

# Culturally Relevant Teacher Education: A Canadian Inner-City Case

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This case study of an inner-city teacher education program documents the tensions at work on a social reconstructionist academic staff attempting to produce a culturally relevant teacher education program. Cultural relevance here includes three features: supporting academic achievement, maintaining cultural competence, and developing critical consciousness. All interests converge on the need to produce academically and technically competent teachers. Beyond this, the staff remain mindful of the dominant social and educational context within which they work and at the same time attempt to meet the longer-term interests of their students and culturally different inner-city communities. The possibilities for success have lessened in the political economy of the 1990s, but the study provides concrete instances of developing a culturally relevant teacher education program.

Cette étude de cas portant sur un programme de formation à l'enseignement dans des écoles de quartiers défavorisés décrit les tensions au sein du personnel enseignant cherchant à produire un programme de formation des maîtres culturellement significatif. Trois éléments définissent la pertinence culturelle d'un programme : il doit promouvoir la réussite scolaire, être adapté à la culture et développer une pensée critique. Tous les intervenants s'accordent sur la nécessité de produire des enseignants compétents. Cela dit, le personnel doit garder à l'esprit le contexte éducatif et social dominant dans lequel il travaille tout en essayant de tenir compte des intérêts à long terme des élèves et de diverses communautés culturelles implantées dans des quartiers défavorisés. L'étude fournit des exemples concrets de la marche à suivre pour élaborer un programme de formation à l'enseignement culturellement significatif.

## INTRODUCTION

This poem has given me back what the city life was slowly taking away from me. All around my family circle lived violence and corruption, a life which my grandfather warned me about. . . . I have learned back my traditional life. Meegwetch [Thank you].

—Lloyd Swampy, Student, Winnipeg Education Centre

In this expression of gratitude to his teacher, Lloyd Swampy, an Ojibway pre-service teacher, poignantly summarizes the effects of one Language Arts course at the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC) in 1998. Swampy, an accomplished artist, was a second-year student in a program to produce certified teachers from

inner-city Winnipeg. Graduates would be skilled at teaching not just in Manitoba schools generally but in the rich cultural milieu of the city's core area in particular. This study presents the story of a teacher education program constructed to meet the perceived needs of Winnipeg's inner-city communities. The dominant interests in Canada and those of people in inner cities are antagonistic. They clash as the staff of the WEC strive to develop a coherent program. Nevertheless, the politicized agency of those responsible for the program produced results placing them more or less in alignment with the interests of Canada's most marginalized citizens.<sup>1</sup>

All staff members of the WEC work to implement a university program that meets conventional standards of academic rigour and technical competence. At the same time, they aim to make a collective social reconstructionist vision a concrete reality. Social reconstructionism is a pedagogical and curriculum theory that claims schools ought to contribute to the creation of a more just society. The staff's social reconstructionist orientation thus means that they are concerned with the social and political context of inner-city schooling and forms of pedagogy that might contribute to greater equity and social justice. Ladson-Billings (1995), an African-American scholar, has articulated a set of criteria for one form of social reconstructionism that also counts as effective teaching; she calls this form "culturally relevant teaching." "I have defined culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition," says Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 160), elsewhere elaborating that "the primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to . . . allow [racialized] students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with [their] culture" (1994, p. 17).

Ladson-Billings defines three criteria essential to culturally relevant teaching. The first is academic success. Many writers express the view that one of the greatest problems for minority education is teachers' low expectations of the cultural Other. But she asserts that "While much has been written about the need to improve the esteem of [minority students] . . . culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students' academic needs and not merely make them 'feel good'" (1995, p. 160). The second is cultural competence: creating conditions where students can maintain their cultural integrity while achieving academic excellence. Thus, "culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (1995, p. 160). The third is critical consciousness. Here, she comes closest to expressing a synthesis of culturally sensitive education and the social reconstructionist mission:

Culturally relevant teaching does not imply that it is enough for students to chose [*sic*] academic excellence and remain culturally grounded if those skills and abilities represent only an individual achievement. . . . students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequalities. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160)

In 1996, staff in the WEC's teacher education program (WEC-ED) codified its social reconstructionist orientation by adopting Ladson-Billings' criteria. This article examines the changes that resulted and their effects.

#### TEACHER EDUCATION AND SETTLER INTERESTS

Historically, the preparation and use of Aboriginal teachers as a policy mechanism in the interests of the settler state<sup>2</sup> has precedent in Canada. At precisely the time when First Nations people were being systematically excluded from opportunities to develop productively as agriculturalists (Carter, 1995) and the notoriously colonial residential schools were being established, indigenous teacher education became an aspect of settler state strategy. The first university institution in Saskatchewan was established in 1883 to train indigenous interpreters and teachers who would be familiar with the language and mode of thought of the Aboriginal people (Littlejohn & Regnier, 1989, p. 6). In the context of Western expansion into the prairies and "religious imperialism" (Wotherspoon, 1991, p. 258), indigenous teachers familiar with their kin's "mode of thought" would be trained to advance the mutual interests of Church and State.

We should make no mistake, then: teacher education is not ideologically and politically neutral and will be established under appropriate conditions to serve the interests of European settlement—interests that persist to this day. So we come to key questions. What ought teacher education that meets the needs of its inner-city residents look like? Whose interests are being legitimized or illegitimized through the everyday practices of particular teacher educators in particular times and in particular settings? To what guiding philosophy or ideology do these practices more or less correspond? And given that Winnipeg is one of the largest Canadian centres of Aboriginal residents, how should WEC-ED respond to the challenge of the Aboriginal education leadership who charge, for example, that "Western society's refusal to acknowledge or respect tribal knowledge . . . is . . . cognitive imperialism" (Battiste, 1993, p. 3)? How, in other words, does WEC-ED negotiate the academic terrain to advance the interests of a non-hegemonic, non-Eurocentric teacher education program? Or does it? These are, evidently, not politically neutral questions. As Mohanty (1990) argues:

Decolonizing pedagogical practices requires taking seriously the different logics of cultures as they are located within asymmetrical power relations. It involves understanding that culture, especially academic culture, is a terrain of struggle. (p. 196)

Aboriginal people and their organizations have historically engaged in a process of *negotiation* with the dominant State apparatus to achieve goals that both meet their inherent rights and needs and adjust to changing material conditions and relations of power (Persson, 1986; Stevenson, 1991; Wotherspoon,

1991). This is an historical process, and teacher educators are currently working together with Aboriginal people to prepare Aboriginal teachers to participate in it. It is not so much that these teacher educators necessarily operate exclusively on one side or the other of this negotiation process as that their everyday practices tend *more or less* either to reproduce settler hegemony or to respond successfully to the articulated needs and demands of Aboriginal interests. For example, the inability of most academic staff to incorporate elements of Aboriginal spirituality into their courses is perfectly consistent with teacher education practices in Canada, but it is also a negation of traditional Aboriginal pedagogies (Kawagley, 1995). At least to some extent, both of these fundamentally opposed goals may be achieved at the same time.

#### STRUCTURAL FEATURES AND STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

In 1973, a convergence of social democratic government policy interests and the human rights sentiments of several Jewish cabinet ministers in Manitoba resulted in a proposal to establish a teacher education program to recruit and train residents of Winnipeg's inner city to become certified professional teachers (Orlikow & Young, 1993). The Winnipeg Centre Project (later, the Winnipeg Education Centre) did not spring out of a vacuum but rather was consistent with plans originating in the previous decade in the United States to produce "new cadres of teachers" for U.S. schools, including the training of teachers for the inner cities (Popkewitz, 1995, p. 60). In 1981, the program was joined by one in social work (SW) based on the same recruiting and pedagogical principles, so that there were two programs — WEC-ED and WEC-SW — housed in the same aged school building on the northeast fringe of a growing inner city.

Through an extensive selection process, potential students are considered in terms of their suitability for the professions of social work and teaching. Applicants are chosen according to their relevant life experience and work or volunteer experience in a field linked to education or social work. For example, applicants who served as teacher aides, worked as volunteers in their neighbourhood school, or served on a parents' council will be favourably evaluated. Consistent with prevailing conceptions of disadvantage in North America, which prioritize "race"<sup>3</sup> and ethnicity over social class (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997), it is also expected that the students will generally reflect the racial and ethnic demographics of Winnipeg's inner city. This is interpreted to mean that approximately 50% of the students will be of Aboriginal ancestry, 15%–20% will be recent immigrants or refugees, and the balance will be socially and economically disadvantaged Whites.

The two WEC programs were funded by the Government of Manitoba, as part of a group of provincially funded "ACCESS" programs offering the possibility of a university education to members of groups historically underrepresented

among university students. A particularly devastating policy shift in September 1994 resulted in the termination of these student allowances, which had supported students throughout their studies. Currently, ACCESS students are funded through a combination of Canada Student Loans and ACCESS bursaries administered through the Manitoba Student Financial Aid Program. Of necessity, therefore, student funding sources have become more diverse in recent years, with more students receiving financial support from sources such as their Bands (38%), social assistance programs (15%), Workers' Compensation, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services, as well as the Canada Student Loan Program. This privatization of access to post-secondary education has resulted in a dwindling number of applications for the two WEC programs.

Overall funding for the programs has also declined sharply in the 1990s. For example, in 1991–92, a “peak year” of the ACCESS programs, the provincial grant to the teacher education program was \$1,049,300 or \$89,107 per WEC-ED graduate. The full amount of grants received in 1997 was \$357,800 (Winnipeg Education Centre, Inner City Social Work Program, 1998). As students now cover their own tuition fees and purchase textbooks and all other related materials, the cost per graduate to the province has decreased by approximately 50%. One of the most damaging effects of cutbacks has been a necessary, increasing dependence on part-time sessional instructors: everyday work like student counselling is now usually divided among a shrinking number of full-time staff. Likewise, little time is available to organize cultural activities, among them a community dinner to recognize publicly the achievements of WEC students.

#### DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHER EDUCATION: THE CONTEXT

Although I have claimed that WEC has always been a social reconstructionist teacher education program, this has been as much a simple tendency as a coherent mission. Again, it is worthwhile to consider the prevailing ideological conditions in North America when WEC was established in the early 1970s. In the view of policy makers and corporate leaders at the time, Aronowitz (1997) claims, the mass social unrest and radical social critique of the day “had to be redirected to acceptable . . . outcomes, especially mobility” (p. 199). Despite the record of police violence against groups such as the American Indian Movement and the Black Panther Party, Aronowitz argues, the preferred tool for re-establishing State legitimacy was “a systematic effort to promote . . . a new class of managers . . . whose main assignments would be to run the now decimated ‘inner-city’” (p. 199). One institution for imposing this new mode of management would be the school. In the eyes of some, then, the value of WEC may have lain in the fact that inner-city cultural brokers would be recruited, prepared to use their background knowledge to turn their gaze on inner-city cultural values, and then work to secure and maintain social peace. So, the move to an educational strategy that consciously planned to meet inner-city communities’

long-term interests required a political, non-hegemonic (at least) choice.

The choice to produce an alternative and responsive teacher education program necessarily raises issues of cultural difference. By mandate, WEC does not attract only Aboriginal students. As a program that also recruits descendants of long-settled immigrants from Europe and newcomers from the "Third World," the program has both the opportunity and the responsibility to make central the nature of settler society and the settler state. Between 1996 and 1998, WEC-ED staff took this to mean the elaboration of an explicitly "culturally relevant" teacher education program. WEC-ED is a culturally heterogeneous program, with most of its students being of non-European ancestries but most of its staff being White (at the time of writing, three of four full-time academic staff of the WEC-ED program are of European ancestry and the fourth is Irish American—Nez Percé). Even WEC students of European ancestry live their lives in the class-based hostility towards them typically associated with the politics of middle-class suburbia (Rury & Mirel, 1997). But the White academic staff live comfortably outside the inner core, returning to the suburbs at the end of the work day. Therefore, their identities are partially rooted in social experience outside the realm of their students' non-school experience. Both leisure and economic activities—from going to an expensive movie to buying clothing and groceries at some venues economically inaccessible to their students—limit the instructors' capacities to draw on similar cultural experiences for more effective teaching. Nevertheless, most members of the full-time academic staff can point with pride to long histories of personal engagement in loosely defined antiracism work.

The current socioeconomic milieu does not provide support for a program dedicated to honouring cultural difference. The limited but real advances made by Aboriginal educators and organizations in the field of education have encouraged a reorganization of settler hegemony on new terms. It is now occurring within the global context of neo-liberal economic and social policy. For example, budget cutbacks in medical care have meant a crisis in Aboriginal health care, with the rate of preventable deaths among Aboriginal youths remaining at 42% (Paul, 1997). In the context of declining full-time employment in Canada, the general population's concern about these conditions is diminishing and racist, victim-blaming attitudes towards Aboriginal people are increasing (Little, 1997; Paul, 1997). At the same time, the number of immigrants allowed to enter Canada from "Third World" countries continues to be officially limited, but without the use of official quotas (Sarick, 1997). In the context of a global worsening of social conditions for inner-city communities in general (Rury & Mirel, 1997), the federal government's limited response to child poverty is designed to bypass completely those dependent on welfare, those who principally occupy the inner cities (Maunder & Maracle, 1998). Winnipeg's response to consequentially rising physical insecurity and crime rates has been, in part, to mount surveillance cameras on downtown streets ("New eyes," 1997).

These broad, worsening social and cultural conditions constitute some of the parameters within which WEC-ED's educational strategy is now unfolding. Strategy formation has necessarily paid attention to conditions in the schools if for no reason other than that program staff depend on sympathetic school staff to accept field placements and cooperate in preparing WEC students. Ideologically, the staff has also been predisposed to working with inner-city teachers as colleagues. WEC-ED staff need to pay attention to the fact that a tired, skeptical, overdrawn, and still predominantly White teaching force might not take warmly to seeming adventures in the direction of a more focused and public culturally relevant program.

Nor can the program organizers expect the Winnipeg School Division's central administration to provide enthusiastic support to significant initiatives for a politicized teacher education. When, as Director of the program, I visited the offices of Human Resources administrators in the fall of 1997, for example, I was admonished for turning away from a marketplace demand for Science and Math teachers. The Assistant Director of Human Resources curtly told me that our provision for allowing students to develop a major in Native Studies would be good "for the Native schools," by which she meant the two schools in our city that have a public mandate to emphasize culturally appropriate teaching for exclusively Native students. A desire to counterbalance these relatively conservative political forces was one reason why the WEC staff worked to redevelop a multinational advisory committee and to develop working alliances with effective minority teacher groups.

#### THE EFFORT TO IMPLEMENT CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHER EDUCATION

Implementing critical and culturally appropriate teacher education is never complete. However, there are times when it is important to celebrate publicly limited gains by inserting their record into a continuing dialogue. As Dei (1996) asserts, "Anti-racism education must always practise what is preached and, conversely, preach what is practised" (p. 26). The central elements of delivering the WEC program fall into three categories: course selection, employment strategy, and pedagogical practice.

Course selection is limited principally to those offered at the parent university (University of Winnipeg), with their range and potential fundamentally determined by the structure of a program defined by others. Course selection is further limited by the need to mount transition or bridging courses to increase students' capacity to perform at standard university levels. The subordinate position of this small program in relation to the established academy limits the creativity with which staff can transform a curriculum to make it less grounded in Eurocentric abstractions. This subordination also means that creation of an isolated program that would both accommodate students' strengths and provide access to a full range of academic majors is difficult. As Lon Borgerson, former-

ly a program coordinator for a Métis teacher education program in Saskatchewan, says, "The whole university structure that we have to deal with is political because of the departmentalization [and] very inflexible programming from the university" (personal communication, May 10, 1996). However, within this framework it became possible to create spaces, that is, to launch teaching majors we thought most appropriate and to select courses such as North American Indian History, Introduction to Ojibway, Intermediate Ojibway, Introduction to World History, and ESL Instruction.

More important is what I call "insurgent recruitment" of instructors. The conscious recruitment of competent insurgents meant, for example, that the World History instructor struggled to teach "from the perspective of indigenous and other subaltern cultures" (B. Angel, course outline, 1997). Thus, among other themes in the course, students learned about "cultures of resistance in the Americas" (B. Angel, course outline, 1997). Similarly, a course entitled General Science for Elementary Teachers has been taught by a person who has expertise in the similarities and differences between Western and multicultural science and who teaches, in part, to dismantle the "symbiotic relationship" (D'Dambrosio, 1997, p. 23) between colonialism and science.

In the final analysis, a program that pragmatically challenges the hegemony of settler sovereignty and contributes to progressive alternatives to contemporary inner-city life depends on the everyday experiences that come to inhabit the bodies and minds of student teachers. To understand what is at work here, I find the concept of *cultural technologies* useful. Simon (1992) uses it to refer to the "sets of organizational, curricular, and teaching practices that frame the ways in which meaning is produced, identities shaped, and values challenged or preserved" in any given society (p. 40). These practices constitute intentional efforts at structuring different ways of making meaning as people attempt to give meaning to their own existence and that of others. This concept provides a broader range for the idea of pedagogy, allowing us to see it in relation to other forms of cultural work such as the organizing of feasts, shield-making, and vision quests. A cultural technology aims to develop an organized process for the production of meaning.

In an effective program, a central ethos infuses multiple aspects of the program's daily reproduction. At WEC, the cultural technology includes the ways in which both support and academic staff do or do not work to support the growing self-confidence and eliminate the lingering self-hatred of some students. It includes the micro-politics of democracy, openness, and dialogue that either does or does not enable students to feel they are in a safe, non-exclusionary learning environment. It embraces everything from the way the Director breaks the news to a student teacher that his field experience will not be continued to the way the custodian holds conversations with students during the day or hastens them out the door so she can leave early. It extends to the respect the



librarian gives students when they ask for help and to the fact that the academic advisor organized and led smudges with some of our more tradition-oriented Aboriginal students. The coherence of the cultural technology was seen in the exceptional efforts of the history professor to coach her students through the arduousness of writing term papers in standard form and in the response the Director gave to students who came forward with original antiracism proposals. The ethos that marginalized students and their families really matter is manifested in the cultural technology practiced by the office administrator who consistently offers her time to lead the organization of family picnics and Christmas concerts, for example. The cultural technology includes the fact that WEC-ED graduates are finally being hired to teach for the program from which they graduated and the practice of selecting, ordering, cataloguing, and shelving the many books, both academic and practical, purchased over the past two years to provide resources for the implementation of the Centre's antiracism principles.

In the WEC-ED program specifically, the most official and organized mode for the reproduction of a nonhegemonic cultural technology occurred in the content and teaching practices of courses. For example, as part of a major theme in our program, literacy, Renate Schulz's Adolescent Literature course required students to read the equivalent of 25 works of young adolescent literature, at least half of which had to be written by minority authors or be about multicultural themes. Students were required to find an Aboriginal or multicultural text, hold an organized dialogue about it with another person, rewrite at least a part of the text in a personally contextualized framework, and discuss the meaning of the text with the WEC student-writer-interviewer. Thus, one Aboriginal student whose marriage partner is Jamaica-born found an insurrectionary poem written in Jamaican patois and interviewed her to help him understand the possibilities and limitations of working with it in a Manitoba setting. A partially Yugoslavian "mixed-blood" student selected a poem by a Manitoba Métis poet that speaks to the dilemma of being "caught between two worlds." She wrote:

I automatically feel that this poem was meant for me. . . . At times I have raised either the white or the brown flag to better a certain situation for my own benefit and at times for the others around me. . . . I learned a lot about myself over just one poem.

An urbanized Ojibway man, Lloyd Swampy, selected "Words to a Grandchild" by Chief Dan George and interviewed his grandmother: "She told me this was the first time she read about a native writer." The grandmother admitted her own lack of knowledge about Aboriginal culture "because of the residential school system," he wrote, then continued:

This poem has given me back what the city life was slowly taking away from me. All around my family circle lived violence and corruption, a life which my grandfather warned me about. . . . I have learned back my traditional life. Meegwetch [Thank you].

The introductory Ojibway language course, taught by a WEC-ED graduate, asked students to prepare bilingual projects. Two students, for example, prepared children's books developed after interviews with family elders.

These two courses stand as examples of the meaning of antiracism education articulated by Dei (1996), who calls for a multicentric approach to education that starts from "targeting groups for attention and centering the lived experiences of a diverse student body as a starting point for education" (p. 82). This means, according to Dei, moving the experiences of the marginalized from the margins to the centre, producing a *balanced* curriculum—that is, "locating students within the context of their own cultural frame of reference so that they can relate socially, [and] politically to the learning process" (p. 83). The Adolescent Literature and Ojibway courses reinforced or developed students' cultural competence.

Ladson-Billings' third criterion for culturally relevant pedagogy is the development of students' critical consciousness. Charlotte Reid has taught at WEC for more than 20 years, giving her a deep immersion in the life of inner-city education. The School Organization course was officially meant to be taught to senior education students. Reid, however, transformed the course into a structured and intensive dialogue with first-year students around issues central to inner-city education and what might be done about them inside a classroom. She was teaching about issues of power and economic exploitation. The course focused on "who benefits most from [existing school structures] and how they could be otherwise" (C. Reid, 1997, course outline). A stated objective of the course was "to begin to construct a method of examining the constraints as well as the opportunities teachers confront." Another part of the course was given to examining the roles of "students, teachers, parents, administrators, government, school boards . . . as [they relate] to . . . Aboriginal education, minority education, gender equity, [and] standardized testing," among other issues. As student voice was encouraged in the course, this course also became an opportunity for the cultural relevance of lived inner-city life to penetrate what counts as schoolwork at WEC.

Attention to a multicentric cultural technology was reflected in Birgit Hartel's habitual use of the talking stick as a means of managing class discussion during her Seminar and School Experience course. Hartel's primary responsibility was to introduce students to the mechanics of teaching, such as developing a lesson plan, but students were at the same time required to use culturally relevant teaching in the field. A multicentric cultural technology was reflected in the invitations a range of instructors issued to the WEC-ED academic advisor to visit their classrooms and apply his expertise with Aboriginal epistemologies to course content. It was reflected in the emphasis in the first-year Mathematics course when students learned and worked with different number systems, from Mayan to East Indian.

Limitations to implementing multicentrism (Dei, 1996) at WEC-ED appeared in courses that depended almost completely on direct instruction. As well, the

model for program development was entirely cognitive and linear. No attempt was made to invite elders into the program. Full-time and part-time staff's incorporation of a multicentric approach into their teaching, despite some limited official encouragement, was left to individual instructors rather than being organized into an ongoing dialogue in relation to the achievement of the unofficial mandate of WEC-ED. Insufficient attention was given to the implications of Aboriginal child-rearing practices for what counts as schooling and learning to teach. Program pedagogy did not attend rigorously to building on the knowledge students bring into the program rather than focusing almost pathologically on academic deficits. We did not sufficiently grapple with the differences between "support service meaning crutch [and] support service meaning solidarity and community" (S. TeHennepe, personal communication, April 25, 1996). And in such matters as assessing students' academic competence to handle a broader range of subject majors, we did not examine the implications of the fact that most instructors remained White and middle-class.

Finally, elements of self-directed loathing among students and the "historical amnesia" described by Freire (1995) are as alive and well in inner-city Winnipeg as in any other colonial setting. Thus, student consciousness too presented a limitation to advancing a counter-hegemonic program. The basic necessities of successful performance as a student, complicated by a life lived in the material and gendered contexts experienced by all inner-city residents, meant there was usually not a great deal of energy or time available for taking risks.

#### CONCLUSION

The contents of a culturally relevant pedagogy are academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Possibilities for academic success in the two WEC programs were heightened through structural, psychological, and cultural means. Structurally, the bridging courses, which aimed to upgrade students' academic skill levels, were indispensable. Making the improvement of library holdings a budgetary priority provided students with access to more relevant, current, and motivational learning materials. However, the consistent effort given to creating a non-alienating place to work and learn may have been equally important. This aspect of WEC's cultural technology included all staff members, academic and non-academic, who endeavoured to share "ownership" of the building and program through the creation of an easy, informal work place for adult learners. For example, librarian Alem Asghedom's respect for students who came for help may have contrasted with the childhood school experiences of many of the students. Similarly, reducing students' anxiety and stress by, for example, organizing family picnics and Christmas concerts helped make a parent's and marriage partner's new role as an unwaged learner more acceptable. Such activities and events were therefore important for building

necessary psychological and cultural foundations for adult learners. It is now conventional wisdom that role models of their own “race” and/or ethnicity are important for the academic success of minority students. Consequently, the hiring of an Ojibway WEC-ED graduate was meaningful.

Developing academic success includes more intentional and focused strategies, however, such as the willingness of an instructor to spend extra time coaching students through the arduous task of meeting academic expectations. Entire literacy programs are built on the notion that making personal meaning of texts is essential. Students’ opportunities to select their own content and interview family members in both their Language Arts and Ojibway courses thus provided heightened incentive for academic achievement. The selection of topics and the dependence on effective dialogue in the School Organization course were also premised, in part, on the belief that making personal meaning is essential to academic achievement at all levels.

These latter examples also help show that Ladson-Billings’ three criteria cannot be artificially separated from one another. I argue, as she does, that developing cultural competence is essential for academic success. This is especially true for students previously excluded by conventional academic cultural practices, such as studying to enter a profession many young minority students already know is not accessible to them. How much was gained, for example, by Renate Schulz’s capacity to grasp the personal value of helping students strengthen their own identities as part of their course work? Reading multicultural texts helps even non-Aboriginal students to explore the meaning of White cultural identities constituted in a context of difference. The use of a talking stick in class and the organization of smudges were acts that helped to create the psychological security essential for effective learning at the same time that they helped to develop cultural competence.

Finally, in the context I described earlier in this article, the teaching of critical consciousness is only a natural aspect of teaching a full-fledged sense of cultural competence. Historically marginalized students cannot gain the kind of cultural understanding that will promote academic achievement unless they possess an authentic understanding of the history of this marginalization, oppression, and exploitation. Otherwise, liberal explorations of cultural identity can easily return a student to a sense of shame and self-hatred. Thus, the teaching of a radical interpretation of history is simply congruent with the other criteria of cultural relevance. At a less intense level, it is difficult to enrich a library with holdings on Aboriginal experience without at the same time contributing to critical consciousness. It may be impossible, finally, to organize an academically legitimate course around inner-city educational issues without examining themes that both are culturally meaningful to inner-city inhabitants (e.g., WEC-ED students) and contribute to critical understandings of power and domination. These have been WEC-ED’s achievements.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Since this article was drafted in Spring 1998, WEC-ED has been transferred to the University of Winnipeg and a centralized mode of operations. The extent to which the promise and practices identified in this article will be continued remains undetermined.
- <sup>2</sup> Settler societies are those in which Europeans have settled, initially as land-holders, where their descendants have remained politically and economically dominant over indigenous peoples, and where in terms of class, ethnicity, and "race," a pluralistic society has developed (Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis, 1995).
- <sup>3</sup> There is disagreement within the antiracism movement and the scholastic literature about whether the term "race" should be used in quotation marks only. I support the position that because "race" does not empirically exist and because the assumption that it does exist has historically proven harmful, its nonexistence must be always recognized by placing it in quotation marks.

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