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Running head: NEGOTIATING TWO WORLDS

Negotiating Two Worlds: The Voices of Young Island Acadians

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the cultural identity formation of young Prince Edward Island

Acadians. A group of francophone Acadians was involved in this study in order to explore the

ways in which young people living within this minority context negotiate between the two

distinct linguistic and cultural realities in which they live. The participants, aged between fifteen

and eighteen, live in the Charlottetown area, a place where English is the language of the

majority. They attend the only French first-language school in the city and they speak French at

home. A focus group was completed with a group of five participants. Two subsequent

individual interviews took place with three randomly chosen focus group participants. The

literature review examines certain aspects of Acadian history on PEI through the lens of power

relations theories developed by researchers such as Paulo Freire, Jim Cummins, and Tove

Skutnabb-Kangas, bringing a critical perspective to the social structures that have silenced

Acadians for centuries. The data analysis provides a stark contrast to the dismal experiences of

Acadians in the past, as the participants affirm the pride and the conviction they feel for the

French language and the Acadian culture.

In memory of my grandfather, Alyre Gallant, who inspired me to know more about who I am and where I come from.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

At the centre of this study lie three concepts: voice, power, and transformation. I place this short quotation by Paulo Freire at the beginning of my work because it embodies all three ideas. Having learned a great deal from Freire, I have begun to understand the importance of the relationship between power and voice, and how in acting together over time, they lead to transformations in individuals and communities.

The people of the Acadian community on Prince Edward Island know about the importance of voice. They know of its importance because they have struggled without a collective voice for centuries. As a cultural and linguistic minority in this province, Acadians have been subjected to varying forms of oppression on many different levels. These forms of oppression include cultural invasion and manipulation (Freire, 1972), as well as many overt and subtle attempts at linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). These practices, over a period of a few hundred years, have contributed to the quiet and insidious process that has entwined the Acadian community. This process is called silencing (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Cummins (1989) suggests that to be voiceless is to be powerless. Power is what silencing is all about. In society certain voices are valued while others are discredited; certain voices express their way of knowing, their world view, while others have a world view imposed upon them and accept in silence. In societies worldwide, the voices of minority groups have gone unheard or have been silenced by the majority, and the situation has been no different on Prince Edward Island.

Silence is damaging because those who are being silenced do not always realize it, and those who are doing the silencing consciously or often unconsciously work to keep it that way (Freire, 1972; Wink, 2000). The most pervasive method used to maintain silence is to breed feelings of guilt and inferiority within the silenced group, which in turn manipulates members of this group into perpetuating the cycle of oppression themselves. For many years, Acadians were caught up in this cycle, ashamed of their language and realizing that denying their language and heritage was the only way to make gains in Island society. One example of this is the trend of name 'translating' that occurred, producing English sounding names such as "Perry" from the original French name "Poirier" (Arsenault, 1989).

Only in recent years, by way of certain community leaders who could "speak a true word" and thereby "transform their world" (Freire, 1972), have Acadians begun to experience a resurgence of voice and a resurgence of power in affirming this voice. The formation of organizations such as the Acadian Teachers' Association (1894), the Mutual Assumption Society (1903), la Société Saint-Thomas-D'Aquin (1919), and the advent of the second French-language newspaper produced on PEI (aptly named *La Voix Acadienne* - the Acadian Voice)[1] have all contributed to the strengthening of the collective Acadian voice on Prince Edward Island. An example of this strengthening of voice comes forth during a time when the Acadian community is both bolstered by its successes within the larger community, and anxious over the consistently high rate of assimilation coupled with the decreasing rate of school enrolment. This study shows there is a resonant, strong, vigorous voice coming from the youth of the Acadian community.

Unlike their parents, the youth who participated in this study have not known what it is like to be overtly silenced. They have not known what it is like to be oppressed. They know, however, through an awareness of their history, that their heritage has been mired in silence and

oppression. By involving a group of students in this study I wanted to create a space in which these young Acadians could feel safe in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and stories surrounding the issue of their identity as Acadians. By engaging in a dialogue about their experiences, I believe the participants of this study strengthened their voices. They were transformed to some extent by using their voices to examine the world around them and to name their place in it. They were able to name their world with a powerful voice and in a language that is their own. As Freire has said, "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it" (Freire, 1972, p. 76). I believe these young Acadians will exist, they will be heard, and they will transform their world.

As a researcher, my own voice must also be heard within the context of this study. My thoughts, ideas, and experiences regarding the issue of my Acadian identity are intensely personal for me and have contributed to who I am as a person and to how I lead my life. This is what Kirby and McKenna (1989) call "conceptual baggage." There is no way I could possibly separate this "baggage" from my research; therefore, I will endeavour to examine important aspects of it, in an attempt to keep it in full view.

As one of the many thousand assimilated Acadians on PEI, I was aware of certain parts of my culture and heritage, but never felt as if I could identify with what it meant to be Acadian. One main obstacle held me back: my mother tongue was not French. My parents, however, had the foresight and the conviction to enroll me in the first early French immersion class in our school district, a decision that has impacted greatly on my development as a person. Learning French in school involved me in the process of becoming familiar with important aspects of Acadian culture, such as language and history. Throughout this process I was never aware of the

reasons why I was learning these fundamental aspects of identity in an artificial school setting. It is not enough to say that I was not aware. I did not even know to question.

Years later when I began conceptualizing this study, I slowly became aware of my own silence in relation to the language and the culture my family had lost as a result of assimilation. Until that point, I had reflected very little on my culture, remaining complacent in my ignorance of social structures that have greatly altered and affected it. This study created a space for a dialogue with myself about language and identity, for my own examination of experience, and this has allowed me to engage more fully in my world. It has strengthened my voice. I was brought up in an anglophone community, speaking English as my mother tongue, so I had difficulty realizing and accepting the notion that I too had been silenced as an Acadian. Silencing is so insidious a process that it goes unnoticed. This realization has served as a not-so-subtle reminder of the pervasiveness of silence once it becomes ingrained in a culture.

This study is related to the issue of preserving the French language and culture, which is a constant struggle for anyone in the francophone community. Assimilation, which began as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century, remains a constant threat. The obstacles parents faced in their eighteen-year struggle to establish a French school in Summerside is an example of the difficulties this minority group continues to face, and to overcome. The tenacious, hard-working Acadians who struggle for the advancement of all Acadians on PEI may possibly be bolstered in their efforts by looking at the results of this study: their efforts are not being lost on the youth of their communities. To those Acadians who may be losing a sense of who they are through the loss of their language or the loss of voice, this study may help them understand their loss, dispelling the myth that these things have somehow been their fault.

This research has evolved from my personal experience and describes the experience of a group of young Island Acadians, exploring the ways in which they negotiate their cultural identities as they grow up within the minority context of the French-Acadian community of Prince Edward Island. It also builds knowledge related to Acadian identity and Acadian experience in this province. Acadians have always lived in the margins of PEI society (Arsenault, 1989). To live in the margins is to suffer injustice, inequality and exploitation (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). According to Kirby and McKenna, "People find themselves on the margins not only in terms of the inequality in the distribution of material resources, but also knowledge production is organized so that the views of a small group of people are presented as objective, as 'The Truth'" (p. 33). They also observe that certain groups enjoy a monopoly on knowledge creation because their elevated status gives them easy access to institutions, such as universities, that conduct research. Consequently, it was surprising for me to notice that even though much research has been carried out on the subject of the Acadians in general and on many other francophone communities existing outside of Quebec, to my knowledge very little academic research has ever focused specifically on Acadians from PEI and the entirely unique situations they face as a culture.

Because I am an Acadian I was able to conduct this research "from the margins" so to speak, from a standpoint rooted in my own experience. The knowledge produced by focusing on the world from the margins of Acadian society is at the very least a contribution to the Island community that not only has affected the lives of Acadians but has also been affected by them. It is my hope that it will provide both English-speaking and French-speaking Acadians a space for the examination of their own experiences regarding language, culture, and identity.

Voice, power, and transformation. These words, as Freire would say, are "true" words, and they hold within them the praxis that combines action and reflection. When action and reflection come together, the world is transformed. Transforming the world is not the work of world leaders or world dominators, who often seek to preserve the status quo. It is the work of the oppressed, the minorities, the underprivileged, and those dwelling in the margins of society. "Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both [the oppressor and the oppressed]" (Freire, 1972, p. 28). It is from the knowledge of their experiences, closely examined through dialogue, that the silent can develop the awareness and the power to reclaim their voice and to name their world. Freire calls this process "conscientization," the wakening awareness of one's life-conditions. This awareness leads to action, and action to transformation. This transformation was initiated in me within the space created by this study, and I learned that the participants were already much farther along in this process than I was myself.

Chapter Two: Examining My Identity - Finding My Own Voice

Naming realities is owning them.
- Tove Skutnabb-Kangas.
Linguistic Genocide in Education - or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?

My name is Rachelle Gauthier. My name, and even the spelling and pronunciation of it, are part of my identity. Physically, I share many features with other Acadians, like dark hair and dark eyes, and these characteristics also contribute to my personal identity. My family customs and my religious upbringing are similar to those of other Acadians. All of these elements add to the picture of me as a person and help in the make-up of my identity as an individual. Over the course of my lifetime these things have contributed to who I am, but they have never made me feel as though I belonged to a specific group of people who had their own unique heritage and place on PEI. All of these factors put together somehow could not replace and compensate for the loss of the one thing that would have ensured my sense of belonging to this group. That thing is language.

I am one of the several thousand assimilated Acadians on PEI. The fact that I am one of the assimilated surprises and angers me now, but it has not always done so. Throughout most of my life, the fact that my mother tongue is English seemed to be a very natural thing. In the process of doing this research, I have learned facts about my history, I have examined the experiences of my past, and I have located feelings such as surprise and anger, through the process of "conscientization" (Freire, 1972). I am slowly becoming aware of the conditions and the social structures that my ancestors lived within, and the more my awareness grows the angrier I become. The level of silence that these social structures have cultivated and maintained within the Acadian population, including in those Acadians who no longer speak French, has had far-reaching repercussions. This silencing is why I had to learn about my history from books and why I had to

learn the language of my ancestors in school, instead of through transmission from one generation to the next. It may be the reason why some Acadians, both anglophone and francophone, feel it is more important for their children to learn English than it is for them to learn French, preferring to send their children to English schools or to French immersion classes than to the French-first language schools on PEI. This silencing is the reason why assimilation continues to erode Acadian communities at an alarming rate. As a prominent Island Acadian recently told me, "As long as we continue to remain silent, we live with the threat and the reality of assimilation."

It seems to me that Acadians have been silenced for so long that this silence is no longer perceived; it is not questioned anymore and most people, myself included, do not know enough about their history to question why they lost their language in the first place. Becoming aware of the silence was my first step in regaining my Acadian identity. Surprisingly enough, this first step came only after spending most of my lifetime learning French and being involved in some way with the Acadian community. This research was the catalyst for a closer examination of my cultural identity, and before embarking in this process, I was not aware of the silencing. The following information is an example of what I have learned about my background throughout this study. These facts have helped sharpen my awareness and have prompted me to begin questioning:

- Gauthier families were among those who left their farms to hide in the woods of Prince Edward Island, living as refugees during the Deportation of 1758.

- In the census of 1798, forty years after the Deportation, only one Gauthier family remained on PEI. They were registered in the Rustico area, where my father, Gerard Gauthier, is from.

- In that same census of 1798, twelve Gallant families were registered in the Rustico area. My mother, Geri Gallant, grew up there as well.

- Both the Gauthiers and the Gallants were among the first inhabitants of the colony in 1720.

In looking at my family tree, the French names of Gallant, Gauthier, and Blacquière appear on both sides. These names were accounted for in the census of 1798, and the families lived in the area of North and South Rustico, a place that could be considered one of the Acadian strongholds of the nineteenth century. The first Acadian school on PEI was established there. Years later, the first French private secondary school opened its doors in order to train Acadian teachers. The first Farmer's Bank in Canada was opened by Acadians in South Rustico. Women in the area were among the last to give up wearing the traditional Acadian dress. These facts led me to ask questions that have become very important for me, questions that have helped me break through my silence. If my heritage is so deeply entrenched in a place where Acadians struggled for years to maintain their language and culture, how was I born into an Acadian family that shared very little of this history and did not speak the language of its ancestors? What had happened between then and now in order for such a drastic change to have taken place? My search for answers, while instilling in me a sense of outrage at the injustice suffered by my ancestors, has also prompted me to look as far back into my own experience as memory permits, to discover the fundamental links to my heritage I once thought did not exist.

French was not present in my home or in my community when I was young, and the issue of our Acadian roots was never a topic of discussion as far as I can remember. I grew up in the town of Summerside, a forty-five minute drive from Rustico. Summerside is an anglophone community with a relatively high population of English-speaking Acadians. As I grew up, I began to realize that somehow I was connected to the Acadians, because after all, my name was French, wasn't it? However, my notion of Acadians at the time was of a population who lived west of

Summerside, in the Evangeline Region, and it seemed I had precious little in common with those people. It is strange to say it now but I did not know that one could live in other areas of Prince Edward Island and still be Acadian. Again, I did not question. Thinking back, I can also admit to regarding the people who lived there as somehow different from the rest of us. Why, as a child, did I formulate such an idea? The pervasive attitude towards Acadians, even during my lifetime, has not been one of acceptance. The negative connotation of being 'Acadian' still exists, and I somehow knew this at a very young age.

On Sundays we would visit my grandparents in Rustico and in my mind, even though Rustico was smaller, it was no different from the English community in which I lived. It did not seem like an Acadian community and I never once came in contact with French, whether I was among my relatives on either side of the family or in the community itself. I knew that many people in Rustico had French names, that many were farmers or fishermen, and that the only church around was a Catholic one. I took these things, along with the fact that everyone spoke English, to be quite normal.

The person I credit most with opening my eyes, even if ever so slightly, to the importance of the French language as an integral part of my past and therefore a part of who I am today, is my maternal grandfather. His story and the impact it has had on my life cannot be measured.

When I began school my parents enrolled me in the first French Immersion class in the school district. As a child learning French in an immersion setting, I still had no notion of the culture and the history that was connected with this language. I learned the vocabulary, the grammar, and how to read and write in French, but the cultural context was always very 'English'. Even when we learned about Acadian history or did activities that promoted French culture, I

never had a sense that only two or three generations ago these things that seemed so foreign to me would have been my birthright.

One of my most cherished childhood memories is of my grandfather sitting in his chair in the sun porch of his house, greeting us as we came in the door. "The Summersiders are here!" was his weekly welcome, and my sister and I would give him a peck on the cheek as we went past him into the pantry to forage through the cookie tins my grandmother kept stocked. "Pop" was always in that chair.

When we started school he was very interested in the fact that we were learning French. He would tease us as we came in the door, trying to get us to say a few French words. "Comment ça flippe?" he would ask as we sailed by. Not knowing what he meant, my sister and I would pause long enough to inform him that *that* was not French. We hadn't learned that expression in class, so it couldn't be. We didn't know that it was an Acadian expression that means "How are you?" and we never thought to stop and ask Pop what it meant or where he learned it.

Several years later, after one of our weekly visits, something happened that made me see my grandfather in a new light. He had been growing weak and pale over the past little while and my family was worried about his health. I was unsure of what to think about all that because I couldn't imagine walking in the door without him being in his chair. As a typical twelve-year-old, I chose to ignore it. That day, I remember rushing out of the house and past Pop because my family was waiting for me in the car. I also remember feeling relieved to have to rush by. "Bye, Pop!" I said over my shoulder as I reached the door. Then he said something that made me stop.

"Never forget your French."

At that moment, I knew how proud he was of me and how important French was for him. I also had a sense that this was something he wanted me to understand before he died. I think I

feebly said, "Okay," and burst through the door to the car, tears streaming down my face.

Thinking back, I wish that I had acted differently that day, that I had gone to ask him why I should

never forget my French, instead of running away to hide my tears. I wish now that I had talked to

him about his heritage, my heritage, for this is what I later found out, and it is something so

maddeningly obvious, it is hard to understand why I never knew. My grandfather, being an

Acadian, was also a francophone from birth. Growing up, he spoke it fluently, but by the time I

knew him he could not, or did not, speak it very much at all. None of his children spoke French

either. I believe Pop saw in my sister and me a chance to recapture what had been taken away

during his generation, and he was proud. Had I known and understood, would I have scoffed at his

use of a familiar French expression? Would I have always walked past him instead of sitting

awhile and asking him to tell me stories of when he was young? I hope not.

Why did we never know that French was a reality in our family as recently as my

grandfather's lifetime? Why were stories never told that would have helped us understand our

heritage? For instance, I never knew that my great-great-grandmother (Pop's grandmother) could

not speak a word of English before she died. She also wore nothing but the traditional dress

Acadian women wore at the time, being probably one of the last to do so. Why were these stories

never told, these issues never discussed? When talking to my mother recently, I asked her this.

She summed it up this way: "In both your father's family and in mine, nobody ever asked

questions." Does she know that this wasn't their fault?

Somehow, I think that in most Acadian families who now speak English the process has

been the same. Somewhere within the collective psyche of these families, covered over by many

years of silence perhaps, is there shame in the fact that they no longer speak French? Is there the

need to hide the fact that they were ever really French? Whatever the reason, very rarely do

English-speaking Acadians discuss this dispossession of language. When it is spoken of, it is referred to as a loss, meaning that they are the ones who lost it, it was of their own doing.

I myself used this same word many times to describe what happened in my family. I remember saying, "My family lost its French language many years ago," in a vague attempt to connect somehow with those who still speak French. It was not until I began speaking of this process of "language loss" as "language theft" or "dispossession", putting the onus where I think it belongs, that I have truly begun to understand my world.

So, yes, I am surprised and angry that with my background, I have never fully identified with Acadians. I am astonished that Acadians are inherently blamed for the erosion of the French language, and I am puzzled as to why no one speaks of these things.

What can be done to break through this imposed silence that was solidly in place years before I was born? Still acting upon me, this silence deceives me into accepting the "natural way of things." It is easy to justify the disappearance of the French language by saying that it is just quietly succumbing to the wave of English that engulfs it. "That's just the way it goes," I have been told. "How could the Acadians ever have prospered if they had remained unable to communicate with those around them?" Indeed, it is difficult to disagree with such a logical question. On the surface this question is justifiable, yet it tends to emphasize the generosity offered to Acadians and to downplay the importance of the language Acadians lost. Learning the language of the majority was and is a right Acadians can choose to exercise so that they may fully engage in society. What makes it necessary for them to lose their own language and culture in the process? As an anglophone, I learned French as a second language and use it on a daily basis. Has this hindered or inhibited my use of English? No. An easy explanation for this is that English is everywhere. I am never very far from an English radio station, T.V. channel, newspaper, or native

speaker with whom I can converse. French is obviously a great deal less prevalent because less people on PEI speak it, so opportunities are fewer for French interactions. Consequently, learning and maintaining the English language is almost an effortless endeavour.

That is the easy explanation. I believe there is more to it than that. Would Acadians have been assimilated in such great numbers if the English language and the French language had been equally valued in Prince Edward Island society? Why couldn't Acadians have been able to integrate into commercial, political, and social life in English, while being supported in the maintenance of their mother tongue? In my opinion, this second scenario seems to be closer to the 'natural way' for two groups to come together. English would have remained the language of use in social circles, not because it was better or more advanced, but simply because more people spoke it. The assimilation of Acadians, brought about by conscious and unconscious assimilationist practices, was not the natural way of things. It was an assault on a culture and a people who were different from the rest. This assault has continued until very recently because the silencing had lulled most people, both anglophone and francophone, into a false sense of security in believing anglicization was the right thing to do.

Today the social climate has changed for Acadians and the wave of assimilation brought on by government policies and social practices is slowly being reversed. Government legislation like the French Services Act, public funding, French first-language schools, and private initiatives have all seen to that. Why then, does assimilation continue to be a threat? I believe it is because the perceived inherent worth of English over French still remains very deeply ingrained in the consciousness of people in PEI today, people who had absolutely nothing to do with the discrimination and intolerance of the past.

Generally, the average person today is reasonably tolerant and accepting of differences, yet I continue to hear on a regular basis derogatory comments about the special attention given to Acadians and to the French language. Complaints about unequal funding for schools and special status when applying for jobs are commonly heard coming from people who do not speak French. I believe these types of comments are vestiges from a time when francophones were openly considered a lesser people and attempts were made to eradicate the French language in order to improve the lives of those who spoke it.

Slowly, a shift has been made and value is now placed on preserving and promoting the French language and culture. In comparison with the detrimental actions and attitudes towards French that have been present for the past two-hundred and fifty years, these positive initiatives have only just begun and have not yet scratched the surface of the unconscious belief that English is a better language. This is an idea that has been around for so long and it will take a great deal of time and effort to dispel. I believe these efforts have already made PEI society a more open, accepting place to live, and eventually the unconscious notion of the inferiority of the French language that was instilled in us all long ago will be forgotten.

Before engaging in the close examination of my experiences and opinions regarding my identity, I could not fully identify myself as an Acadian. If asked, "Are you Acadian?", my hesitant, vague response was usually, "Well, my background is French, so yes, I guess." Today, I am proud to say that I am an Acadian. I am aware of my past and of the reasons why I am who I am. I have learned that I am passionate about my heritage and about the two languages, both French and English, that are important parts of that heritage. I no longer feel disconnected from the Acadian community because my mother tongue was English, not French. I feel I have found

my place within that community as a person on the road to reestablishing a cultural link that was

severed only two generations ago.

My views of my Acadian identity were deepened by the reading and the personal reflection

I undertook for this study of how the Acadian youth of today negotiate between two worlds in

order to develop their own identities. Their experiences differ from mine in that most of the

participants have been imbued with an awareness of their history and their language from the time

they were born. The following chapter gives shape to this study, outlining the processes I

undertook before, during, and after my discussions with the participants. Our discussions were

very exciting because listening to these young people express their views and beliefs about their

culture, their language, and about who they are was somewhat of a revelation for me. Their strong

sense of identity showed no signs of ambivalence or uncertainty, and the eloquence with which

they expressed their views in French holds a depth of meaning that speaks volumes for the

growing strength of the Acadian community today.

Chapter Three - Research Methodology

Research is like embarking on a voyage of discovery.

-Sandra Kirby, Kate McKenna
Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins.

The central purpose of this study is to explore the cultural identity development of young

Island Acadians and to provide them a space for reflecting upon and expressing their views about

language, culture, and identity. I have chosen the following research question to form the basis of

my study:

How is cultural identity 'negotiated' by youths growing up in the minority context of the

French/Acadian community of Prince Edward Island?

This question suggests that I want to deepen understanding of the internal processes that

youths engage in when forming cultural identity. A large part of the literature review will focus on

the external, social structures that either promote or inhibit this negotiation, but primarily, I

wanted to find out how the youth of the Acadian community develop within these structures.

With this question driving my research, the methodology had to reflect the need for space

and provide the participants with the time necessary to examine and make meaning from their own

experiences. This chapter highlights the decisions I made in constructing a research design in

which the simplicity of the design itself allowed the voices of the participants to shine through.

<u>Site Selection</u>

I selected *École François-Buote* in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island as the site of my

research for several reasons. First of all, there is an established French community in

Charlottetown. Its cultural base consists of *École François-Buote* and the community centre, the

Carrefour de l'île St.-Jean. Here, the French language and culture are promoted both by the school

staff and the community members, who are continually present in the building. However, the contact this French community has with the dominant English culture is also constant. One only has to step outside the building to encounter the English society within which this minority culture exists. Consequently, students here are faced with two visible cultures and many choices relating to these two cultures. I believe this situation presents a certain amount of conflict within young people attending this school who are struggling to identify with one culture or the other. Because this rich French-Acadian environment is situated in a predominantly anglophone context, it was an appropriate setting in which to carry out my research relating to language and identity.

As well as the criteria I have just mentioned, I chose this site because I am a part of the life there and I wanted to examine the phenomenon of cultural development in people I already had established relationships with. I believed that the strong relationships we have developed over a period of years would allow the participants to enter into a dialogue, feeling safe enough to honestly and openly examine this intensely personal issue. This is a choice I made that involves feelings and presupposes caring. These words, according to a positivist research paradigm, should not exist within the realm of reliable academic research. Positivism is a "discourse in which value judgements are eschewed, and in which theoretical propositions are regarded as empirically verifiable or falsifiable" (Bocock, 1986, p. 55). The emphasis here suggests that knowing alone does not involve feeling and understanding. Just as I cannot separate myself as researcher from my "conceptual baggage" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989), I cannot separate my thoughts from my feelings or avoid value judgements, as Bocock suggests. Simply put, my students are important to me and I wanted to involve them in my research. In so doing, I believe I created a safe space for them to examine their experiences and express their thoughts. I believe my site selection had an impact on

them, and I know it has had a lasting impact on me. In other words, my research acknowledges

that feeling and understanding are integral parts of knowing (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

École François-Buote is one of five schools that exist under the jurisdiction of the only

French school board on Prince Edward Island, now called *la Commission scolaire de langue*

française. The French school board was unofficially established in 1963 as the Évangéline School

Unit. It was officially recognized as a school board in 1972, when the government began

consolidating the many small school boards across the province. At this time the Evangeline

region was recognized as a unique cultural area, and the government acknowledged the role school

played in the preservation of the French language and the Acadian culture (Arsenault, 1989). The

Evangeline School Unit thus became Unit 5, and from that time on the French language has been

preserved as the language used for both teaching and administration. The first school established

within this school board was École Évangéline, situated in Abrams Village, in western PEI. Built

in 1960, it was one of the first regional high schools on the Island.

Smaller French first-language schools also exist within this school board. West-Prince,

Summerside, and Rustico now have students enrolled in classes as part of a new initiative that has

occurred because of a January 2000 Supreme Court Decision. This decision accorded French

speaking minorities on PEI the right to be taught in French in areas where the numbers warranted.

The decision was based on article 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, adopted in

1982. The general objective of this article is to maintain Canada's two official languages as well

as the cultures they represent, and to favour the growth of these languages, wherever possible, in

the provinces where they are not the language of the majority. It is because of this article that a

group of Acadian parents, after struggling with the PEI government for eighteen years, was

accorded the right to have a French first-language school in the Summerside area. This new school plans to open its doors in January 2002.

École François-Buote, which opened in 1980 in the basement of a church, is now the second largest school in this board. In partnership with the community centre since 1991, the two provide a bastion of French language and culture in the Charlottetown area. It is a modern facility with meeting rooms, a daycare, a kindergarten, a cafeteria, an amphitheater, and a social gathering place on one side, and twelve classrooms, a gymnasium, a computer room, and administrative offices on the other side. Between the two is a French language provincial library.

The population of the school varies from year-to-year between 160 and 180 students. Because this school does not serve any specific geographical area, students come from as far away as Crapaud and Wood Islands. The students themselves form a diverse cultural group. Québécois, Franco-Ontarians, Acadians from New Brunswick, the Magdalen Islands, Prince Edward Island and people from different countries such as France, Austria, Lebanon and Cameroon all attend or have attended this school. A small population of students come from families of Scottish or Irish descent as well.

Linguistically, the students form an extremely heterogenous group. Some speak little English, while others have difficulty with French. They come from homes where both parents are francophone and little English is spoken, to homes where neither parent speaks French and no French is spoken. A recent survey completed by the administration of the school revealed that only about one-third of the student population speaks French at home or with friends outside the school. While this statistic is disturbing, it came as no surprise to school staff, who are involved in a constant struggle to encourage students to speak French.

From this student body, seven students in grade eleven and twelve fit the criteria of being

Acadian and of speaking French at home. Six of them became participants in this study.

<u>Population Selection</u>

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. I wanted information-rich

participants (Patton, 1990), young Acadians who experienced the development of cultural identity

in an intense way (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The young people I talked with are high school

students at *École François-Buote*, aged between fifteen and eighteen. I based my choice of age

group on Erikson's research on identity formation, which emphasize the fact that these formative

years are crucial in the development of identity (1969). Erikson suggests that identity is achieved

after a period of reflection and experimentation, and that this period usually occurs during

adolescence (Erikson, 1969). Also, in my experience I have learned that students of this age group

have achieved a level of cognitive maturity that enables them to discuss certain abstract topics,

such as culture and identity, and to reflect more deeply and critically on their experiences.

Throughout our discussions, the participants themselves proved this point with their eloquent and

articulate comments.

The students involved in this study are from families who speak French and who encourage

French culture in the home. I wanted to target students who have a strong base in the French

language and culture so we could explore how they negotiate between their home/school culture

and the dominant culture in which they live. I chose not to include those students who attend

École François-Buote in order to enhance their knowledge of French as their second language,

even though this situation is highly typical of many Acadian families across Prince Edward Island.

Their situation differs from those families who are striving to maintain the French language and

culture. This is an interesting and worthwhile process and could become the focus of a future

study.

Within the population of high school students who fit the criteria for this study, I

considered certain students to be key informants. These students are actively involved in school

life and participate in many cultural activities provided in the context of both school and home.

Because I am a teacher at *École François-Buote* and I knew the potential participants, I believed

they would actively engage in discussions and take this topic seriously. After having explained my

intentions to the principal and corroborating with her regarding my list of potential key

informants, I met the students in a small group to explain the purpose of my study and the reasons

I was inviting them to participate. In this initial meeting, I made it explicitly clear that they were

under no pressure to participate. I explained that, if they initially agreed and then had a change of

heart, they were free to leave the data collection process at any time. I also made clear to them the

time commitment involved, issues of confidentiality and consent, and let them know that this

project is in no way connected to the school or to anyone in it. I then contacted the parents of those

students who were interested and had them sign the letter of consent. Both the parents and the

students signed the consent form. (See Appendix A for Information Letter and Consent Form)

<u>Data Collection Methods</u>

Once I had identified the five potential study participants and the process of informed

consent was complete, I conducted an initial focus group. This focus group was approximately

forty-five minutes in length and it took place in a room at the *Carrefour de l'Île St-Jean*

community centre. Even though I had wanted to physically remove the students from the

school/community centre setting, in the end it proved to be the best place for our discussions. The

focus group and most of the interviews took place in a room that had an enormous Acadian flag

painted on the wall, and it seemed to create a fitting atmosphere for our dialogue. An interview

guide was used during both the focus group and the interviews. (See Appendix B for Interview

Guides).

The goal of the focus group was to stimulate the students' thinking around the issue of

Acadian identity and to get them talking about it, even if only in a superficial way. I regarded this

step in the data collection process as the 'warm-up'. I assumed that up until that point, the students

may not have had the opportunity to think about this issue, or they may never before have

articulated their thoughts in a structured setting. I included this focus group in my research design

in order to give the participants time to delve into this weighty issue so that they could explore it

in a way that was perhaps new to them. After the focus group ended, I then randomly chose three

participants from this group to continue with the research process, each undergoing two further in-

depth interviews. The participants who did not continue on with the interviews said they

appreciated their focus group time, but were not concerned that their experience ended there.

The issue of language was an important one when considering the focus group and the

interviews. I let the participants decide which language they wanted to use, but made it clear that

they could use both French and English in their responses. For the most part, the focus group and

interviews were conducted in French. One interview was conducted in English.

I conducted phenomenological interviews with the three participants who continued with

the process after the focus group. Patton (1990) gives a description of this method:

"Phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as

to make sense of the world, and is so doing, develop a world view." During the two in-depth

interviews, I initially focused on the past experiences of the participants, and then on their present

experiences with Acadian identity. The basic assumption of phenomenology is that there exists

"essences" to shared experience (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). By talking to these young people and in considering my own experiences, I have attempted, through analysis, to identify these "essences", or as I prefer to term them, themes and patterns. In the process of phenomenological inquiry, I have also undertaken an *Epochè* phase in which I have tried to "eliminate, or at least gain clarity about, preconceptions" (Patton, 1999, p. 406). Chapter Two of this report is the close examination of my "conceptual baggage" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). By dedicating a chapter to this examination, I have attempted to bring it into focus within the context of the study.

Data Management

I used an audio recorder during the focus group and the interviews. I did not take notes during the sessions because I felt that note-taking would have hindered the flow of the discussion. I then transcribed the tapes of these sessions. The focus group and interviews were conducted in French and my transcribed data is also in French. After having chosen the excerpts I wanted to include in this report, I translated the transcribed text from French to English. I am fluently bilingual myself, and am confident that I was able to clearly understand the meaning my participants tried to convey.

The study participants each received copies of the transcripts and the analysis of the data. The feedback received from the participants regarding their involvement in the study and their opinions of the data analysis was very positive. All the participants felt that this process had been a worthwhile experience.

Data Analysis

The phases of data collection and data analysis took place one after the other. I transcribed verbatim the approximately one-hundred and ninety minutes of taped discussion derived from the focus group and five interviews, and I began generating themes and categories from these initial

transcriptions. I did not predetermine any themes or categories of meaning before the data

collection process.

The first time I reviewed the transcribed data, I recorded the sub-categories that emerged

using an open coding system based on the actual language of the participants (Strauss & Corbin,

1990). I then listed the sub-categories, attempting to identify some of the general categories that

grew from the sub-categories. Once a tentative list of these general categories was compiled,

second and third readings took place to verify and refine the categories that had first become

apparent. After verifying these categories and changing them a few times, I was then able to divide

all the categories into two major themes called "Ingredients of a Culture" and "Negotiating Two

Worlds."

<p align="center">Limitations of Study</p>

The limitations of this study come from the choices I made when developing my research

proposal. In the course of this development, several issues had to be considered in order to uphold

the canons of quality research and to ensure that the research remained consistent with my own

style as a researcher.

First of all, certain questions pertaining to consent and confidentiality arose as I was

developing my methodology. The issue of free consent had to be carefully considered because I

am currently teaching at *École François-Buote* and have taught there for six years. I believe the

procedures I undertook counterbalanced any pressure students may have felt. The students know

me and know that I am fair and reasonable. I am confident that no undue stress or pressure was

experienced regarding consent.

Confidentiality needed to be considered carefully. Because I had initially planned on

completing only in-depth interviews, it would have been relatively easy to identify who I was

talking to and what each person said. The fact that I could not guarantee confidentiality to my participants could have influenced their responses in some way, and I did not want to run that risk. To address this obstacle I decided to conduct a preliminary focus group with the participants. In this way, students' comments are not identifiable to them, because in the analysis I have not disclosed which statements derive from the in-depth interviews and which ones come from the focus group. This allowed me to maintain a high level of confidentiality and reassured the respondents that their comments could not be traced to them. I do feel it is important to mention that, even though the issue of confidentiality was discussed, the participants were not concerned that they may be identified as the research participants. They openly stated that they were involved in the study, in my presence and in the presence of others.

The choice of setting for this study also involved a trade-off. As the setting for this study, I chose the French-Acadian community in Charlottetown as opposed to the community established in the Evangeline Region of PEI. These two centres for the French-Acadian community on PEI are unique and very distinct. I chose to conduct my study with students living in the Charlottetown area because of the ongoing and pervasive contact this small, heterogenous cultural minority has with the dominant anglophone culture. It is because of this vulnerability that I believe the Charlottetown area to be the best place for this study. The Evangeline area has a geographical distinction, a pocket where French is spoken in the shops and in the homes, and even though the English language is still very pervasive, there does exist a certain continuity between school, home, and community in regards to the French language and culture.

Trustworthiness

I considered the issue of trustworthiness when developing my methodology and built in several components that helped enhance this aspect of my research.

First of all, I chose a variety of data collection techniques instead of depending solely on in-depth interviews. This helped in the process of triangulation of data sources. I not only conducted two interviews with each participant, but included the focus group as well. In this way, I was be able to validate the information given in the interviews. Patton (1990, p. 467) states: "Consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources and reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings." By looking at these various sources of data, I examined themes and patterns that emerged, which eventually lead to a deeper understanding of how the participants viewed their Acadian identities.

This second part entitled <u>Background</u> establishes the literature review that is the framework for this study. It contains the next three chapters of this report. Chapter Four, called French Education, examines the development of French schools on PEI and outlines the obstacles Acadian educators faced along the way. Chapter Five, Relations of Power, juxtaposes other aspects of Acadian history with power relations theories that have been developed by researchers over the course of the twentieth century. Chapter Six, entitled Positive Negotiations of Power, focusses on the present Acadian experience, again examining theories that support the subtle yet pervasive positive changes that have taken place within the Acadian and the Island community during recent years. This final section exists as a sharp contrast to the bleak situations of the past and serves as an introduction to the optimistic and enthusiastic voices of the Acadian youth of today.

<div align="center">Chapter Four: French Education on PEI</div>

The transmission of knowledge within contemporary education systems focusses on the reproduction of social and linguistic values that favour the dominant group.

- Willis, Bourdieu and Passeron
  *Compétitions idéologiques et les droits
  scolaires francophones en milieu minoritaire
  au Canada.*

The participants of this study are all Acadian, therefore they share a history. This history, which is my own as well, forms the backdrop for this study. It is important to understand the climate in which Acadians lived for many years in order to provide context to the participants' comments and to assist in their subsequent analysis. I believe knowing at least part of the heritage these youth share can provide us with a better picture of who they are and how they see themselves. Language, customs, and history are powerful symbols of ethnicity, and they in turn contribute to both group and individual identity formation (Fishman, 1977). The chapter on French

education and the chapter on power relations address different aspects of Acadian history. I hope

these chapters will provide further insights into the challenges Acadians face in maintaining their

voices and the very difficult conditions through which they have persevered.

The atmosphere of inferiority and the level of discrimination that were forced on Acadians

have sought to silence them ever since their return to the Island after the Deportation of 1758. For

centuries, this linguistic and cultural minority has been oppressed by a society that essentially

stripped them of their language rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). They have existed along with the

dominant anglopohone society in what Cummins refers to as a coercive relation of power, or "the

exercise of power by a dominant group to the detriment of a subordinated group" (1996, p. 14). In

this process, the dominant group defines the subordinated group as being inferior, thus promoting

itself to a superior position. Once this mentality is established, it is relatively easy to maintain

supremacy within a society where the resources and social status heavily favour one group and

disadvantage the other. In effect, it becomes a vicious cycle - the division of resources favours the

dominant group, which uses those resources to maintain the unequal division of resources. In

considering the development of French language education over the past two-hundred and fifty

years, it is clear that the Acadian community on Prince Edward Island was very much entrenched

in this cycle.

Georges Arsenault, a renowned Acadian historian, has documented the path that French

language education has taken on PEI since the early days of colonization. The information

regarding the development of the French school system on PEI and the history of Island Acadians

in general comes from his work, *The Island Acadians, 1720 - 1980*. This book has been a crucial,

indispensable resource in this study.

Since before Confederation, Island Acadians, along with most other francophone communities living outside of Quebec, have been subjected to systematic institutional discrimination because of their language and their culture. Assimilation, the "enforced subtractive 'learning' of another (dominant) culture by a (dominated) group" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 124) was high on government agendas from the time *Île St-Jean* became St John's Island under British rule, after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763. From this point on, the Acadians' right to exist and reproduce themselves as a separate group (Alfredsson 1989, 1990, 1991; Thornberry 1987, 1991; de Varennes 1996) was at first challenged, then stripped away. It became an imposed duty, enforced by law, for the Acadian population to learn English, even though they resisted this eventuality for a long time. Very early on, Island Acadians recognized the importance of schooling as a tool to safeguard against the wave of assimilation that began to invade their communities in the last half of the nineteenth century.

The first Acadian school was opened in 1815 in Rustico, by Father Jean-Louis Beaubien. The teacher at the school, François Buote, considered to be the first Acadian teacher on PEI, made teaching his life's work, later opening schools in Miscouche and Tignish. As more and more schools opened on PEI and the provincial government began funding these schools (1825), Island Acadians experienced discrimination through funding policies implemented by the government and carried out by English-speaking school inspectors (Arsenault, 1989). Acadian schools were considered inferior to other schools, as the language of instruction was French. Acadian teachers were considered weaker than their English-speaking counterparts, were paid less, and were not required to obtain a teaching license. No institution existed to train teachers in French. Acadian schools were only promoted to the status of 'first class' if the teacher was qualified to teach English and a sufficient number of students were studying in English (Arsenault, 1989). Despite

these difficulties, the Acadian population remained adamant that the language of instruction in

their schools be French. They were often criticized for this by school inspectors and accused of

harboring prejudices against the English-speaking community because of their self-imposed

isolation (Arsenault, 1989).

In 1847 an amendment to the School Act of 1834 put stricter controls on the qualifications

of Acadian teachers. At this point, an Acadian teacher could obtain a teaching license from the

parish priest, who had to attest to the fact that he or she could sufficiently teach both in French and

in English. Because of this, salaries for Acadian teachers were increased, but were still generally

half of what the English-speaking teachers received (Arsenault, 1989).

Until this point, the School Act on PEI did not stipulate the language to be used in schools.

All that changed in 1854. An amendment to the Act stated that the reading, writing and arithmetic

classes in all schools were to be given in English. It was the first in a long line of amendments that

were to cripple French language education on PEI. On a national level, post-confederation

provincial governments had been given 'carte-blanche' in matters of education, and many laws

hindering French education cropped up in other provinces in the years that followed.[2]

Governments all across Canada, anxious to establish their power and to unite under one common

culture and language, quickly established assimilationist practices and adopted laws that dictated

the language of instruction in schools (Martel, 1993). New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba,

Alberta, and Saskatchewan all introduced laws that restricted or prohibited the use of French in

schools funded by government. While Prince Edward Island law did not go so far as to prohibit the

use of French, it did make the absence of English in Acadian schools a punishable offence which

would result in the reduction of a teacher's salary.

Amidst these ever increasing difficulties a new debate reared its head in the late 1850's. Because many of the school districts contained families of differing religions, and these families insisted on separate schools in which their own values and beliefs could be taught, the question of the Church's presence in state-run schools was the subject of fierce public scrutiny. Acadian schools were targeted by certain Protestant leaders for the high level of involvement the Catholic clergy occupied in almost every aspect of these schools, from teacher certification to the choice of texts. Questions were even raised as to the why the government was funding French education in the first place:

> We reply that the French inhabitants of the Island have no right to expect to be educated in the French language - they have no claims upon the Government - they are the descendants of prisoners of war who secreted themselves in the woods of the Island, and of the neighbouring Provinces.... We, on the grounds of national policy, object to the encouragement of French schools... (in Arsenault, 1989, p. 116).

Sensitive to these criticisms, the government amended the School Act once again, this time obliging Acadian teachers to take the Board of Education training and exam, both of which were delivered in English, in order to be licensed. If they refused, their salaries were to be reduced.

In 1863, Acadian schools were dealt another crippling blow. In that year, the Legislative Assembly, having no elected Acadian member, abolished the category of Acadian schoolteacher, effectively erasing from existence any unique status Acadian schools had ever enjoyed. Now, a teacher in an Acadian school could be of any denomination, did not have to show that he or she was capable of teaching French, and had to attend the Normal School in Charlottetown (established in 1856) where all the training and examinations were done in English. Acadian

schools were now on 'equal' footing with all other schools on the Island, which had many

devastating short-term and long-term affects on the transmission of the French language.

Immediately following these changes, many Acadian schools had to close down because

the law did not allow for two schools to exist within the same school district. Therefore, if a

recognized English school was already in place within the same district as an Acadian school, the

Acadian school was not recognized by the province. Secondly, even in areas where the Acadian

schools remained open, there was a shortage of qualified teachers who could teach in French. In

order to become certified, Acadians first had to undergo training in English at the Normal School,

a task that discouraged many from becoming teachers. To fill the need for teachers, Acadian

schools were forced to hire either unlicensed francophone teachers with little training, or licensed

teachers who could not speak French. Eventually, this policy contributed greatly to the

anglicization of the Acadian schools (Arsenault, 1989). It is easy to glean from the following

comment made by a school inspector in 1863, that this development and the subsequent

assimilation that occurred was considered by some a positive step for Island Acadians:

> The abolition of the Government allowance to Acadian teachers, thus putting the French
>
> population on precisely the same footing as their fellow subjects, was, I think, a judicious
>
> enactment, and it will tend most strongly to the general introduction of the English
>
> language in districts throughout which it has hitherto been of rare occurrence. I believe,
>
> indeed, that the most intelligent among the French are fully sensible of the disadvantage
>
> under which many of them have laboured, from their ignorance of the language in which
>
> the business of the country is conducted (in Arsenault, 1989, p. 117).

Around this time, with the imminent demise of Acadian schools very apparent to a good

many in the Acadian population, Father George-Antoine Belcourt decided to set up private

institutions that would counteract what he saw as the government's specific agenda to anglicize

the Acadian community (Arsenault, 1989, p. 119). In 1862 Father Belcourt opened a secondary

school in Rustico that was to train bilingual teachers. The school existed for three years on private

funds and trained several Acadian teachers who then taught in Acadian districts.

The year 1877 brought about another obstacle to French education on PEI. At this time,

after years of public debate, the government finally passed a law making all schools non-

confessional. This meant that texts with any religious material had to be removed from schools.

This posed a serious problem for the Acadian schools, because, as their French texts had been

chosen by the clergy, there was religious content in all of their books, and the texts were

subsequently removed. After a concerted effort by Bishop Peter MacIntyre to have the books

returned, the province conceded to having bilingual readers placed in Acadian schools. The

success of this venture was negligible because the approved readers did not actually assist in the

learning of French. They did, however, make it easier to learn English.

At this point in history, the situation of French education and the plight of Acadian

communities struggling to maintain their language and culture seemed bleak. However, Arsenault

speaks of a "renaissance" of the Acadian voice that began in the 1890's, which led to the creation

of many organizations that are still in existence today, organizations that have managed to

promote the French language and the Acadian culture through the adversity that continued on into

the twentieth century.

In 1892 the French newspaper l'Impartial was founded in Tignish by Gilbert Buote. For

twenty years, it was a resounding voice to all Acadians, encouraging higher education, promoting

culture and providing an arena for much public debate on issues surrounding Acadians. In 1892,

the first francophone school inspector was appointed, thus improving relations between the French

schools and the government. 1893 brought about the creation of the Acadian Teachers'

Association, whose mandate was to "foster the teaching of French in public schools on the Island"

(Arsenault, 1989, p. 167). Until 1971 this association provided a meeting place for Acadian

teachers to discuss issues surrounding French education and the promotion of the Acadian culture.

In 1919 the Société Saint-Thomas-D'Aquin was founded, and since that time, this organization has

strived to achieve its main goal: to see French and Acadian life flourish on Prince Edward Island

(Arsenault, 1989, p. 173).

Despite these initiatives, the school system itself continued to hinder the development of

French language education in public schools across PEI. Since 1854 the government-imposed

curriculum had been delivered in English. If French was to be taught at all, it had to be done after

the required curriculum was covered. French as a first language became a supplementary (not a

compulsory) subject. The Department of Education made no effort to provide Acadian teachers

with appropriate training in their own language. As Arsenault (1989, p. 224) states: "[The

Department of Education] left the entire matter in the hands of the Acadians, without giving them

the necessary tools and resources to carry out the task."

In 1899 there were forty-three Acadian schools with 2, 226 students. At this time,

approximately 200 Acadian children attending school lived in areas where they did not have

access to French education. Thirty years later, the number of Acadian children attending English

schools was 1, 100. The situation was so drastic that J.-Wilfred Arsenault, a school inspector at the

time, wrote in 1936:

> I have concluded that, unless our present system of teaching French and preparing teachers
>
> for our Acadian Schools is immediately revolutionized, the French Acadian Schools of our
>
> Island will soon be French in name only (in Arsenault, 1989, p.176).

Even after this dire warning, the practices of the government did not change a great deal over the course of the twentieth century. If it were not for the hard work and ingenuity of Acadian educators throughout this century, French language education might possibly have disappeared completely from public schools on the Island.

Acadian teachers attended private summer schools given by French-Canadians from Quebec in order to improve the quality of their French and to upgrade their training in their own language. They put together French programmes that were taught without the government's seal of approval. They held yearly conferences that brought to the forefront issues of French language education and the challenges they faced. In order to attract more pupils to higher education they created one of the first regional high schools on the Island, École Évangéline. Nevertheless, measures taken by the government had lasting, detrimental effects on their efforts. The reorganization of the school system in 1972 provoked one of the most influential changes in French language education on PEI.

While the schools in the area of Mont-Carmel, Abrams Village, and Wellington were protected within the newly created Unit Five, the other Acadian schools in various areas in PEI became part of districts where French was not protected. As the small schools closed, the Acadian students were forced to attend the larger regional schools where very little French, and only French as a second language, was taught. After a few years, what had once been a network of over sixty Acadian schools had finally been eroded down to one.

The importance of schooling in the maintenance of the French language and the Acadian culture on PEI has always been emphasized by those who could see that erosion taking place. In fact, in any minority setting, the reality is the same. Education has a fundamental impact on the survival and growth of a language and a culture (Cummins, 1996; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Landry

& Allard, 1991; Duquette, 1993). Depending upon their own resources to advance, the people

who worked hard to improve the lives of Acadians did so without government aid, in spite of

discriminatory practices and overt attempts to assimilate. In the face of these challenges, the

Acadian leaders have maintained a voice and a legacy that is being passed on to today's youth.

Chapter Five: Relations of Power

In hegemonic discourse, inequality and exclusion are legitimated so that both those who do the excluding and those who are excluded feel that exclusion is based on rational arguments and that the actions benefit those who are excluded.
-Tove Skutnabb-Kangas
Linguistic Genocide in Education - or
Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?

Hegemony, a word that comes from Italian social theorist Gramsci (1971), refers to the unconscious domination of one group over another. The domination is taken for granted as being the way the society operates. The division of resources and power in society typically favours an elite group. Hegemonic practices then work to maintain this inequity and to further oppress the disadvantaged group. The history of the Acadians on Prince Edward Island is fraught with examples of this type of domination. By examining some of these examples through the lens of power relations theories, trends begin to emerge, informing us in a more critical way of the struggles Island Acadians have had to endure.

Power Relations Theories

The term 'power relations' refers to the negotiation of power engaged in by two distinct groups in a society. These distinctions are established by race, gender, religion, culture, or language. The views regarding this negotiation of power are many. Each is unique, as theorists use different vocabularies in describing this relationship, but they are also similar in many ways.

What exactly is meant by the word 'power'? Skutnabb-Kangas defines three types of power, basing her ideas largely on the writing of Johan Galtung (1980). The first is called innate power, and it refers to the characteristics with which we are born and which are the product of good breeding. These include attributes such as intelligence, charisma, and good looks. The second type of power is called resource power, and there are two categories of resource power. The first, material resources, are things like money, possessions, and books. The second category

is non-material resources, and these include language, culture, education, knowledge, and time. The third type of power is <u>structural power</u>. Structural power refers to a person's position in society and the ability this person has to effect change on others. An example of structural power would be achieving some type of political office.

According to Galtung, these types of power do not exist in and of themselves. They are negotiated between people and between groups. He also states that resource power and structural power are mutually convertible, which means if you have one you can readily obtain the other. It is described as a cycle of sorts. A child starts out life with substantial non-material resource power by speaking the dominant language and having access to education. This can easily be converted into material resource power as education brings about better jobs. This in turn leads to structural power and the ability to climb the social ladder.

Bourdieu (1992) creates similar divisions in relation to types of power but he uses a different language in describing them. He speaks of various forms of 'capital': economic capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. This symbolic capital is the result of the validation of non-material resources. For example, if your language is validated, you are regarded more highly than if your language is invalidated. These forms of capital engage within the same cycle as Galtung's 'resources'.

Freire (1972) uses a different vocabulary when speaking of group power relations. He describes the process of "cultural invasion" using words such as "conquest," "invader" and "invaded." He frequently expresses just what the connotation of these words suggests, that even in the absence of physical force, the act of domination is one of extreme violence. Freire adds a crucial point to this discussion on power relations in regards to the power the dominant group has in forcing its will on the subordinated group:

Cultural invasion further signifies that the ultimate seat of decision regarding the action of

those who are invaded lies not with them but with the invaders. And when the power of

decision is located outside rather than within the one who should decide, the latter has only

the illusion of deciding" (Freire, 1972, p. 159).

This illusion makes it extremely difficult for a dominated group to realize what is taking

place, especially when the dominant group is presenting itself as being kind and helpful. This is

what Gayatri Spivak refers to as benevolence: "The forces against which one is speaking are at

their worst when they are most benevolent" (Spivak, 1990, p. 160). Because it is hard to detect, the

cycle is allowed to continue.

Cummins (1996), also uses unique terminology when talking about power. His framework

of coercive relations of power operate on a zero-sum logic. In other words, the more power a

dominant group has, the less power is afforded to the subordinated group. Because of this,

dominant groups are reluctant to give up any of the power they have achieved, so they consciously

or unconsciously set up "subtractive" learning conditions. In these conditions, members of the

dominated group learn a new language and new customs in such a way that they "unlearn" the

language and customs that belong to them. What they have already learned through the

transmission of culture from one generation to another is thus "subtracted," and they are often left

with the inability to identify with either the dominant or the dominated group. As a result, what

Cummins (1996) calls "ambivalent identity" develops.

Cummins has also elaborated a framework of collaborative power relations. This

framework involves the empowerment of individuals in a setting that leads to the additive learning

of the dominant language and culture. In this instance, members of a minority group learn a new

language and become familiar with the surrounding culture while remaining validated in the

maintenance of their own non-material resources. In the Chapter Six, I will discuss this framework in greater detail.

How do these cycles of power, the coercive and subtractive processes, play out when we add Skutnabb-Kangas' A-team B-team theory? She sees innate power and non-material resource power as social constructions, ideas 'made up' by people regarding the worth of one thing and the worthlessness of another. For example, the notion that the colour black represents evil and secrecy, whereas the colour white represents purity and peace is a socially constructed one. The A-team B-team theory acknowledges these constructions and centres on the question, "Who is doing the constructing?"

This is how Skutnabb-Kangas explains her A-team B-team theory. The dominant group (or A team), is able, because of its position in society, to elevate the non-material resources it has, making these resources 'the norm', making them mainstream and validating these resources as the ones to have if a person is to take part and advance in society. This is called glorification. Through this process, the non-material resources of the A-team become readily convertible to both material and structural types of power. In this process, they also receive Bourdieu's positive "symbolic capital."

At the same time, while glorifying its own resources, the A team invalidates those non-material resources that the B team possesses, effectively turning them into deficiencies or handicaps and not resources at all. This is called stigmatization. Through this process, the B team's resources, such as language and culture, are desecrated to the point where they become invisible, rendered useless in terms of convertible power. No "symbolic capital" is gained.

It is at this point that the A-team usually steps in to inform the B-team that it must discard the appendages, such as a different language or different customs, that are dragging it down and

inhibiting it from integrating and assimilating into the society at large. The A-team offers

assistance with this process by imposing rules, regulations, and rewards on the B team in order for

it to be more readily integrated. This is called rationalization and it contributes greatly to

maintaining these practices.

The Acadian Example

These ideas of A-team and B-team relations bring into focus examples from the past

regarding the experiences of domination endured by Acadians. The first two levels of hegemonic

practice that exist when a group is being controlled by ideas are established in order to maintain

unequal division of all three types of power, innate, material, and structural. They are

glorification and stigmatization.

Glorification and Stigmatization

What exactly were the Acadians' non-material resources, and how were these non-material

resources stigmatized? The French language, the Catholic religion, their customs, their habits, and

even their values differed from the British, Irish and Scottish pioneers who were their neighbours.

These resources also differed from those of the ruling class politicians because as Catholics,

Acadians, along with the Irish, were not allowed to vote until 1830. The French language and the

Acadian culture have been consistently invalidated at all points in their history on this island, from

the early days of colonization to instances that still exist today.

As a distinct population with its own language, customs, and religion, Acadians lived in a

self-imposed isolation for approximately one hundred years after the Deportation. They clung to

their traditions, continuing to farm and to dress in traditional ways. Even in the small schools that

were cropping up in Acadian communities, French remained the language of instruction for many

years. Because of this attempt on the part of the Acadians to preserve what was theirs and to

remain autonomous in matters of language and culture, they were subjected to much ridicule

(Arsenault, 1982, 1989). Despite that fact it could be said that Acadians enjoyed some non-

material resource power at this point because they existed within their own realms and to them,

their language and culture held great value. However, as Acadians were reluctant to come in

contact with the society at large, they were considered backward, old-fashioned, and of inferior

intelligence. Here is where the roots of stigmatization begin.

Acadians had a custom of observing religious holidays, which drew much criticism from

their staunch Protestant neighbours. Because they enjoyed leisure activities such as dancing,

singing and playing music, they were considered careless and lazy. This comment was written by

S.S. Hill in the 1830's: "They are in fact a careless and light-hearted people, with the improvidence

of Indians, ever preferring the passing enjoyment of the hour, to the solid pursuits of industry" (in

Arsenault, 1989, p. 95).

As a group, due to their isolation from the society in which they were immersed, Acadians

held low economic status and were scoffed at by their neighbours. They were devoid of educated

leaders in the larger community who could defend their rights and were, like many others, the

victims of severe exploitation at the hands of absentee landowners.

In the middle of the 1800's, Acadians increasingly began to emerge into the social realm.

How were they to do this and keep their language and culture intact? Acadians were divided on

this point. While recognizing the advantages of integrating into the society at large, most were

adamant about the preservation of their language and culture. Others felt, however, that in order to

fully take part in Prince Edward Island society, they must relinquish some of their traditions and

'archaic' notions. Because of this Acadians now not only had to deal with the negative attitudes

they encountered from those non-Acadians who diminished them, but also from certain Acadian leaders who rejected their language and heritage in order to get ahead.

An example of this is the debate that surrounded the traditional dress worn by Acadian women, which singled them out from other women of the era. Here is an excerpt from a letter written by an Acadian that appeared on the front page of *The Summerside Progress* in 1868. In this scathing address, the results of years of stigmatization are apparent.

Acadians! You deserve praise for your virtues; but to remain in your present condition, wedded to traditions of the past, holding in reverence antiquated notions of exclusiveness, and hugging to your breast old manners and customs, will not conduce to your material prosperity, respectibility [sic] or happiness!

If you do not avail yourselves of the advantages of education, - if you do not assimiliate [sic] your manners and customs to those prevailing around you, - and if your women do not conform in some near degree to the fashions in dress, and become more *susceptible du poli* [sic], you will continue a separate and, as a matter of necessity, an insignificant people.

Think of it, Acadians, and wake up! (in Arsenault, 1989, p. 104).

In other words, this person is telling his fellow Acadians that, as an Acadian, your non-material resources are not valuable. Not only are they not valuable, they are hindrances that will hold you back, preventing you from any financial gain and social status, or as this person puts it, "respectibility [sic] or happiness."

After a period of intense pressure encouraging the rejection of their traditional dress, most Acadian women complied, even though it was a strong symbol of their identity. This fact was

neglected, however, as stigmatization of the traditional dress took hold. This letter appeared in

1880 in *Le Moniteur Acadien*, again written by an Acadian:

> A few years ago our women used to wear the old-fashioned dress our mothers brought
>
> from Acadia. They were very fond of it. It is hard to imagine why for it is neither pretty nor
>
> practical. Because of it we were mocked and ridiculed by other nationalities. To avoid
>
> disgrace, we persuaded our women to adopt the present-day fashion and today the majority
>
> of them are dressed like the women of other peoples. They are not any worse off for it and
>
> Acadian men are much better off (in Arsenault, 1989, p. 106).

Not only did this process of stigmatization touch Acadian dress, but it pervaded all other

symbols of Acadian identity, including Acadian names, language, and values.

Around this time, those of Acadian heritage who wanted to advance in society began

changing their names in order for them to sound more English. Stanislas F. Poirier, the first

Acadian elected to the Legislative Assembly, preferred to go by the name 'Perry'. He defends his

decision to 'translate' his name in a speech given at the National Acadian Convention held in

Memramcook in 1881:

> Well, Sirs, you know that there was a time when all that was French in our provinces was
>
> the target, the object of hatred and ill-will from which it was not easy to escape. Maybe it
>
> was necessary and useful to anglicize ourselves to a small extent in order to defend
>
> ourselves and shun the attacks to which we were exposed (in Arsenault, 1982, p. 14).

Just as an Acadian name was seen to be a hindrance to advancement in society, so too was

the French language. The stigmatization of this language and the perpetuation of inferiority that

went along with it has had devastating affects on the Acadian community and some people strive

even today to overcome feelings of inferiority that are vestiges from this time.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 195) has said that, "A prerequisite for success in persuading individuals to replace their mother tongue by another language is the invalidation of their own languages and cultures." The campaign to stigmatize the French language and the Acadians' use of it has contributed a great deal to the so-called "voluntary anglicization" (Arsenault, 1982, p. 15) that has taken place. It has been said that many Acadians freely chose, for themselves and for their children, to abandon the French language in order to escape the victimization that they were enduring. I suggest, by examining this situation through the lens of power relation theory, that the Acadians did not choose at all. Let me explain.

In this region French has always held a lower status than English. It has been associated with poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, and low socio-economic status. English, on the other hand, has been glorified as the language of commerce, of the educated, of big business, and of politics. Not only have Acadians had to deal with the stigmatization of the French language in general, but they have also had to deal with deeper levels of stigmatization in regards to the way they speak the language. Their spoken French has been deemed a 'dialect', or "franglais", a vernacular that is unrefined, uncivilized, and uneducated. These words imply that "Acadian French" was somehow less than a language and certainly not to be used if one wanted to avoid being the object of ridicule. Once again, the non-material resource, the language of the Acadians, has been constructed into an obstacle that must be overcome in order to achieve validation and equality.

The non-material resources that Acadians held were stigmatized in such a way that to be connected with anything French was to be despised. Being an Acadian was synonymous with being of the lowest class of people (Arsenault, 1982). Because of this low social status, the Acadians had very little structural power. In effect, Acadians had no power of decision over what their lives would be. They had no power of decision, therefore they were not the ones who made

the choice in the process of voluntary anglicization. This term puts the onus on the victim,

blaming him or her for the fact that he or she chose to stop speaking French. As Freire puts it,

however, members of the dominated group have only the illusion of chosing for themselves. In

actuality, it is the dominant group that has made, albeit unconsciously, the choice for them. This

illusion is part of the third level of hegemonic practices, rationalization.

Rationalization: "Colonization of the Consciousness"

Once the two first levels of hegemonic practice are in place, the third level, called

rationalization, is established in order for the first two levels to be maintained. Both parties in this

unequal relation of power contribute to rationalizing the actions of the dominant group so that

these practices and attitudes then become accepted and internalized by the subordinate group. This

is what Fanon (1952, 1963, 1965) refers to as the "colonization of the consciousness." When the

people in the dominated group begin believing what the dominant group is telling them, their

actions are no longer the only thing controlled; their thoughts are now also being controlled. Other

means besides rationalization are used in order to maintain the unequal division of power.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) categorizes them as sticks (physical force), shame (psychological force),

carrots (bargaining) and ideas (ideological persuasion). Glorification, stigmatization and

rationalization fit into the last and most subtly pervasive of these categories, that of ideas.

School inspectors, community leaders, and even some Acadians themselves, believed that

renouncing certain parts of who they were was the only way they could make personal gains in

society. Therefore, any attempt to 'help' Acadians in this respect was looked upon as benevolent.

More often than not, however, decisions regarding this matter of anglicization were made by those

who were not Acadian, namely government leaders, clergy, and school inspectors. As I have

outlined when discussing educational practices and societal structures, attempts were made to

stamp out the transmission of French, assimilating Acadians into the larger society. This began a

process of language disappearance that has been rationalized and accepted as the responsibility of

Acadians themselves. The theory on language disappearance or dispossession is divided into two

camps, based on two very distinct world views. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) outlines them both, and

depending on how one views the world, one may say that what happened to the French language

on PEI was the result of the natural process of "language death", or that the Acadians on PEI were

victims of "linguistic genocide."

Language Death vs Linguistic Genocide

These terms are both emotionally charged metaphors that attempt to explain why some

languages cease to be spoken. The distinction between these two paradigms begins in the role each

paradigm affords to outside agents and to the language group itself. In "language death," the

language group engages in the seemingly natural disappearance of the minority language, choosing

to stop any use of it on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis (Edwards, 1985). In other words,

speaking French costs more and the benefits are much less in return, therefore, the relatively easy

switch to English is made. Other researchers, such as Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977, p. 307),

also insinuate that the language group is at fault because its "ethnolinguistic vitality" was not

strong enough to maintain the language.

Skutnabb-Kangas believes that outside agents are much more involved in this process than

these researchers and this view reveal. She uses and defends her use of the term "linguistic

genocide" in the following passage, taken from the introduction to *Linguistic Genocide in*

Education - or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?:

"A second, partly related argument has to do with the comparison between physical and

psychological death, torture, pain, genocide, which is a central theme in my book. When

the final draft of what became the United Nations Genocide Convention (discussed in several chapters) defined linguistic genocide as 'prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publication in the language of the group' ..., many people might think of **physical** prohibition only. Likewise, when reading the part of the Convention which in its Article II (e) includes 'forcibly transferring children of the group to another group' as genocide, most people might think of **physical** transfer only, transfer of the children's bodies.

What I claim throughout this book is that genocide happens equally effectively when a child is **psychologically** (and structurally) prohibited from speaking (and wanting to speak) her own language, and is **psychologically** transferred to another group, made to **want** to identify with a dominant group **instead of**, rather than **in addition to** her own.... Therefore, in order to show the seriousness of the psychological prohibition and transfer (which often **result** in the disappearance of a language), words have to be used which clearly show the similarity of a physical and a psychological process, and which show that the processes are not agentless." [Emphasis added in text]

Her description of linguistic genocide coincides with the examples I have given from Acadian history, and disputes the effective use of the term 'voluntary anglicization' with respect to the Acadian population.

This chapter on power relation theories outlines the negotiation of power and the bargaining that goes on between groups in a society. It also emphasizes how difficult this negotiation becomes when one's bargaining chips are stripped away or rendered useless and when the more powerful group attempts to assimilate the less powerful, making them invisible and voiceless. This has been the Acadian reality for 250 years. The next chapter focusses on the

successes that have contributed to the preservation and growth of the French language and culture. By refusing assimilation and transforming their world, certain Acadian leaders were able to initiate change within the larger society. This transformation has slowly created a more positive society for Acadian youth today. Now we do not have to talk exclusively of assimilation; integration has entered into the Acadian experience. We no longer have to remain trapped in the 'subtractive' learning cycle; our well-equipped schools, well-trained teachers and strong community networks promote 'additive' learning. We do not only have to concentrate on 'coercive' relations of power; we can talk of 'collaborative' relations as well. Rigorous, strong words, such as 'open society', 'empowerment', and 'voice' begin to resonate within the realm of Acadian experience. These 'new' Acadian examples and the theories that support them will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Positive Negotiations of Power

What is important to study, then, is: under which circumstances can [people's] ethnicity and their language(s) become positive forces and strengths, sources of empowerment in people's lives?
-Tove Skutnabb-Kangas.
Linguistic Genocide in Education - Or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?

The negotiation of power that takes place between groups in a society moves out of the realm of domination and into a process of empowerment when these negotiations stop existing on an 'either-or' stance or a 'zero-sum' logic. The fallacy that power exists on this type of continuum has lead many researchers to support the notion that minority-language speakers should be taught in the language of the majority if they are to advance in society. The idea that minority first-language education leads to isolation and "ghettoisation" (Schlesinger, 1991), or even an unwillingness to learn the majority language, insinuates that both groups cannot enjoy sufficient power in a society to thrive, so the weaker must therefore succumb to the stronger. As Cummins (1997) puts it:

A common element in the warnings about diversity in countries around the world is that they invariably problemarise [sic] the culture, attitudes and language use of the subordinated group, which is expected to become invisible and inaudible either through assimilation or exclusion. Diversity becomes a problem only when subordinated groups refuse to accept their preordained status and demand 'rights' (p. 107).

At the centre of this shift from the 'either-or' to the 'both-and' stance exists the dichotomy between two words: assimilation and integration. While assimilationist practices force cultural and linguistic minorities to learn the customs and language of the majority by imposing this learning as a duty, integration practices allow this learning as a right. The difference between these two situations is quite significant. Assimilation promotes the subtractive learning of the second,

majority language. This means that there is no space in this type of society where both languages and cultures are validated. It is either one or the other. Because of the immense structural and psychological pressure put on minorities in these assimilationist situations, the language and culture that usually wins out is the language and culture of the majority.

Integration is not a duty imposed by those who adhere to the 'either-or' philosophy. It is based on the voluntary, 'additive' learning of other languages and cultures by a minority group, and reveals an attitude of 'both-and'. Both cultures and languages are valid, both exist within the society, both groups are empowered. The culture and language of the minority group remain intact, and as members of the group they are free to choose not to assimilate. They do, however, occupy an important place in society, and can adopt the language and customs of the majority while maintaining the core elements of their identity (i.e. language and culture). The degree to which a society fosters this type of integration indicates the level of openness that exists.

Jim Cummins has elaborated a framework for this type of additive learning situation. He refers to it as "collaborative relations of power" (Cummins, 1996, p. 15). This framework exists on the premise that power is not quantifiable or fixed. He contends that power within group relations is not given or taken away, but is actually generated when the relationship of power is collaborative. In the diverse and open society envisioned by Cummins, differing world views and different voices are affirmed and heard. Identities are not shattered or stripped away, they are strengthened and maintained. Structural power is not monopolized, it is created on all levels by groups who choose not to assimilate, but to integrate into society. Minority groups then have a much greater sense of being able to effect change in their own lives, existing no longer with the mere illusion of decision-making power.

Skutnabb-Kangas suggests that, in order for integration truly to differentiate itself from assimilation, certain ideas deemed as 'truths' must be dispelled. Integration must not be looked upon as the final product of a change process that only the minority group must undergo. The idea that the minority group must change and accommodate the mainstream society, where the values of the majority are "presented as somehow shared and universal, rather than particularistic and changing, as all values are," (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 130) runs contrary to the spirit of true integration. The idea that those who are different should enjoy less material and structural power until they cease being different, while being a tenant of assimilation, is not acceptable in terms of integration. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) sees integration as a "process and a socially constructed relation which the minority and the majority have to negotiate reciprocally, and where both have to change"(p. 131). In other words, integrating into a society must no longer be seen as one group changing to resemble more closely the group who holds the power. According to Skutnabb-Kangas' definition, both groups must be willing to change and to redefine what mainstream really means.

<u>The 'New' Acadian Example</u>

As we have seen in the previous section, Acadians have existed in this "either-or" assimilationist atmosphere for a very long time. Acadians, up until very recently, were expected to change their ways in order to gain respect and to become part of Island life. Today, it is easy to see that this idea has abated somewhat and the "process of negotiating integration" between the Acadian community and the Island community at large has begun. This means, not only have members of the minority group adopted and valued certain elements of the majority group, but the majority group has begun adopting and valuing certain elements of the minority group as well. For example, French immersion programs have contributed to a much larger percentage of the Island's

English-speaking population being able to speak French. Acadian music is very popular among

both French and English-speaking Islanders thanks to groups such as Barachois, Acadilac, Real

Pelletier and others. "Being Acadian" is no longer a social liability, as prominent Acadians have

been appointed to the highest positions within government, not only at the provincial level, as with

Léonce Bernard's recent appointment to Lieutenant Governor of PEI, but also at the national level,

with the past appointment of Roméo Leblanc to the position of the Governor General of Canada.

French is now regarded as an invaluable tool for those who speak it, not a liability or

something that should be hidden. As one of the study participants put it:

> I think that in our society now, it's more acceptable to speak French than it was in the time
>
> of my parents. Back then it was like, "No, no French. You have to speak English now."
>
> These days, it's much more open because we realize that if you speak French and English,
>
> you have a huge advantage. We live in a society and a country that are bilingual, and the
>
> French now have the same rights as the English. It wasn't always like that, though.

It is not enough, however, that the majority group be open to the minority group. In order

for true integration to take place, it must be combined with what Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 131)

calls "cultural competence." Knowledge, including language, feelings and attitudes, and behaviour

appropriate to the culture make up the first three components of cultural competence. Members of

the minority group must possess elements from their own culture that coincide with these three

components. In order to integrate fully within that group, they must also adopt certain common

features with the majority group, such as language and behaviour. "Integration preparedness"

(Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 132) also involves the fourth and last component of cultural

competence, that of metacultural awareness. Members of the minority group who engage in the

process of integration develop a heightened awareness of their own culture, of the majority

culture, and of the relationship between the two. They are able to reflect on this relationship with a somewhat detached perspective, and they can see their place within this relationship.

In the next chapter, the focus of the research turns toward the participants of the study and examines their comments through the lens of cultural competence and integration. Belonging to a cultural group that has a history plagued with discrimination and intolerance, these young Acadians speak with a voice that is strong and optimistic, affirming their place in a society that is more hospitable than it once was to those who do not ascribe to mainstream ideology. As we will see, these young people know about words such as "cultural competence" and "integration," not because they have read about them in books, but because they live them.

Chapter Seven - The Voices of Acadian Youth

As a teacher my philosophy rests on the importance of creating a space for students to express themselves, to discover who they are through what they learn. Within this space my students have surprised and impressed me on countless occasions, learning far beyond my expectations, teaching me something about who they are and teaching me something about who I am as well. Carrying this philosophy into my research I was again astounded, at times even overwhelmed by what participants had to say within the space that was created for the expression of their thoughts and feelings about themselves and their culture.

Their comments are infused with a sense of humour, and at times are touched with a hint of nostalgia for the way things used to be. At other moments, their comments seem somewhat unstructured as the participants struggled to express a new idea that was forming in their minds. Behind all of this, however, running like an underwater current, constant and deep, there exists startling honesty, profound insight, and a strength of voice that comes from being firmly grounded in who they are.

The group of six participants included five boys and one girl. Three of the male participants have roots in the Evangeline area of Prince Edward Island. Two of these three have spent most of their lives in Charlottetown, while the third moved to Charlottetown three years ago. The Acadian roots of the other two boys are in New Brunswick. One of these boys has spent most of his life on PEI, while the other moved to Charlottetown two years ago after spending most of his life in a place where French was the language of the majority. All of these participants were primarily brought up in French.

The girl who became involved in the study moved to Prince Edward Island from Halifax two years ago. Her Acadian roots are on PEI, but she was not brought up in French. Her

background reflects my own more closely than do the backgrounds of the others. I wanted to involve her in the study even though she did not meet the criteria of speaking French at home because, since coming to PEI, she has discovered her Acadian heritage and is a strong proponent of the French language. I also wanted to include a girl's voice within the study. Her inclusion in this study helps illustrate the diversity that exists within the Island's Acadian youth.

The fact that there are more boys than girls in this study is a result of the eligibility of the participants. Within the appropriate age group, the Acadian students who speak French at home were mostly boys. One other girl was an eligible participant for this study. Though she was willing, her busy work schedule did not allow her to become involved.

I identified eight major themes from the transcribed text of the focus group and interviews and was then able to divide those themes into two major categories of meaning. The first category, Ingredients of a Culture, deals with the participants' thoughts and feelings about where they come from, who they are, and the sense of belonging and identity that being "Acadian" gives them. In other words, the first category deals with their culture in and of itself, and not in relation to the society at large. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 116) calls this "cultural competence," and in this section I will examine the four components of cultural competence in relation to the participants' comments. The six themes that make up this category are: Language: A Key to the Culture; Characteristics of Acadians; The Role of the Family; A Sense of Belonging; Identity: "It's Who We Are."; and A Definition of Culture.

The second category, called Negotiating Two Worlds, deals with the challenges involved in bringing this sense of who they are forward into the anglophone community in which they live. It also deals with how they view their role in the maintenance and growth of the French language and the Acadian culture within this community. For centuries Acadians have been dealing with

this issue. Assimilation and subtractive learning have resulted for many who came in contact with the English-speaking community. These trends, however, are not present within the realm of experience of the young participants of this study. Integration and additive learning (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Cummins, 1996) are words that more aptly describe their reality. The two themes that make up this category are: Pride: A Maintenance Tool and a Growing Awareness of Identity; and Negotiations: Striking a Balance.

Because all the interviews except one were held in French, I have translated the excerpts in order to include them here. These are my own translations and I have tried to translate word-for-word the text I transcribed, remaining true to what was said. The power of these words, however, is due partly to the fact that they were spoken in French, therefore, I believe some of their impact has been lost in the translation. The meaning of what was said has been conveyed, however, while the irony of having to translate the words of these very proud francophones into English remains.

Ingredients of a Culture

Skutnabb-Kangas describes four components of what she calls cultural competence. They are cognitive, affective, behavioural and awareness. The first component, cognitive, deals with the knowledge a person possesses regarding the language, the traditions, the history, and all other things relevant to a culture such as how people think, how they interact with one another, what they eat, and how they behave. The second component, affective, includes the feelings and attitudes one has in relation to his or her culture. It deals also with "an understanding of it from the inside, internalizing it, and an identification with it or, rather, parts of it, including acceptance of (most of) its norms and values. . . . Aspects like dependence on the group for security, solidarity with the group, low levels of anxiety, feeling at ease, naturalness, when being enveloped by the culture, are parts of this" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 120). The behavioural component of cultural

competence depends on a person's capacity to act in culturally appropriate ways with other members of the same culture. Finally, the fourth component, that of metacultural and metalinguistic awareness, looks at a person's "understanding of the distinctiveness and relativity of one's own (and other) cultures, consciously being able to reflect over one's own cultures and others, at times distancing oneself from them and looking at them as objects" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 121). In the analysis of the participants' comments regarding their culture, all four aspects of cultural competence are apparent.

Cognitive Component

Language: A Key to the Culture

All the participants of this study strongly believe that language is an integral part of their culture. For them, language exists as a core value (Smolicz, 1981), inseparable from the Acadian culture. Language, while being one of the many different aspects they spoke of in relation to their culture, seemed to be the most important one.

When asked about the most important aspect of their culture to them, the participants responded this way:

For me it would be, I guess, the music and the language. I am proud of my language and I think I will always be a francophone.

I think that it is the language, because I am proud to be a francophone.

The language, it's like the way that you pass on [culture], from one generation to the next, by telling stories.

For me, I think it would be the language. . . . If I continue to speak French, I will be able to

keep it, and now it's like, I will use it as a tool, a link to my culture for the rest of my

life.

When asked their views on preserving their culture, again, the participants stated that

language was the most important aspect that needed to be preserved in order for the culture to

thrive:

> With language, if you take away your language, it's like you lose your culture because
>
> that is what goes with it.

> For me, when we talk about maintaining the culture, it's really about the language.

> To maintain our culture, that is what I thought of right away, the language.

> When you say "maintaining the culture" the first thing that came to mind was the
>
> language, because we are surrounded by an English community.

Characteristics of Acadians

While language was highlighted in our discussions, many other elements of the Acadian

culture were spoken of, elements that again fall under the category of cognitive cultural

competence. The participants referred often to the traditions, the way of life, and the history that

are connected with their culture:

> That was the big tradition: you got there, and for the whole evening you would sit there
>
> and there was someone, a storyteller who told stories all night, and who sang songs.

> The Acadian Festival really taught me a lot about my culture.

We go [to the festival] almost every year, we rarely miss it, and it's just, it's like the music, and going there at Christmas, to my grandparents, where all the family gets together, and they sing and tell stories of things that happened in the past.

When you talk of Acadians, I think of the violin, step-dancing and the music.
The food.
Yes, or like knitting things with wool, making hand-made quilts and all that.

I mean they are one of the cultures, and lots of cultures are like this, but they're one of the cultures in the world that's always been beat down, and like forced to go like, wherever they can, and they've always been pushed out of their homeland, and starting from France, first they had to come across the Atlantic, and then the whole Deportation thing, and they, I think they've learned to adapt no matter where they go, and no matter where they go, they sort of instill that place with like, their own culture.

Along with having an awareness of their traditions and history, the participants also had strong views on the characteristics of the Acadian culture, and of Acadians in general when it comes to their outlook on life and the way they interact with others:

The Acadian culture, it's about fun, but the Acadians, I think also they really know how to work, because they worked all their lives, so it's fun, but it's not always just about having a good time.

I think that having fun and enjoying yourself is important to Acadians because, it's rare that you walk into an Acadian household and. . . . I just think that when you go to a house where Acadians live, you are more welcome, you're greeted with open arms. It's like,

you'll sit, play cards or crokinole and all that, you know, just having a good time, and you

sit to eat. I really think that laughter is a big thing with Acadians.

Acadians back then weren't the most educated people in the world, it wasn't like they

wrote things down and were like, here, you can read this and learn how to do things. It was

more like they explained things from one generation to the next, one person to another.

My values are the same. There is no "quick fix" in life, you have to work hard for what you

get in life. And they were all "party animals" and I'm a "party animal" too.

If we went to visit someone, a member of the family somewhere else, it was never the

same as when we went to see my grandparents or my cousins in Evangeline, because it was

more like, you know, it's like a "warm welcome" kind of thing. It's always like "Come in!

Eat! There's food left. Eat!" And at my house it's kind of like that, like at my house,

because it comes from my grandparents and it was transmitted to us. . . . But when you go

to someone else's house, or if we went to visit someone in Charlottetown, some family

maybe, it was never as close, never the same at all.

But, I've always thought of the Acadian culture as something very, almost like joyous. . .

In general, just a culture who is really proud of who they are, and their language and where

they come from, but also, that tries to adapt to new places and to teach people about what

they are like.

The participants spoke with great fondness of their childhood memories, of going to "la

région Évangéline" to be with family and of the simple philosophies of life: you get out of life

what you put into it, for example. Their admiration for the examples that their parents and

grandparents have set for them shines through in their comments:

> They [my grandparents] want only to share what they have. I admire them.

> I listened to my father [tell stories about his life, about Acadians] and I thought that it was a natural thing, but I realize that not everyone is like that, so now I know that it is special.

> My culture has come from my mother because she raised me.

> My ideas [about culture] are mostly the same as my mother's because, the French language, for her, it's like really a big, big thing. She loves, she adores her language and she doesn't want us to lose it, she doesn't want anyone to lose it.

This admiration seemed to grow out of a sense of pride in their family members and a sense of belonging within their culture. This sense of belonging, of identity, and the idea that family plays an enormous role in their culture, are representative of the second component of cultural competence, the affective, or feeling, component.

Affective Component

The Role of the Family

A strong sense of family pervaded everything the participants said. They received their culture and their language from family and they see this process in terms of a continuing cycle. In their lives, these young people have been receivers of culture, taught by their parents and grandparents about the history and the language and the way things are done. They see themselves as future givers of culture, teaching their children in the ways they have been taught.

When asked what experiences influenced their cultural development, stories about

families dominated the responses:

> In the summer when we went to my grandparents' cottage where everyone got together, there were always photo albums or something, and my grandmother would explain who the people were and all that. She would say all the names of the people and the names of their parents and how they got their names. You could see the connections between people, see where you came from, and you could see that all these people came before you. They were people who did special things and are famous for certain things, and they gave a lot to the community and things like that.

> Um, my dad is like, he is really, he talks a lot about Acadian history and he is always trying to find out more about Acadian history. He talks to people older than he is, who were around in the years before he was. He is always talking about the stories and the way things were done before. He talks a lot about that.

> My grandfather tells lots of stories of when he was a fisherman getting caught in a storm, and often he would come to the Island because he couldn't get home.

> When I think of my Acadian culture, the first people I think of are my maternal grandparents.

The participants see themselves as one day continuing this cycle of passing down information from one generation to the next. They view it as their responsibility to learn as much as they can in order to pass along the key elements of their culture:

When we are older and we have kids, we will teach them French. . . .That's how we

learned and how our parents learned and everybody, it's like, it's to maintain, to maintain

the continuity of how things happen, to make sure we don't lose it.

[To do things] the way our parents did, the way our grandparents did, and to teach our kids

in the same ways we were taught.

The more aware you are, the more it will help in the future and the more you can teach the

next generations to keep it, to know it.

And another thing is to talk to, like, talk to your grandparents and your parents, and to just

be conscious of how things were done, and other aspects of the culture.

We're the future generation of Acadians on P.E.I., and well, in the Maritimes too, and if

the Acadian culture loses itself, then it's going to be gone forever. Like, you can't just

reach back a couple of generations and pick it up again, because no one will know what

you are talking about. And I think it is our responsibility to pass it on to our kids and to

keep it going, because it just shouldn't be lost. It's too important and too precious for that.

A Sense of Belonging

This sense of family does not end where the blood lines do, however. The participants

spoke of a strong feeling of belonging, of being accepted, whether it was within their families or

within the Acadian community at large:

It's just like the spirit, kind of, just the fact that I feel so much more Acadian now, and all

my friends here are the same as me, and it's like we have this common bond that holds us

all together, and it's so strong that everybody feels it.

Just going to the Evangeline area, visiting my grandparents and their families, like all their

kids and their brothers and sisters, *the family*. Everybody in the Evangeline area, and going

to the Acadian Festival and things like that.

Everyone is equal, you just, you go, you have a good time.

I think you're better accepted. It's like you're part of the family and you don't even know

them.

In one way or another you're part of the family because Acadians are all one big family.

Yah, it's like I am related to practically everyone in the Evangeline area.

It's like you're so happy to see these people, happy to be together and to just have fun.

Going one step further, this sense of belonging and of well-being encompasses even the

more distant connections these participants felt. While the first comment reflects the connection

a participant felt through sharing a common history, the second comment touches on the

connection established because of a common language:

When I was in Louisiana, I got a feeling, a taste of a different type of Acadian. They are

Acadian but they are a little different, and that really had an impact on me. I was like,

"Wow, there are Acadians here, and they are different, but they are really like us too."

I think I rediscovered my culture last summer because I was in Quebec, and I didn't have

the choice, I had to speak French, and I discovered how much I love speaking French and

how much it really is *my* language.

Identity: "It's Who We Are"

This strong sense of family and of belonging has enabled the participants to identify with and to internalize the aspects of their culture they find important. When asked if they considered themselves to be Acadian, this is what they said:

I am definitely Acadian. One hundred per cent Acadian, even.

I consider myself to be an Acadian, and the importance I give to that, well, it's like, it is part of my identity, to something I am connected to. It's more than a role that you play, it's like, you belong to a group of people.

Yes, because I think it is like my identity. I think everyone wants an identity, you don't want to be just, like, "I am a Joe Blow," you have to have something, something that you can say, "I am this or I am that." If not, when you meet someone, you would have to say, "I am just a guy." It's my identity. I am an Acadian, that's just who I am.

If someone asked me if I am Chinese, Indian, American, I would say that I am Acadian, because that's the way it is. That's who I am. I am an Acadian, and I am also a francophone. I think that "Acadian" falls under the category of "francophone" too.

Oh, definitely. Even though, I mean, as far as background, I'm half Acadian, but I'm half American, which is my mother.... Probably because I'm here right now, and I'm surrounded by Acadian culture, I really feel Acadian. Like to me it's always been something, well not always, but even more since I came here, something I am definitely a part of.

<u>Behavioural Component</u>

<u>A Definition of Culture</u>

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p.116) defines culture as "the material and ideological ways in which a group organizes, understands and reproduces its life as a group." When discussing culture, not only did the participants have a keen awareness of the "ways" that were specific to their own experience, but they also strove to define what the term 'culture' meant for them in a more general sense. For the participants this word seems synonymous with "ways of doing":

It's the way in which people do things or think, and it can even go into religion and things like that. Whatever it is that you do, in terms of customs or ahh, I don't know, like the things we do all have to do with culture.

It's the ways of doing, I don't know, like at Christmas, to be with all the family, and the way it all happens. I am sure it's different than other families, and different cultures do things differently. I like the way things happen in my family.

I think that culture is the way that a group of people lives.

From their descriptions of Acadian customs and Acadian people, these participants showed that they are fully aware of how one behaves as an Acadian. This knowledge (cognitive), bolstered by a strong sense of belonging and of well-being (affective), impressed upon them the need to behave according to the norms set by their culture (behavioural). The behavioural component of cultural competence was obviously present because for them, they seemed to agree that the best way to express their culture was to "live it":

To maintain the culture, I thought right away about the language and the ways of doing.

You have to live it.

Yes, live it.

Yah.

That's the first thing.

Metacultural and Metalinguistic Awareness

Being able to actually "live" your culture is effortless when everyone around you is living

the same one. Challenges arise when most people are not living the same culture you

are. Living your culture within this kind of environment requires a great deal of thought and deep

reflection about your own culture and about the culture of others. Were the participants capable, as

Skutnabb-Kangas says, of "consciously being able to reflect over one's own and other cultures"

(Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 121), to truly understand the relationship between their culture and the

culture of the anglophone community that surrounds them? This final component of cultural

competence comes forth in the discussions when the participants begin to express their views on

how they interact with the English-speaking society. This last component of cultural competence

connects the analysis of the first category, to the analysis of the second category, Negotiating Two

Worlds, which examines the participants' role within the interactions of the two cultures. I believe

this metacultural awareness component also provides a link between the two worlds through

which the participants negotiate. In other words, the participants are able to take a step back and

reflect upon how these two cultures interact because they have a great deal of knowledge about,

they identify deeply with, and they behave according to the norms of their own culture first.

Because they are grounded in a sense of their own culture, they are able to flourish in the larger

society, learning and experiencing different cultures while holding on to what is theirs:

It's like for culture, and that, I think that it doesn't hurt, I think even it does some good to learn about other cultures, but you're not going to go grab it and replace your culture with the culture of someone else and still be as happy and as proud as if it was your own. You can get to know other cultures and it will do you good, even more than that. I think it will make you more proud of your own [culture].

You have to be ready to accept certain things [from other cultures], but I think you should never let others walk all over what you hold as important.

You can learn French and the "correct" way to use it and all that, but just don't go and replace that totally with all you have learned, like, replace all you have known. You have to be proud of your language, proud of your Acadian language.

The participants understand that, in order for them to be fully aware of their own culture, they must also know the 'Other' to some extent so that they may compare and contrast this 'Other' with what they know. They are experiencing the dialogue between 'Self' and 'Other' as a necessary component of their identities (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This exploration of the dominant anglophone culture, the experiences they have had negotiating between the two, and the developing pride that has grown out of these experiences are the topics of the next section.

<u>Negotiating Two Worlds</u>

<u>Collaborative Relations of Power and Integration</u>

In his book, *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*, (1996), Jim Cummins develops a framework of coercive and collaborative relations of power. As I described in the literature review, coercive power exists when power structures in a society

impose constraints on a certain group, unconsciously exercising power over this group and installing systems that maintain the unequal distribution of this power. We have also seen that for many years, Acadians were entangled in this cycle, feeling ashamed and unable to effect positive change regarding their social situations. As a result, assimilationist practices and subtractive learning trends engulfed many Acadians, stripping them of their language and severing a fundamental link to the Acadian culture. Before talking to the participants of this study, I wondered if I would be able to sense any resentment towards the English community or any ambivalence towards their culture that may have resulted from years of discrimination.

It came as somewhat of a surprise to me that, not only was there no resentment apparent in their comments, but there were absolutely no traces of ambivalence or negativity towards their own culture either. Instead of corroborating Cummins' coercive power relation theory, they exemplified characteristics of his theory of collaborative relations of power. When the discussion turned to their experiences and interactions with the largely English-speaking community of Prince Edward Island, the participants spoke not of shame but of a growing pride they felt for their culture. Some mentioned feelings of isolation, while others did not. Some spoke of rare painful moments when they felt they had been mistreated because of who they were, while others spoke mostly of positive experiences. They all seemed to stress two notions, however, and these two notions fly in the face of centuries of oppression, knocking down power structures and "generating" power instead of dividing it (Cummins, 1996). Firstly, these young Acadians feel they have the freedom to choose to live their lives in French. In other words, they are "empowered" (Cummins' word, not theirs), and they can create change for themselves. Secondly, they seemed to say that some kind of balance between the two cultures must be struck, a balance

that puts their own culture and language first and foremost. This balance hints not of assimilation, but is founded in the tenants of integration.

<u>Pride: A Maintenance Tool and a Growing Awareness of Identity.</u>

The participants often spoke of the pride they felt for their language and culture. This sense of pride is a tool that will help them maintain and nurture both of these things:

I think that [to maintain the culture] it's like, to develop a sense of pride so that we don't say that we are less, that we aren't as good as the others, and try to change to be more like the others, or something like that. If you are proud, then it will just naturally show to others, and it should continue on.

Um, I think if you have pride in the culture and the language then it will, you will continue to grow, but if you are not proud, if people are not proud, then it will just die, dissipate, or, I don't know.

For me, I don't think that there is one thing that is more important than the others, it's more like to have pride in all the things, and to learn about all aspects of the culture. Because if you are, if you are not proud of it, it will just be lost, and like, there will be nothing left. It's just like, like learn of the history and of the other things because there is lots there, and we have to make the effort to learn about them and to have pride in them.

The participants acknowledge that they did not always feel this sense of pride when it came to their language and culture. The next three comments describe a developing pride that had always been there, but dormant in a way. Here, there is no sense of identity crisis or

exploration, just a sort of awakening to their culture:

> I think it's been over the past three years where it's really been, where I've realized more
>
> of the importance of keeping what I have, of developing a sense of pride, of learning more,
>
> and like to realize that we are in an anglophone community and that it's really, if we don't
>
> make an effort to keep them, we will just lose all that we have learned, I don't know. . . .
>
> When we used to talk to them [my grandparents], and my father, he would ask questions,
>
> or things like that, and I could see that for him it was important, but for me, it was just like,
>
> I would listen, it was interesting and all that, but now it holds greater importance to listen,
>
> to learn things, to develop a sense of pride.

> Before, I was, I listened [to my father], but I never really knew a lot. I thought and I
>
> listened, and it was interesting enough, but it was really no big deal. But now, as I get
>
> older, the more it, I realize maybe more of the importance, or now I am less ignorant of the
>
> culture, and it's beginning to be more important for me. I think that as I get older, the
>
> closer I get to the way my father is.

> I remember in sixth grade, I think, I did a project on Acadian customs or something like
>
> that, and it was like, interesting, but now I find it even more interesting to go into detail. . .
>
> Personally, it involves me even more, and I cherish those things more.

For these next participants, the sense of pride they now feel has grown out of a sense of
embarrassment they felt at a younger age for being "different." In these comments, we can see
evidence of the exploration involved in identity formation:

Sometimes I was embarrassed that each time my neighbours came who were in immersion, my mother would talk to them in French, and I would be like, "Mom!" (Groan). I knew she would always do that and it would embarrass me, but now, these days, it's like, it has more importance.

When I was younger, in grade seven and eight, that is when you arrive with the bigger kids in school, and you're like, "Ah, I want to be cool" kind of thing. It's like, if you spoke French at that age it was less cool, because the majority of the people spoke English, so, that's it, I always tried to speak English if there was someone around me who was English, even if he or she was in the minority and that person was talking to someone else, like, I would never have spoken French. But now I feel, it really doesn't bother me if people make fun of me or whatever. It's like, "Your loss" kind of thing. But, I guess that's about it, just when I was younger I thought that French was the minority so it wasn't as good, and I just wanted to be like everyone else, kind of thing, you know. Fit in, be cool. . . . Now I realize that it is my mother tongue and I am proud to be a francophone.

I think that, like, in my younger years, like I said before, I tried to hide my culture, my language and all that, but now that I'm older I have started to realize, I think that, in relation to my culture and how I think of my culture, it was maybe my trip to Louisiana, because I saw, like, two extremes of the same culture, and then, it's like I realized that it was okay to be who I was and that I didn't need to feel ashamed of who I was, and like, to really love my culture. . . . I realize now that it makes no sense to hide who I am because it is one of the greatest advantages you could ever ask for, especially in Canada.

I find that I don't really see what you can gain by hiding your pride, because, like they were

saying at the presentation, it's really an advantage too, being francophone and anglophone,

these days, because being bilingual, the more you are bilingual the better it is. These days, I

don't see the advantage of saying, "Me? An Acadian? No. No way."

This developing sense of pride seems to coincide with Erickson's (1968) framework of

identity formation. He suggests that during the period of adolescence identity is achieved after a

period of reflection and experimentation. Phinney (1989) proposes a three stage model of the

formation of ethnic identity. First is the period of unexamined ethnic identity, then comes a period

of exploration, and finally this process ends in the stage of achieved ethnic identity. What these

participants are saying tends to suggest that they have passed through the period of exploration and

have moved closer to achieving a developed sense of ethnic identity.

How does this sense of pride stand up when the participants move forth into the

community? How do they negotiate between the cultural world of their home and school, and

the cultural world of the community in which they live? Their comments on this issue were

thoughtful and profound, revealing a keen understanding of the social interactions that inhibit or

promote their language and culture.

Negotiations: Striking a Balance

Throughout our discussions the participants continued to astound me with their thoughts

about their culture and language. However, nowhere were their comments more honest and

more insightful than when they spoke of their experiences within the English-speaking

community and of what it would take for them to exist within this community while keeping

their identities intact. Their difficult experiences and feelings of isolation were far outweighed

by positive growth experiences and an optimism they seemed to hold regarding the balance

they live within.

While the vast majority of our conversations were of a positive nature, some of the comments the participants offered did reveal a sense of the isolation they sometimes feel, along with the notion they have, or had, of being different:

In my opinion, it's really not easy being francophone in an English-speaking city like this one, especially if you go to a French school. . . . When I see my neighbours and they all go to Charlottetown Rural, it's like you lose those connections compared to, say, if you go to school in the Evangeline area. Everyone there goes to the same school. So that's it, I think it's really hard because, you're like, you're so isolated and so much in the minority, and it's true that the only place you speak French is at home and at school, because you would never go into a store in Charlottetown and, well maybe there are some who do, at least if there was a sign or something, but it's like, for most things except for at the Carrefour and at home, all of it happens in English, so I think it is easy to lose some of your language and some of your culture.

It's like we are surrounded by English, and like the only place I speak French is at home and at school. Like, it's a big part of my culture, yet the second I am not at home or not at school, I speak English.

It's because the majority of the Island is English and, it's like, before I felt funny walking down the street or in a store or something, to talk to my friends in French, because I felt that if I spoke French someone would look at me and ask, "What's he doing?" or "What a weirdo", you know.

It's really isolating. It's like being alone in a sea full of icebergs and you're just there, and you can fight all you want, but most of the people will bring you down. . . . Some will be brought down, and that's natural because we are surrounded by English, and even the people who are French "right to the core", for them it's not easy either.

Some participants also spoke of times they were mistreated or misjudged because of who they were:

A couple of years ago, I remember we had gone to UPEI for a science thing or something, to visit the university, and there were other schools there and there was Francois-Buote. Some other schools were saying things like, "You are all rich, and you're taking our money, and you are all a bunch of snobs". . . . They were saying that we were taking all the money from other schools and that we had all kinds of new equipment and that we were all snobs, and things like that, and that we were taking all of their opportunities for things from them.

I used to live in the Evangeline area and I was in sports, and other teams would make fun of us for speaking French . . . .They called us "French Frogs" or something like that. It was just to make fun of us because we were French. It really doesn't make sense, it didn't have a point, well maybe it was just to make us angry or something like that. It got me angry, so it worked.

He was talking to us and all that, and he asked us what school we went to, and we said Francois-Buote, and you could just tell by his face that he had a huge problem with that. So then, the conversation completely stopped, he gave us our [library] cards and said, "Bye."

While these negative experiences left the participants puzzled, wondering why anyone would act in these ways towards them, they did not dampen these young people's willingness to remain part of the English-speaking community and to continue to display their culture and promote their language. In fact, a significant amount of discussion was held on the topic of asking for service in French, both during the focus group and interviews, and after the focus group in a lively impromptu discussion in which the participants all vowed to ask for service in French more often. It made me wish the tape recorder had still been rolling. Nevertheless, their reasons for requesting service in their mother tongue and the ways in which they do so are well-illustrated within the discussions I did capture on tape. The participants' views of this practice are part of how they strike a balance between their culture and the surrounding English-speaking world:

> Normally when I go into a store or something, I try to get service in French, and maybe it's not, I don't know, I think it's funny. Now that I think of it though, sometimes I have been surprised that people could offer me service in French, and if I had've just spoken in English, then, I would never have known. But it's just like, you say, "Bonjour" or something, and it's like, sometimes people are like, "What?", and then you speak in English because it's just easier.

> Or, you can just always ask for it. My father, when we go through customs, normally he asks that people speak to him in French, and at certain places the person can't speak French, so they call Ottawa, and there are people who work there, in French. So the guy puts the phone through the little window, and my father takes it, and it usually takes five minutes extra each time, but my father takes the phone and he talks to the guy on the other end of the line, who asks him if he has anything to declare. My father says no, and the guy

thanks him for asking to be served in French, because, like, if people don't ask for it, they would take away the French positions. And maybe, if more people ask for it, they would put more francophones at the actual places and not just in Ottawa.

I think it's fun to do, and at the same time I know that there is an important reason for doing it. For me, it's not a pain to ask for service in French. It's more like a habit now.

When I ask for it, it always, I don't know, the people will either make a strange face or they will smile and try to make an effort to understand. . . . It's not like I ask for it in a way that's like, "You HAVE to serve me in French" or something. It's just in the way you, it's like more cheerful, and it's like "If you can serve me in French, I will take it, but if not, that's okay."

Working towards this balance is not always easy as set-backs occur from time to time. This next participant was very observant of the ways in which social interactions influence the use of language, usually favouring the language of the majority:

Well, it's strange, because at this school, I've had the experience where everyone is speaking in French, we have a circle of about five or six friends, and everyone speaks French, but as soon as an anglophone comes into the circle, everyone changes to English, even if that person understands French. . . . In the opposite sense, if like the francophone entered a circle of anglophones, he is the one who has to make the effort to speak in English.

If I am alone in a group with anglophones, it's like, it's alright, because I am comfortable speaking in both languages, but if there was another francophone with me, and we started

speaking French in the group, I think that would be considered strange, because the anglophones would think we were talking about them if we started to laugh or something. So it's a little bit, it's like a feeling of doing something that's not right, type of thing.

Being observant and noticing trends is necessary if one is going to challenge these trends. It is a difficult thing to do, involving high levels of risk and requiring strength of character:

I found myself, the other day, someone [who speaks French] spoke to me in English and I answered in French. Usually I would have said to myself, "Oh great, look what you did. Now he will think you are loser," or something. But this time, it didn't bother me and the person started talking to me in French, and the conversation was all in French, so I guess now it doesn't bother me at all.

Even within their own French first-language school, the pressure to give in to English is strong. The participants are aware of this pressure, and strive to deal with it in positive ways:

But, I think it's true that everyone who comes here should love the language and should want to speak it and should be proud to be coming to a French school where they, like because that is where their heritage is from. And it really bugs me when I see people like, ah, I mean it's their choice, but it still bugs me when people say, "I'm leaving next year, because I don't want to go to this school anymore, because I want to go to a big high school." And it's true, there are advantages, at bigger high schools, because you have more courses, and stuff like that, but, um what was I going to say, ah. I think it is almost

disrespectful, if people are here and they don't, and they speak English all the time. It's just like, why would you come here, unless your parents are forcing you? And I don't think it's right for parents to do that either. Because there shouldn't be kids at this school who don't embrace what the school is all about. And one of the most important things about this school is the fact that it is French. Especially the fact that it's French in an English town, because, the school, plus the Carrefour, is one of the biggest links to French in Charlottetown, and it is very important to maintain that.

You see people who are like, there are certain things that make me sick, it's like, you see people who go to a French school, and they never speak French. And I just ask myself, "What are they doing here?". . . . I think if everyone talked in French at school, like if everyone talked French all the time, then there would not be a problem with English. But I think that there are certain people who decide to speak English all the time, and it ruins the French atmosphere for the others.

I think I am starting to speak more French [at school], and even sometimes I find myself, if someone talks to me at school in English, sometimes I answer back in French just to see what will happen. So far, no one has given me strange looks, it was just like, okay, we will continue the conversation in French.

Other, more positive and accepting trends do emerge, and the people promoting and living these trends understand the power and the strength diversity brings:

I don't think many people who know me have a problem with who I am. Even, lots of my

friends from Triple Threats, if they have homework in French, they call me and I go to

their houses and help them with their work, and I am glad that I am able to help them.

I remember more of the positive things, because when I was young, I remember, we would

go to the States to visit family, and it was like, when we spoke French, it was, "What does

that mean?" and things like that. They wanted to learn. It was like, "How do you say this in

French?" I think I have more positive memories about that than negative memories.

Through all of this negotiating it remains clear to the participants that, no

matter what type of balance exists, the most important thing is for them to hang on to the

aspects of their culture they hold dear, protecting and nurturing them first before taking on

aspects of other cultures:

Me, personally, I am happy to be able to live in the situation I am in right now, because I

have the chance to experience more things and to have a life that is more rich. Also I think

that it opens my life up even more. But there are moments when I know I have to make

sure that I don't let go of too much of who I am, to be swallowed up by the current. I have

to keep, and just to pay attention sometimes, because, the more you let yourself go, the

greater the danger is of never coming back. So, it's not like to isolate yourself, but I do

think that there is, I am scared of being swallowed up, but even so, I don't think it would

be like me either to go and isolate myself.

You have to be ready to accept certain things, but I think that you should never let other

people walk over the things you hold dear. Like, I believe that if you are proud of

something, and it's your culture and your language, then you should hold those things dear, and it should be those things that you keep for yourself, the things that will always come out on top. Unless you want to be an extremist, you have to be willing to like, let some things go. . . . Well, I think that there is a certain balance, but it's more important to keep for yourself, like, so that you keep your culture, your identity, and that you don't get swallowed by the rest.

You're going to get to know it in any case, because we live in the environment and all that, and there will be certain things, unless you want to stay totally separated, and have it be just like, "You versus them." You can't do otherwise than accept certain things or to let go of certain things, because if not, then you are totally separated from them, and it's pretty hard to do, because you're so much in the minority. But there is also the aspect of, like, you cannot let everything go, because if you let everything go, then there is nothing left for you, and you will just be like, I think you would be lost in something that is not really you.

Especially in our city and our society, I think it is important to have a balance, if you are francophone.

These comments show the importance of maintaining a balance while at the same time safeguarding the cultural elements that are fundamental to one's identity. In this way, people living within minority contexts are not stripped of their identities, they are empowered to choose to live and to express their culture in ways that are important to them:

Before, it was like, "I speak French because my parents speak French." But after this, I

realize that I speak French because it is my choice, because I grew up with it and it's not

like I am an automaton. I truly decide.

Outside of school, I am the one who chooses to speak French and to try to express myself

the most I can in French, to maintain and to show the pride I feel.

In order to really be proud, you are the one who has to decide.

To maintain the culture, really, it's you who can make the difference for yourself and for

your family.

I think the most you can do is for yourself. You can decide if you want to keep the French

language, or when you have kids, you can decide to bring them up in French or in English

or in both. I think that you yourself can maintain the language when you make the proper

choices for yourself and for your family.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

The participants of this study are engaged in the process of integration. They are growing

up in a world that is becoming more accepting and more open to diversity, a world that no longer

consciously imposes assimilation on people who do not belong to the majority group. From their

comments, we can see that they possess many strong elements from the cognitive, affective, and

behavioural components of their own culture, yet at the same time they realize they must accept

certain elements of the culture that surrounds them. Most importantly of all, they have achieved a

very high level of metacultural awareness, being able to reflect on the intricacies of their

interactions with the majority group. They are able to negotiate a balance between the two by

keeping their culture and language first and foremost in their minds and in their hearts. They are

enthusiastic about the richness and the power this balance provides them, affirming the pride they

feel for who they are and the confidence they have in their ability to bring their language and

culture forward into the future.

The conviction these young people feel will serve them well as they face the future

challenges of safeguarding their language and culture. The insidious nature of silence and

assimilation enables these processes to take hold within people and within communities before

anyone realizes. By the time this realization occurs the damage can be irreversible. The pressures

and the unconscious push towards assimilation remain present in our society and pervade the

experience of people living within minority contexts, contributing to feelings of self-doubt and of

alienation (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Awareness of one's life conditions is a tool of defence that can fortify minority groups

against these pressures, giving them the opportunity to reflect and to act in ways that may

counterbalance the workings of assimilation. Praxis is a necessary component in the preservation

of a language and a culture that are endangered by the mainstream. Optimism alone cannot protect

a language from extinction. The participants of this study are optimistic, but they have also

reflected on their situation and understand the challenges inherent in their daily lives. They

negotiate their identities each day within the intersection of two worlds in successful, positive

ways. May their keen insight and their strong voices carry them through the future challenges they

face.

Chapter Eight - Conclusion

<u>Effects of the Research on the Participants</u>

In Chapter Two I discussed the impact of this research on my own personal awareness of culture and particularly on my learning of French as a second language. Researching the topic of identity helped strengthen my voice, enabling me to understand certain realities I was not aware of before, such as silence, power, and transformation. As a result of this process, I am not the same person I was when I started. How then has this study affected the participants? At the time, they seemed to enjoy the focus group and interviews, fitting them into their busy schedules. When the process was over, the participants were able to look back and put the experience into perspective:

Well, I think the discussion was very good, because it helped me to voice my thoughts about this, which is something very important to me, um. I find it is always good to do that. If you're feeling something that is really strong, it doesn't have to be negative or anything, then I think it's good to talk to somebody about it or write it down, either one, it helps to clarify everything. And I'm very glad you are doing your thesis on this because I think it's a very important topic, and that's the way it should be treated, so thank you very much.

I think that now, especially after the, I think everyone who came to the focus group, it was really like a light that came on, and when we talk about making people proud of their culture and French language, I think we should do more of this kind of thing, to really go deep into the issue.

When you talk about it, you realize more. Okay, maybe you already know, but it gets stronger when you express it, and I think this would be an interesting thing to do with more people.

I think that it was good, because the reason I said all those things is because I was thinking them, and I realize that I don't think about it often enough. Now, it's like, I don't know, it really jumped out at me, that what I am saying right now is really how it is. After this discussion, I feel more open, more open in my thinking, and I think more of my culture and of how I was brought up.

I think that I speak for everyone who was here. I don't know if it was intentional on your part, or if it just happened that way, but I think that everyone after this process, it really made people think of the "why". . . . I think that it helped me look back, and after these three meetings I think I have much more of a, a sense of pride that has grown. It's more solid that it was before. So, hats off to your project because I think it was great for everyone involved, and I think it should be a pilot project for others at this school, because I think it could really go a long way to helping, even if it's not to write a thesis in the end. Just to think about it and discuss, it helps a lot. I really enjoyed it.

I just wanted to say that doing things like this helps me put things more in perspective. When it comes to the Acadian culture, sometimes it loses its importance, but the more I think about it and the more I express my ideas, the more it becomes, like, it gets stronger and it's more special.

For me, it was one of the best things I could have done right now because it gave me the chance, like you think about these things, but unless you speak them out loud and you share them, you are never really sure if this is what you really believe or if they are just thoughts you have. And I think that this has helped me identify just exactly to what point I am proud of my language and my culture and to know that I have to make sure to continue to live it. So I thank you for this, Rachelle.

This study helped the participants focus on certain things in their lives they hold dear. The fact that they valued this process so much was an unexpected and very motivating outcome of this research. Their comments helped me focus on the desire and the commitment I feel to continue this work. The Acadian experience on Prince Edward Island is complex and varied, and deserves further investigation.

Future Topics of Research

Having listened to the participants relate with such fondness the cultural experiences they have had within their families, I think it would be interesting to do case studies involving several generations of Acadian families. This study would include interviews with children, parents, and grandparents, as well as whole-family discussions. I believe this type of research would provide a better sense of how attitudes have changed over the past fifty years. The emphasis could be placed on the changing attitudes of the Acadian community with respect to their language and culture, and the attitudes of the English-speaking community with respect to Acadians. It could also enable us to focus more closely on the attitudes of different generations in regards to 'giving' and 'receiving' culture. A sharing of information across generations might help uncover the ways things have changed, but also the ways in which they have stayed the same.

Another possible area of research would be to focus on the French schools of Prince

Edward Island. Two researchers at the Université de Moncton, Rodrigue Landry and Réal Allard,

have done a great deal of work involving schools that exist within minority contexts. They have

looked at how these schools can promote additive bilingualism in students who face a strong

current of subtractive bilingualism (Landry, Allard, 1984, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1993). It would be

interesting to look at the practices that *École François-Buote* and *École Évangéline* have in place

in order to promote this type of additive environment, and to look at the views of the staff and

administration regarding their role as educators in a minority setting.

A study involving cultural identity development could also be conducted with Acadian

students who attend schools within *la Commission scolaire de langue française* but who do not

speak French at home. It would be valuable to investigate the factors that contribute to their

cultural development, and to understand their views of the French language and the Acadian

culture. This type of information could provide insight to those English-speaking Acadians on

Prince Edward Island who are striving to reclaim their language and heritage.

Conclusion

Two generations ago the process of assimilation replaced the French language my

ancestors spoke for almost two centuries on PEI. As this research comes to an end, I ask myself

what my life would be like if assimilation had not been a reality for my family and I had grown up

a francophone. Would I have enjoyed the conviction, the pride, and the sense of belonging the

participants of this study feel at an age when their identities are still being forged? I realize now

that this research has engaged me in a grieving process for a language lost years before I was born.

I began to uncover the anger that welled up inside me as I became aware of the depth of silence

that exists among thousands of Acadians who, like myself, have lost their language and now have

little notion of their Acadian heritage. The anger is still there, but it has gradually been transformed into a strong sense of conviction. As I have grieved, I have also been able to heal. The healing began as I spoke with the young Acadians who have not lost their language and who recognize its importance.

Throughout the focus group and the interviews I did not sense from the participants any of the resentment I felt about the common past we shared. They are aware of the negative assumptions about Acadians, but they have dealt with this knowledge differently than I have. Their standpoint is different than mine because they were born into families that reinforced the French language and the Acadian culture. Listening to them helped me gain perspective on my own biases and assumptions.

The conviction I now possess to regain my language and culture, and to continue exploring issues related to the Acadian experience, grows from this perspective. I am proud of my heritage, my Acadian roots, and I enjoy the connection I now feel for these elements of my past. I am proud of my family, my parents and grandparents, for holding onto the importance of the French language even though it had disappeared from them. The marriage of these two realities has helped me appreciate my bilingual status on a deeper level. I now bring to my situation a clarity and an understanding I once lacked.

This study of cultural identity development in young Island Acadians, while helping me come to terms with my heritage and address my own issues of identity, has also engaged the participants in the process of "conscientization" (Freire, 1972) that is so vital to the preservation of language and the development of voice. Their views on the balance they negotiate between the French and English worlds of their experience affirm their place within this complex society, and

may lead the Acadian community on the Island to a better understanding of the reality their

children face.

"To be voiceless is to be powerless" (Cummins in Wink, 2000, p. 109). If what Cummins

suggests is true, then the opposite must also be true. People whose voices are heard and validated

can generate power and determine their own place in society. The sense of pride that flows from

the young Acadians I spoke with is evidence that, when people have a strong voice,

transformations occur. Being conscious of these transformations (Freire, 1972) remains the

challenge and the reward.

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Appendix A

Information Sheet

Dear _____,

As you know, I am working toward a master's degree in education at the University of Prince Edward Island. Part of this program includes doing research and writing a thesis based on that research.

For my thesis, I want to talk to a number of young people living in the French community on Prince Edward Island, and explore with them the formation of their cultural identity in this minority context. In other words, how do these young people see themselves as a result of their experiences within their own culture and within the larger English culture of their community?

I am inviting you to be a participant in this research. You are absolutely free to decline this invitation, and if you accept, you are also free to withdraw from the project at any time. In each of these cases, you do not need to give me any explanation, and you will experience no negative consequences because of your decision.

If you choose to become involved with this project, the process would begin with a focus group, which is basically a one-hour discussion with four or five other people, including myself, in which I ask questions regarding your cultural identity. Afterwards, I will randomly choose two or three people from the focus group who will continue on to the next phase of the research. This final phase includes two interviews, each being about an hour in length, in which we discuss the issue of cultural identity in a more in-depth way. Should you become involved, your participation may end after the focus group, or it may continue on into the in-depth interviews. The focus group and the interviews will both be audio-taped. I will plan these meetings according to the schedules of the participants, at convenient times and locations.

Your total time commitment to this project will range from one to three hours. The information discussed in the focus group and interviews will become data for my research and it will remain confidential. This means that I will not publish your name, and only myself and my advisor at UPEI will have access to the tapes and transcripts of our discussions. Because the focus group involves several people, the confidentiality in this case depends on the group participants themselves. I will make it clear before we begin that all things discussed during the focus group session are to remain confidential.

After this process is over, I will keep the documents in a secure place, and I will destroy them in three years.

When my research is complete, I will meet with the participants individually to show them the results of the study, and to debrief them on their input. The participants have a right to a copy of the transcripts of their interviews if they so wish.

Sincerely,

Rachelle Gauthier

Consent Form

I, _____, have read and understand the conditions of my

involvement in this research. I understand that I may withdraw from the project at

any time, and that the information I contribute will remain confidential. I am aware

of my responsibilities as a participant, the confidentiality required, and of the time

commitment I am agreeing to. Also, I understand that I will be debriefed about the

research results as soon as they are available. I may retain a copy of this consent

form.

Signed: _____

_____

_____

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

1. Tell us your name and an interest you have outside of school.

2. As young people living within the Acadian community on PEI, you have often heard the word 'culture' spoken. What do you think of when you hear this word?

3. Of the things we've just talked about, what is the most important part of your culture for you right now?

4. Do you think your ideas of culture are the same as your parents' ideas?
    a) How do they differ? What parts remain the same?

5. We often hear of people striving to maintain the Acadian culture. What is your role in this? Do you think this is important? Why or why not?

6. We've come to the end of our focus group time. How do you feel about the discussion we've just had?

Interview Questions

<u>Interview #1</u>

1. Think back to your early childhood and adolescence. What positive memories do you have that are connected to your culture? You can talk about people, places, activities, anything that may be related to how you became aware of your culture.

2. In the past, have you experienced any negative situations because of your language or culture? Describe those experiences, what you did and how you felt.

3. How have these incidents, both the positive and the negative memories you've talked about, affected the way you think about your culture now?

4. As you've gotten older, how has your awareness of your culture changed for you?

5. If you had to single out the most important incident of all the ones you mentioned today, which one would it be?

<u>Interview # 2</u>

1. Do you consider yourself an Acadian? How important is 'being Acadian' to your overall view of yourself right now?
   a) Do you think this level of importance will change as you get older?

2. In your day-to-day life, how do you express your culture?

3. How does living in an English community affect the way you express your Acadian culture?

4. Do you ever encounter situations today in which you feel it is not 'okay' or acceptable to express your culture?

5. What do you do in those situations? How do you feel?

6. In general, how does your culture affect the way you interact with your friends?
Is there a difference between the way you act and feel with friends who are francophone and with friends who are not francophone?
   a) What do you think this difference is caused by?

7. Do you think there is a difference in how these two groups of friends treat you?
   a) What do you think this difference is caused by?

8. How do you work at achieving a balance between the culture that exists in your home and school and the prevailing English culture in Charlottetown?
   a) Do you think the balance should be fifty-fifty? More or less?
   b) Do you think there should be a balance? Or should Acadians work to protect their heritage from the influence of other cultures?

9. We have come to the end of our focus group and interview sessions. What is the most significant thing you will take with you from this experience?

Footnotes

[1]The first French language newspaper was the Impartial, founded in Tignish by Gilbert Buote in 1893. This newspaper existed for 20 years.

[2]Article 93 of the Constitution accorded legislative power to the provinces in matters of education.