions such as "how do we construct beliefs about children?" (Marx & Pennington, 2003).

The third principle of transformative learning centers on action for change through critical reflection. According to Mezirow et al (1990), critical reflective learning is an avenue to foster resistance to assumptions, conformity, biases and fear of change. In other words, transformative learning enables one to challenge the status quo, take risks and ask difficult questions, in a move to change beliefs in order to change practice. "We need to understand that we have no special card from above, no special credential, no "in" that makes us experts" (Thompson, 1997, p. 362). Rather, we can learn from critical reflection and move from reflection to action.

Once you acquire through study and research . . . knowledge of racism, there is no way back. One cannot undo critical knowledge. There is no way to not recognize racial and other injustices once you have learned how to see them. One can only hope that critical knowledge be used use fearlessly, but with wisdom – with respect for one another as human beings. (Essed, 2004 p. 132)

I hope that this paper becomes a vehicle to educate as well as facilitate discussion for change. Education is central to a movement towards a fairer, less oppressive society.

All students have dreams or hopes for the future and it is our responsibility to find ways to generate hope and agency, to empower Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike.

Empowering education is thus a road from where we are to where we need to be.

It crosses terrains of doubt and time. One end of the road leads away from inequality and miseducation while the other lands us in a frontier of critical learning and democratic discourse. This is no easy road to travel. Any place truly different from the status quo is not close by or down a simple trail. But the need to go there is evident, given what we know about unequal conditions and the decay in social life, given the need to replace teacher-talk and student alienation with dialogue and critical inquiry. Fortunately, some valuable resources already exist to democratize school and society. That transformation is a journey of hope, humour, setbacks, breakthroughs, and creative life, on a long and winding road paved with dreams whose time is overdue.

(Ira Shor, 1992, front cover.)

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